



FEDOR KAUL'S Novel

**CONTACTION TO
THIS WORLD**

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Contagion To This World

by

Fedor Kaul

Translated by Winifred Ray

Published 1933

CONTAGION TO THIS WORLD

“Civilisation transforms man from a perfect
child of nature into an imperfect moral being,
from a happy tool into an unhappy craftsman.”
Schiller

This translation into English of
‘DIE WELT OHNE GEDÄCHTNIS’
has been made by
WINIFRED RAY

CONTAGION TO THIS WORLD

By
FEDOR KAUL



“ . . . And hell itself breathes out
Contagion to this world.”

Hamlet

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PART I

I

THE streets of Berlin were flooded with the dazzling sunshine of a spring day, and in this sea of light moved incessantly a busy throng, every member of which was pursuing some different purpose. Perpetually rubbing shoulders with hundreds and thousands of his fellow creatures, each one carefully guarded the secret of his own destiny.

On this spring morning Unter den Linden resounded with the shrill hootings of motor cars, dashing forward as soon as the green light of the traffic signals allowed them to proceed; newspaper-sellers shouted the latest sensations, which in an hour's time would already be out of date.

Yet in this, the finest of Berlin's streets, there was not the same busy activity as in other main thoroughfares. People hurried along it in order not to lose precious time. Very few had anything to do in Unter den Linden itself, and of these the majority soon disappeared into the entrances of the big hotels, behind whose ceaselessly revolving doors lurked hopes of concluding profitable transactions or disappointments at the failure of long-cherished plans.

The centre pathway of Unter den Linden, with its avenue of lime trees, is little used, for it affords but a poor view of the richly stocked jewellers' windows and the alluring advertisements of the travel bureaux;

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and who does not love to gaze at the displays in the big shop windows, even if he has no particular end in view?

But Ernst Hargon, who had come from the Brandenburger Tor, instinctively chose this path. In other streets he kept close to the houses so as to attract as little attention as possible, but in Unter den Linden the centre promenade, which was almost deserted, seemed to him the safest refuge. The sunbeams played on his hair and caressed his form, but they gave him no pleasure, for he feared their relentless, revealing power. Wrapped in thought, he walked on with bent head, keeping near to the narrow strips of turf, as though afraid of usurping too much room.

At the corner of the Friedrichstrasse he turned to the right and stopped in front of a famous watchmaker's shop. In the window, reposing on velvet stands, were displayed watches and clocks of every variety—gentlemen's

watches, turned sideways to show their slimness, 500-day clocks under glass cases, electrical clocks, showing the oscillations of the pendulum with its centre coil, and costly ladies' watches of all sorts, in gay colours and fantastic shapes.

Hargon gazed unheedingly past all these manifold products of the watchmaker's art. His attention was attracted by a timepiece, the individual parts of which were visible through a lens which magnified them far beyond their natural proportions. The mainspring expanded and contracted unceasingly, and a little hammer moved up and down, fitting into a cog-wheel which in its turn drove another little wheel with teeth set closer together. Although the movements of many parts of the mechanism were so slow as to be imperceptible to the

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eye, they were all so delicately adjusted to one another that the time was always accurately recorded. It was as though man had breathed life into dead matter, subduing it by sheer force of will to the laws which govern the passage of time. In this instrument, which served a quite definite purpose, the human spirit had created something absolute and complete.

The perfection of such a work exercised upon Hargon a mysterious charm to which he abandoned himself for several minutes. Fascinated, he watched the strictly rhythmical yet light and tripping movements of the mainspring, and mechanically he felt his pulse which, like the clockwork, transmitted the recurrent thrusts of the blood in accordance with some hidden law. As he involuntarily counted the beats and compared the result, his thoughts wandered to his own work, which was to be concluded that very day. Strange! In a few hours he would have completed his last experiment, yet he felt no trace of excitement. He knew that he had reached his goal. The thing that had originated in his mind as an idle fancy and had then developed into a terrible, nightmare obsession, was that day to become a reality....

The minutes passed, but his pulse was still steady at between 78 and 80; while in his laboratory there loomed a terrible spectre which, once it had reared its Gorgon's head, would subdue the whole world beneath its yoke.

It lies with you, Ernst Hargon, he thought, whether a monstrous calamity is to overtake mankind or whether the invincible giant is to be held in chains. Here you stand, one wretched being among millions. No one heeds

your voice, no one invites your opinion or defers to your judgment, and yet they ought all to be imploring you to

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preserve them from a horror almost beyond conception!

At this moment, when the fate of the world hung upon his will, pitying glances glided over him. He was conscious that those who saw him turned away with a shudder, and this perpetual sense of being excluded from the society of his fellow men made his heart once more contract in pain.

With bent head and furtive gait Ernst Hargon hurried to the nearest underground station.

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II

DARK walls and hundreds of slender pillars, looming mysteriously like phantoms in the reflected light of the underground railway lamps, flitted past Ernst Hargon's gaze. Some of the stations were crowded with people, lined up two or three rows deep, ready to force their way into the train. At others the empty silence was only broken for a few moments by the noise of the arriving and departing trains. The underground railway climbed up into the daylight, only to disappear soon after into another dark subterranean tunnel; and this repeated alternation of night and day, the hum of the engine, and the bustle of the hurrying, chattering crowd, gradually intensified the eagerness which Ernst Hargon had been suppressing. Everyday experiences seemed rare adventures. He would have liked to be able to accelerate the speed of the train in order that he might arrive the sooner at his destination. But when the name of his station flashed into view, the journey, which had lasted more than half an hour, seemed to have occupied but a few moments. Swept along by the rhythm of his own creative joy and by the excitement of the crowd, he hastened with rapid strides towards his laboratory.

Here, on the outskirts of the city, the houses were not so closely crowded together, and Ernst Hargon had to walk for another quarter of an hour before he reached the laboratory, which he had set up in an old, untenanted

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little house. Quickly he opened the door and hurried into the large room where he did his work. His first task was to examine the incubator, the thermometer of which registered $37^{\circ}2$ degrees centigrade. Afterwards he opened first the metal and then the glass door and took out several test-tubes containing various bacteria cultures carefully closed with plugs of cotton wool. Cautiously he noted their growth and the change in the coloration of the different nutrient media. Then he set to work on some elaborate experiments upon which he had now been engaged for over two years.

On the long table set right under the window, so as to catch the full daylight, were ranged numerous little bottles containing coloured fluids. Hargon lit several gas-burners, whose roar seemed to him like some

melodious musical accompaniment to his work. None of these necessary manipulations was more hurried or more deliberate than usual. The most intense concentration was essential in order to exclude any possibility of error such as might affect the result of his researches. But the patience with which he made the requisite preparations for a microscopic examination was only feigned. On this particular day it was only by dint of a tremendous effort that he could control his thoughts.

A stranger observing him at his work would hardly have guessed that in this laboratory anything very remarkable was in progress. Possibly Hargon's physical deformity, which was even more conspicuous in the white overall, would have struck him as grotesque, and the mask half concealing the face would have aggravated this impression. But no impartial observer could have failed to be impressed by the tireless and devout concentration

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with which he worked. He seemed enveloped in an atmosphere of supreme exertion and electric tension. With the caution of a student only just initiated into the methods of bacteriological research, but at the same time with the practised hand of the scientist for whom all these manipulations have become instinctive, Hargon did what he had to do swiftly and confidently. In a stand to his left were three test-tubes marked respectively 247, 248, and 249. Hargon examined once more the star-shaped cultures in 247 and 248. Then he removed the cotton-wool plug from the first test-tube, and sterilised a long-handled platinum needle by holding it in a gas-flame until it glowed a dazzling white. In a few minutes, when the instrument had cooled, Hargon thrust it into the open mouth of the tube, without touching the glass sides, and dexterously extracted a small quantity of the bacteria culture. Placed in readiness to his right were a large number of slides—little oblong, transparent slabs of glass, which had been carefully numbered and lettered beforehand. On them he rubbed the point of the platinum needle, depositing minute, barely visible quantities of the culture. He went through the same procedure with 248, using a fresh platinum needle, but tube 249 he left untouched.

The slides thus treated Hargon removed to the adjacent room and laid them, carefully separated from one another, on slender iron rods fitted above a capacious sink. He had already the day before made all the preparations for his final experiments. On a little table by the side of the

sink lay a note-book in which he had entered all the staining processes which he had discovered by dint of laborious experimentation. With pedantic

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accuracy he treated each of the slides in accordance with a special method. Only the beginning was the same in every case. The minute smear of bacteria culture must not be rinsed from the glass. In order to prevent this he held a gas-flame under each slide at a distance of a few centimetres. The effect of the heating and subsequent cooling was to make the tiny smear of bacteria culture adhere to the slide. He then poured on to the glass one of the coloured fluids in the little bottles, which stained it in one case a deep brilliant purple, in another a fiery red, and in another a sulphur yellow.

Hargon did nothing without first consulting his notes. He shook each bottle vigorously and held it up to the light in order to convince himself yet again that the hue was correct. And he never treated more than one slide at a time. Another man would perhaps have wearied of thus checking and counter-checking every one of his own movements, but Hargon had by patient self-discipline accustomed himself to this method of work, by which he eliminated every possibility of error. He was wrestling with a world of living organisms which no human eye had yet perceived, and he knew that Nature did not yield up her secrets without a struggle, but he was so consumed with the longing to gain a glimpse into this marvellous unknown world and to gain power and influence by the discovery of hitherto unsuspected vital processes that with self-denying patience and devotion he performed one series of experiments after the other, in order to find the key to the great mystery.

To-day he was not only a seeker, to-day he wanted more; he wanted the last confirmation of that discovery which he already felt to be within his reach; and this

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conviction gave him such strength and urged him on so persistently towards the decisive act, that again and again he had to curb his fancy as it rose in revolt against the mechanical labour.

The various stainings of the slides with contrasting colours, their treatment with specific chemicals, the rinsing of the preparation and the waiting for it to dry again—all this occupied several hours, but Hargon was

unconscious of the lapse of time. When the last smear was ready for examination under the microscope he was even surprised that he had progressed so far.

Now began a new and laborious task. The purpose of all Hargon's preparations up to now had been to make visible to the human eye organisms measuring hardly a thousandth of a millimetre. Many minute organisms are imperceptible even with the aid of the most powerful microscopes, because they are not differentiated from the surrounding medium. Hargon had tried to find chemicals capable of being absorbed by these very low forms of living organisms, and so to tear from them the cloak of invisibility in which they had been shrouded for so many thousands of years. The pigment of the stain with which they were treated was to reveal the hitherto imperceptible.

One slide after another he adjusted beneath the microscope, and examined the carefully-treated smear of culture, magnified to several thousand times its size.

But it seemed as if, in the struggle between Nature and man—who is after all only one of her offspring—he, Hargon, the intruder, was to be worsted. Again and again, by very careful adjustments of the micrometer screw, he tried to penetrate the dark field before him. He examined the preparation from all sides, peering through

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the lens with such intense concentration that his eye began to stream from the exertion. He was compelled to pause at intervals because everything was swimming before his gaze. But, try as he would, neither the first nor the second nor yet the third preparation yielded any result. He was forced to abandon the examination of one slide after the other without having achieved anything.

The hours went by and a paralysing uncertainty checked his ardour. Had he overlooked something? Had he toiled for the last two years to no purpose? Was he to be denied the confirmation of a hypothesis that had already become a conviction?

The tremendous strain was relaxed, but not the determination at any rate to complete all his experiments so as to know where he stood.

Already discouraged, he adjusted the last slide, No. 248f beneath the microscope. Something danced before his eyes! Suddenly he was overmastered by a breathless excitement that made him tremble. Then his

eye eagerly drank in the spectacle that had appeared in the field of the microscope. Several silvery, shimmering spirochætes were plainly perceptible. Their sinuous bodies, like minute, twisting worms, writhed into the dark background, glistening with a mysterious radiance like strings of fine, silvery beads in which the rays of light were many times refracted.

Hargon feasted his eyes on this sight. Gone were the self-control and the calm, dispassionate labour of the scientific investigator. A blissful intoxication overcame him, and he revelled ecstatically in the wonder of this hour. The man seated here at the laboratory table was no longer that Ernst Hargon whom people had always

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shunned. This was no longer the man who was a pariah through no fault of his own and whose heart, once thirsty for love and affection, had been chilled by a constant succession of rebuffs.

In this hour Ernst Hargon was transformed into a vigorous young man, eagerly desirous to help and give to all from his superfluity of strength, joy and confidence. He did not consider that it would be the same thing over again when the happiness of this hour was spent. He forgot all that an inscrutable destiny had laid in his cradle at birth. For a few moments he fancied that all would now treat him as one like themselves, not as an unfortunate cripple, doubly afflicted in deformity of body and hideousness of features. In this one hour he was just a hopeful, ardent young man.

In a state of blissful exhaustion Ernst Hargon convinced himself once more by means of several further tests that no error had crept into his investigations. No. 248f had been treated in accordance with the eleventh staining method. Hargon repeated the experiment, using a fresh smear of the culture, and obtained the same result.

It was now evening, but before concluding his labours Hargon wanted to prepare a fresh culture. Involuntarily he smiled when he discovered that he had not sufficient sterilised bowls and test-tubes at his disposal. He had prepared everything for his experiments, but only in so far as was necessary for these particular researches. He had not been able to bring himself to think of or to prepare anything more until it was certain whether, or no, he had reached the goal. Quickly Hargon heated the autoclave, the apparatus in which he intended to sterilise the test-tubes, by means of a powerful gas-burner, fitted the test-tubes

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into a stand and carefully tightened the screws of the lid. Once more he examined the pressure-gauge and the thermometer. It would be a few minutes before the thermometer rose to 120 degrees.

Like a child who cannot stop playing with a new toy, Hargon went to the microscope and thoughtfully examined the spirochætes. Now he no longer needed to concentrate on his work, now he could venture to indulge in dreams of the future. The tiny, silvery creatures, which he had tricked into absorbing substances to betray their form, would bring him the appreciation and therewith the love of his fellows.

Hargon pictured to himself what a sensation his discovery would excite. It was so beautiful and so strange to imagine himself as a centre of interest.

It seemed presumptuous to reflect upon all that must necessarily result from his researches. He banished far from himself the sombre thoughts which had not only possessed him again and again during the last two years, but had even prompted him to embark upon his investigations and had threatened to overpower him with an almost irresistible force. What strange notions the brain may conceive and fashion in moments of blissful intoxication born of a thrilling experience—notions transcending every law of logic and reason and all consistently directed towards a single goal! Many of the thoughts recur; then other disturbing reflections arise, are thrust aside and give place to new. What happy man would try to stem this flood of brilliant and preposterous ideas which suddenly open up an entirely new world?

Hargon's senses were excessively wide awake and for that very reason he was hardly able to take in the simplest

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impressions. Several times already he had heard a curious cracking sound but had not attached any importance to it or connected it with any process. But a shrill, sharp note, like the sound of breaking metal, wrenched him from his dreams. He gazed round in bewilderment. Was it five minutes since he had begun to heat the autoclave? Or was it longer, very much longer?

Restored to a consciousness of realities, he hurried to the apparatus. In the fraction of a second he saw that its curved sides had bulged. There flashed through his mind a suspicion that a catastrophe was impending, that perhaps a serious error had been made, that the atmospheric pressure inside was so high that disaster was inevitable.

All these thoughts flashed through his brain before he had had time to look at the thermometer and the pressure gauge. He put out his hand to snatch away the Bunsen burner; but at the very moment that he grasped it there was a loud crash. The boiler had burst. Burning hot steam rushed out of the crack. Instinctively Hargon put up his left arm to shield his face. As the torrent of steam swept over him he screamed in an agony of pain. The gas-burner slipped from his hand. In a few minutes the whole room was filled with white clouds of vapour.

Tortured by agonising pain and lost to all consciousness of everything else, Hargon staggered through the laboratory. He collided with the large table, and the glass bowls and test-tubes crashed to the floor. Those that still remained whole were trampled to bits beneath his reeling footsteps.

The door? For God's sake, the door? Hargon groped his way through the room, half-blinded. Suddenly his right hand encountered a metal handle. With a last effort

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he pressed it down. A door opened. Hargon rushed on to the staircase, the white steam gushing out after him. Turning back, he shut the door with a bang, so that the hot vapour could only ooze through the cracks.

Hargon rushed out of the house and along the streets. He no longer screamed with pain. As he hurried along through the dusk of evening his grotesque, frantic leaps made him look like some horrible spectre. Children screamed when they saw him and ran away in terror. Others, who had begun to smile at the jerky, hopping movements of this human freak, felt their smile freeze on their lips. Before they had recovered from the shock he was far away, and they fancied that some ghost had flitted past them. Ernst Hargon tore breathlessly through the streets. With his right hand he clutched his left upper arm; his face was distorted with pain; he was racing for his life. His last thought was to reach the Lüder hospital. Here, this must be the house! His head was heavy as lead. He only saw a broad drive, down which he ran automatically. Then everything turned black before his eyes.

Outside the door of the hospital a small hunch-backed man was reeling round and round as though he were drunk. His left arm, which his right hand was clutching, was raised in the air. Suddenly he collapsed, striking his shoulder against a bell-handle, and crashed to the ground.

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III

A SHRILL, sudden peal broke through the silence of the hospital. Rabel, the sixty-year-old porter, who had just settled down comfortably in his lodge over his newspaper, looked up disapprovingly. His spectacles had slipped down while he was reading. He pushed them up deliberately and rose to his feet in order to go and see what had happened.

One glance through the window transformed him in a moment into the conscientious official who had held this post for nearly thirty years. Rabel carefully distinguished between cases in which one could take one's time and those in which, despite advanced years, one must run like a boy. He pressed hard and continuously on one of the keys of his telephone-board and was about to lay down the receiver in order to hurry to the assistance of the prostrate figure in front of the hospital entrance when a nurse answered the call.

"Send a stretcher and two men to the main entrance at once!" Rabel's voice was curt and peremptory. When necessary he could give orders in a tone which admitted of no contradiction. Then he swiftly put back the receiver and hurried out. A little crowd had already collected round the sick man.

"Take care! Don't touch him! He will be brought inside in a moment!" shouted Rabel, as he hastily fastened back one flap of the door. The sound of rapidly

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approaching footsteps was heard and the men with the stretcher arrived. Two minutes after Hargon had collapsed before the door of the hospital he was being carried into one of the wards.

Rabel shook his head as he closed the door. What could have happened this time? But in the course of his long service he had grown accustomed to these distressing shocks. How much unspeakable suffering he had seen! Day and night the ambulances drew up in front of the entrance; the door was flung open, and terribly mutilated bodies were carried past on stretchers. He had seen them just as they had been picked up after an accident had occurred, and he knew how few minutes it took to transform a happy human being into the tragic victim of a disaster.

The house surgeon had left the room in which Ernst Hargon was lying.

“A bad case, Sister, eh? Terrible, such an unfortunate creature at the best, and now these dreadful burns. Please examine the patient’s condition every hour and let me know if you notice any suspicious symptoms. It is quite possible that complications may develop.”

Sister Martha only nodded. She was not in the habit of asking superfluous questions, although the doctor’s anxiety seemed to her excessive. He is still young, she thought, still over-conscientious. As if it did not go without saying that the patient would be watched!

In the middle of the night the Sister on duty rang up the house surgeon.

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“*Herr Doktor*, would you mind coming to have a look at that accident case that was brought here to-day, the man with the burns?”

“Yes, what’s the matter?”

“The patient is still unconscious. His temperature has risen rapidly during the last few hours. Pulse over 120. The left hand looks terrible.

“All right; I’ll be there in a moment.”

A quarter of an hour later the house surgeon, together with Professor Rieger and two nurses, was standing by the side of Hargon’s bed.

“*Herr Professor*,” said the house surgeon in a cool, business-like tone, “I did not feel that I ought to take the responsibility of amputating without your approval. I have never met these symptoms before in a case of blood-poisoning.”

Professor Rieger made a long and careful examination of Hargon’s left hand. The nurses had removed the oiled bandages. As they did so, Nurse Anna, who was only twenty years of age, had felt so ill that her knees were still trembling. The patient’s left hand was like a terribly swollen lump of flesh. The skin had turned a dark reddish-brown colour, and large blisters had formed and were threatening to burst at any moment.

“Yes,” said Professor Rieger at length in a low voice, “if only one knew how these burns had been caused. Who is the patient?”

The house surgeon shrugged his shoulders. “We don’t know. No one has inquired after him.”

“How long has he been unconscious?”

“Ever since he was brought here, *Herr Professor*.”

“The case looks to me hopeless. We’ll try an amputation.”

Before Ernst Hargon’s eyes white walls shifted to and fro. They seemed sinister and oppressive, as if they were threatening to close in on him and crush him, without possibility of escape. But in a moment of clear consciousness the feverish vision faded and the mist before his eyes dissolved. As though touched by a magician’s hand, the walls receded into the distance and shaped themselves into a spacious room. Ernst Hargon gazed into a pair of eyes which were fixed on him with a look of warm, anxious sympathy. He would have liked to hold fast this look which he had never seen before in any human eye that had rested on him. In the light of these eyes he felt himself sheltered and at home, and he dared not move for fear of destroying the dream-like vision.

His face seemed to be held tight in an invisible vice, as though hot hands were clutching his head and he were unable to move. He tried to speak, but his lips were hot and parched. His skin was hard and strained, and his throat was so dry that he could not utter a sound. He was unconscious of his body, as though he were freed of all earthly bonds. Yet he knew that he was alive, for he could see the eyes, which thrilled him with such a feeling of ecstasy. He wanted to draw nearer to them, and tried to rise, but was powerless to move; then everything vanished from his sight, and in a fresh access of delirium he still clung to the wonderful and beneficent gift of warm, human sympathy.

Ernst Hargon’s second awakening was a painful shock. He found himself in completely unfamiliar surroundings and was at a loss to know how he had come there. He was still unable to move a limb. He saw himself lying in a bed, and a pitiful groan broke the silence of the room. When the light met his eyes he felt as if rockets were exploding in his head, and a rain of sparks were descending into his brain. Only when he closed his eyes was it a little better; in the dark night which enveloped him no more painful lights flashed out. Yet the groaning in the room continued like some monotonous lament. Ernst Hargon tried to speak, but only an inarticulate sound broke from his lips. Instantly the groaning ceased.

Horried at the inhuman howl to which he had given vent, Hargon listened amid a silence now doubly oppressive.

“Hullo, you! Are you awake at last?”

Hargon did not understand a word, but he made desperate efforts to collect his thoughts and to discover where he was and who had spoken to him.

“Come, keep smiling,” said the voice again. “Even if we’re all going to die sooner or later, we can make the best of it meanwhile.

“I am in a room with other people,” thought Hargon. “I am lying in some place I don’t know. What a queer smell, like a hospital! What has happened?” A sudden flash of memory made him clutch anxiously at his left arm. A bandage ... a bandage as though after an amputation? Ernst Hargon’s hand groped over his face, it was bandaged too; only the mouth and eyes were free.

“Call a nurse,” whispered Hargon in a faltering voice.

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His heart was throbbing like a machine; his face was tortured by a terrible burning pain; and his left hand smarted as though it were pierced by red-hot arrows. He must have made a mistake. But why lie to himself! He knew that limbs could hurt long after they had been amputated.

So that was the end of his experiments!

The door opened quietly. A nurse appeared by his bed. “You have been unconscious for a long time.”

“They have amputated it?”

No answer.

“Call the doctor.”

The nurse went out without a word. The other patients in the ward, whom Ernst Hargon could not see, but of whose presence he was conscious, were silent too. In spite of the agony of their own sufferings, Hargon’s awakening and his realisation of the calamity which had befallen him made them forget their pain in the strained expectation of what was about to happen. No one addressed another word to him. They were sorry for the poor wretch whom this catastrophe had overtaken so suddenly. But even while they pitied him, they thought of their own sufferings which clung to them day and night like some unwelcome companion who could not be shaken off and whom only rare intervals of sleep allowed them to forget.

Accompanied by the house surgeon, Professor Rieger entered the ward. Although he had to perform several operations every day and had witnessed much human suffering, the Professor had not grown callous to the many tragedies in which he played a part. How terrible to have to tell this man that they had been obliged to

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amputate his left hand! For a moment he thought of leaving it to the house surgeon to break the news, but promptly dismissed this notion. Sister Elizabeth had told him that she fancied the patient had regained consciousness once before, but only for a few seconds.

When Professor Rieger had heard that Hargon was fully awake, he had resolved to talk to him himself and to find out how the accident had happened. For the patient was still hovering between life and death. New instructions would perhaps have to be given when it was known what had caused the poisoning. And so Professor Rieger had hurried immediately to Hargon's bedside. He tried to speak in a friendly, cheerful tone in order to reassure the sick man. But the latter's first question proved that it was no longer any use trying to conceal the truth.

"You have amputated my left hand?"

"Who told you that?" asked Professor Rieger with a faint note of vexation in his voice for, in order to guard the sick man against any excitement, he had expressly forbidden that he should be told the truth concerning his condition.

"No one. I recognise the bandages."

"Why, who are you?"

"I am a doctor myself."

"Oh, indeed, a colleague?" asked the Professor in a kindly tone. He now felt a double interest in the sick man. "I am extremely sorry," he went on, "that you should have been put in this ward, but we had no idea who you were. There were no identification papers on you."

Professor Rieger did not mention that he had been wondering for a long time why no one had asked after

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the patient, and why he had never been notified as missing, since the cripple would have been recognised immediately.

It seemed as though Ernst Hargon divined all that the doctor left unsaid.

“I have no relations or friends who could have inquired about me. My name is Hargon, twenty-eight years of age.”

Then the two men engaged in a whispered business-like discussion. They might have been talking about some interesting case that had been brought to the hospital; Ernst Hargon might have been a doctor at his own bedside. He gave a superficial explanation of the circumstances of the disaster, which he purposely made so vague that it gave no clear impression of what had actually occurred. He listened while Professor Rieger explained why he had decided that immediate amputation was necessary. The burns on the sick man’s face were only briefly alluded to. Ernst Hargon was in great pain and very weak.

With a few comforting phrases Professor Rieger brought the conversation to a close. He suggested to the patient that he should be moved into another room, but Ernst Hargon declined with thanks; he did not want any preferential treatment.

With a shrug of the shoulders Professor Rieger left the ward.

“A strange fellow, this Hargon?” he remarked to the house surgeon when they were outside in the corridor. “We certainly don’t want thanks when we have saved a man’s life. And I can understand a patient not thinking of such a thing when he learns that his hand has been

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amputated. But such excessive detachment—is it heroism or weakness?”

“Who can see into another man’s soul, *Herr Professor*?”

Professor Rieger took a step towards the door as though he wanted to enter the room again and ask something, but next moment he let go the door handle and walked on. This case had taken up far too much of his time already.

In the ward a deathly silence reigned. The other patients did not speak a word. They were expecting perhaps that Ernst Hargon would say something. They would not have been surprised if they had heard him sobbing or if he had burst into a loud scream. Respect for the feelings of a man who had so suddenly learnt the truth restrained them from talking. But Ernst Hargon did not stir. The sudden transition from the height of his happiness to this catastrophe was so difficult to grasp that the blissful intoxication which had filled him only a few days before seemed like a fairy tale. At the moment when he had insolently stretched out his hand to

interfere with the rulings of Providence, he had himself been branded. Even the physical pain of his burns seemed trifling in comparison with these gloomy reflections. He would need a long time in order to grasp the full tragedy of what had happened. As he lost consciousness in a fresh attack of weakness, an agonised groan from the next bed filled the room.

IV

LITTLE occurred to break the monotony of life in Ward 17. In the next bed to Hargon a young acrobat daily cursed his male and female friends for leaving him alone in his misery. He never tired of relating fresh stories of his debut in the circus, and of the tricks he performed on a swaying bamboo-rod until the women shuddered. "Krüger's a fine chap," the manager had said to his colleagues shortly before his last appearance, "you might all take example by him. Always punctually at his post, always in a good temper; merry outside the ring as well as in it. That's the sort for me."

"Yes, I knew my job. It was a real grind. But when once I had mastered every muscle of my body, I began really to enjoy my work, and I could be merry over it and crack my jokes. It was at the most dangerous moments that I felt happiest of all, for I knew that nothing would happen to me. You should just have heard me when I played the bassoon standing on my head. The people didn't know whether they were laughing or whether their hair was standing on end with fright."

Of his accident, Franz Krüger—whose professional name was Robert!—was loath to speak. Something must have been wrong with that girl Leni on that day. The others did not question him any further. Yes, at first one or two people came, but he did not treat his visitors very well. "Be off with you. It's very decent of you to come,

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but I shall never be one of you again. Just look at my leg. They keep pulling it and stretching it so that it shan't be shorter than the left one, but shall I ever perform in the circus again?" Yet, when they all ceased coming, that didn't please Franz either. Now he got no more news of the girl Leni.

Buchlender was a hopeless case. He knew that he was suffering agonies without any hope of recovery, and save when a fresh injection brought him relief he groaned without ceasing. When he was out of pain he sometimes became quite communicative. His favourite subject was politics. No party or government met with his approval. "Ideas," he used to say, "are like clean clothes. As soon as a man has them, he soils them. Of what good to us are even the most divine inspirations? They are no earthly use. First comes the struggle for existence, and then it comes again, then for a long

while there is absolutely nothing, and then we start doing stupid things for the sake of love.”

“Love,” jeered Franz, “let’s call the thing by its right name.”

“Stop that,” said the other man. “I know what your dictionary has to say on that subject. If your Leni were to walk in, of course everything would be quite different. The only difference between you and your fellow men is that in your case love came first. But that, too, has to be paid for.”

Crimson with anger, Franz broke into curses and Buchlender’s good-natured attempts to soothe him were of no avail.

Such were the conversations in the sick-room. Ernst Hargon rarely took part in them. His opinion of his two

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companions had been formed in the first few days. Both the acrobat and the twenty-five-year-old lithographer were decent, kindly fellows. Something might have been made of Buchlender, for he had a clear, sober intelligence. Sad to see the young fellow sinking day by day. Another one whom the doctors could not help.

One night, when neither Hargon nor Buchlender could get to sleep, they had a long conversation. Buchlender was utterly despondent.

“Why am I fighting for a life that is really not worth making such a fuss about? Can you name a single absolute value? What is the good of science, or art, or any other creative work? Has it all made a single human being happy? Has it freed us from death? Has it enriched us inwardly? Look at the men of to-day. They are more superficial than ever, more callous and thoughtless than ever, more solely concerned for themselves. And yet I so long to live. Merely for the sake of the few pleasures that are vouchsafed us here! Isn’t it terrible—this primitive, materialistic outlook? But why should I tell a lie such a short time before my death? Why should I deny that I am consumed with deadly fear? Tell me honestly, how much longer can I live? You are a doctor. You will tell me the truth.”

And Hargon did what every doctor has always done in a similar situation. He held out hopes to the sick man. He told him that his condition might improve, that it was even possible that in a few weeks he might be discharged from the hospital, that at any rate he had one or two years in front of him. And all the time Hargon was perfectly aware that Buchlender was already so weak that he must inevitably succumb to any further inroads of the disease.

The worse our condition, the more eagerly we drink in any word of comfort, even if we know it to be a lie. Buchlender believed the whispered words of consolation that came from the mummy-like head, of which only the eyes and mouth were visible, and which in the dim light thrown by a distant lamp in the corridor loomed out like some ghostly apparition amid the darkness of the sickroom.

Grown calmer, Buchlender resumed the conversation. "I know why I want to live. I want to taste the joy of life and of all living processes, whether they be manifested in the relations between man and man or in the phenomena of Nature."

"But if we know about these things and can unravel the mysteries of Nature, the processes of life seem even more wonderful. Why, then, do you curse science and all seeking after knowledge?"

Buchlender laughed softly. "Is not what has actually happened an exact contradiction of what you have just said? Has not our knowledge taken from us that which is the basis of all joy in life, namely, simplicity?"

Ernst Hargon was profoundly moved. The thought over which he had brooded so long had been expressed in simple, primitive fashion by this man on whom death had already set its seal. It was the curse of knowledge which weighed upon the human race. The farther man tried to probe, the more was he crushed to earth by a burden which he was unable to bear, which was beyond his strength and from which he could only escape by flight into the commonplace. The Curse of Knowledge.

Next morning Buchlender was worse. After a morphia

injection he got a little sleep, and stretcher-bearers came to take him away, in order that he might not die in the presence of the other patients.

Greatly agitated, Hargon rang for the doctor and begged him to leave the sick man where he was. "Spare him the horror of waking to find himself alone in a room with the knowledge that his last hour has come. I implore you to have pity on this man in his dying hour. I should like to be with him."

The doctor made a sign with his head towards the bed of young Franz. "Better let things be for his sake. Life is beginning to beckon him back."

“Leave Buchlender here,” interposed Franz Krüger. “I, too, would like his dying hour to be made easier for him.”

Before evening Buchlender had breathed his last.

V

THE bed in which Buchlender had lain was no longer occupied. Hargon, who was only able to bear his agonising, almost unendurable suffering because he was so entirely engrossed in his thoughts, was now obliged to talk to Franz Krüger. To the latter, Buchlender's death had come as a terrible shock, and although the day was approaching when his extension bandage was to be removed, he was, for the most part, gloomy and depressed. Hargon hardly listened to his circus stories; he knew them all already; but he did not want to deprive his neighbour of a relief which he needed so sorely.

One day he was not a little surprised when merry Franz said to him: "I say, I believe Elizabeth is in love with you."

"Elizabeth, who's she?"

"Come, don't try to humbug me! She's taken the place of our tartar four or five times."

"Oh? The nurse who takes Sister Emma's place in the afternoon?"

Hargon recalled that more than once at about this time a slim young Sister had arranged his pillows for him. He had been struck by the earnest, thoughtful expression of her face, which contrasted so strikingly with her youth. The mere thought of her loving him was absurd. Had young Franz no idea what he looked like?

As though the latter had divined his thoughts, he

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promptly resumed the conversation. "You don't believe it? Take my word for it, lots of women have just such morbid tastes. With all those bandages round your head you look mighty interesting."

Hargon paid no heed to this rather doubtful compliment.

"I believe you're in love with Sister Elizabeth and want me to tell you that she returns your affection.

"Such a thought never entered my head. But if she comes to-day ... we'll see."

Hargon had adopted an attitude of extreme reserve in the hospital. He had begged to be treated like all the other patients, and his wish had been respected. He took no notice of anyone. When the doctor tried to draw him

into conversation, he repulsed him politely but firmly, saying that he felt too weak to discuss any scientific problems, even those which concerned his own case. The rebuff was unmistakable and the doctor made no further attempt to engage in private conversation.

Hargon patiently endured all the sufferings entailed by the treatment, but not to anyone did he speak a word more than was absolutely necessary. He would probably have forgotten to notice Sister Elizabeth if Franz had not reminded him just before twelve o'clock.

"But don't look too foolish, or she'll notice it and get scared."

Hargon was amused and resolved to oblige Franz. Shortly after twelve o'clock the door of the sick-room opened and Sister Elizabeth entered softly. She had a way of doing everything so quietly and carefully that several times Hargon had not heard her come in. Often when a member of the hospital staff entered the room, he did

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not look up, and appeared to be asleep. In reality he merely did not want to be spoken to. To-day he opened his eyes cautiously so that he might watch unobserved this remarkable being who was said to be interested in him. He had been so often disappointed and repulsed when he had wanted to make friends with someone that it did not occur to him that there could be any truth in what Franz had said.

Sister Elizabeth remained standing in the doorway for a moment in order to make sure whether Hargon was asleep. Franz Krüger had nodded to her genially when she entered and then turned his attention to the book which he was pretending to read. As Hargon did not stir, Sister Elizabeth walked softly to the wash-basin and began quietly to rinse the tumblers. Then she fetched a vase of flowers and hesitated for a moment, obviously wondering whether filling it with fresh water would make too much noise. Once more she glanced questioningly at Hargon. Suddenly—obviously she was under the impression that he was still asleep—the expression of her face changed. Hargon opened both eyes wide in a sudden surge of recognition and looked at the nurse in boundless astonishment, and with the rapture of one beholding a miracle. Fascinated by the strange light in his eyes, Sister Elizabeth could not turn away her own, but a deepening flush slowly spread over her face to the roots of her hair. Utterly disconcerted she turned away, quickly poured some fresh water into the vase, then arranged the patient's cushions and vanished from the room again.

Hargon was in a state of feverish excitement. Like lightning it flashed into his brain that once before a woman had looked at him like this with a warm sympathetic

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gaze that was like the touch of soft, caressing hands. If his waking thoughts had not concerned themselves with this memory, it was because he had imagined it to be a fevered dream. Agitated by a host of sensations which threatened to overpower him, which rendered him incapable of sober reflection and plunged him into a condition of such blissful ecstasy as he had never before experienced, Hargon was consumed with impatience and hardly able to endure the chatter of young Franz. No doubt the fellow meant well, but to Hargon in his sudden, amazing happiness every word of the other man seemed a desecration of his feelings. The asperity of his answers to Franz Krüger convinced the latter that he had been correct in his supposition. He tried to chaff Hargon good-naturedly, but finally gave it up when his companion completely lost his temper.

After a few days Hargon was completely transformed. At first he had utterly surrendered to the tumult of his emotions and for hours would indulge in dreams in which he pictured to himself how he would behave to Sister Elizabeth when she came back; but when day after day another nurse came into the room at midday his overcharged heart could contain itself no longer. Unskilled in hiding his feelings, he tried again and again to bring the conversation artfully round to Sister Elizabeth without attracting attention. Krüger had no difficulty in divining what was in his companion's mind and did not need much pressing to induce him to relate all that he knew. It was not much. What had impressed him most in Sister Elizabeth was her seriousness, which, so he declared, was not sullenness or ungraciousness, but showed depth of character, though exactly what Franz

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Krüger meant by this he would have been at a loss to explain.

For Hargon every slightest new detail in his companion's account was sufficient to make the absent one more lovable than ever. The dark and sinister world of his experiments had receded into the far distance. In Hargon's present exalted mood, which was only troubled by the fact that he could not see Sister Elizabeth again, many of the blasphemous thoughts which had come to him while he was working seemed to him simply

inconceivable. Why doesn't she come back? he asked Franz Krüger several times a day. And the latter never tired of reassuring him:

"That is the surest proof that she loves you. You have disturbed her peace of mind. Now she doesn't trust herself to come here."

In the first tumult of his love Hargon was sometimes quite touchingly childish. He begged Franz to help him.

"Sister Elizabeth must come back. I can't go to her."

Meanwhile Krüger had learnt that Sister Elizabeth was working in quite a different part of the hospital and only now and then obliged Sister Emma by relieving her at midday. How could she be induced to do this again without attracting attention in the hospital? Young Franz, who had plenty of experience in love affairs, soon found a way out of the difficulty. When he laughingly disclosed his plan, it seemed to Hargon too transparent to deceive Sister Elizabeth.

"You forget that she is interested in you, else she would certainly refuse. As it is, she will be only too glad of an excuse to come."

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Krüger undertook to put the plan into execution. One day he asked Sister Emma quite casually whether her colleague, Sister Elizabeth, would be coming to their room again.

"I'm surprised myself that she hasn't come," replied Sister Emma. "She used often to offer to take my place, but now she seems too busy."

"What a shame!" said Krüger regretfully. "I've been taking care of something she left here for such a long time. Now I shan't be able to give it her."

Sister Emma offered to take it, but Krüger became very mysterious. It might get the girl into hot water; it would never do to send it her through anyone else.

At length Hargon intervened in the conversation. Yes, he said, it might get Sister Elizabeth into trouble.

No wonder that these mysterious hints whetted Sister Emma's curiosity, and she begged the two men to tell her what it was that Sister Elizabeth had left behind.

Krüger solemnly pledged her to the strictest secrecy. Then he gravely drew out of his locker a half-finished packet of cigarettes. Sister Emma laughed heartily.

“What, Elizabeth smokes? I should never have guessed that. It isn’t in the least like her!”

Krüger fired up. “Why, what’s the harm. All women smoke nowadays, whether they’re nurses or artistes.”

Sister Emma made no reply to this argument, although in her opinion a hospital nurse ranked very high above a circus acrobat. But she did not want to offend Krüger, so she promised to convey a message to Elizabeth and not to breathe a word to her colleagues about the cigarettes. Then she left the two patients.

Would she come? This was the problem that engrossed

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Hargon unceasingly, and he never wearied of discussing it.

“If she doesn’t smoke, it will seem just a clumsy trick. You had....”

Krüger interrupted him impatiently.

“Emma promised expressly not to tell her what we had found.”

“But suppose she does tell her?”

Hargon no longer understood himself. Why should the pitying glance of a young girl plunge him into such a turmoil? But his heart had swelled with rapture when she had looked at him. Hopes long since buried revived with a vehemence only to be explained by the fact that their suppression had cost him many years of painful effort. The more rebuffs he had encountered, the more ardently had he longed for love, for someone who would recognise him as an equal. How much hatred and bitterness he had had to store up in himself in order to fight down this craving for love, in order to accept voluntarily this enforced separation from his fellow men.

Now he realised that all that he had inculcated in himself by dint of this prolonged struggle had now become a second, a new nature. Try as he would to repress the tempestuous yearning which flamed up in him, there still remained so much timid hope and trembling anxiety lest all should once more be in vain that he waited feverishly for the hour when he would see Elizabeth again.

Next day, punctually at noon, the door of the sickroom was opened softly and Sister Elizabeth entered. Quietly and without any outward sign of embarrassment, she greeted the two patients and asked what it was that she had left behind.

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Hargon had to clear his throat before he could get out a word.

“Would you be so kind as to come a little nearer? In the drawer of my locker I have a packet of cigarettes which you left here.”

Did Sister Elizabeth smile when Hargon said this? He was so excited that he simply could not think of anything else to say and an embarrassed pause ensued. Hargon was already dreading that she would go out and that therewith all hope of remaining in touch with her would vanish. He racked his brains to think of some innocent remark, but to no purpose, though his heart was filled to bursting with things that he wanted to say to this girl.

Sister Elizabeth waited for Hargon to continue the conversation. She will only be here a few more seconds, thought Hargon, and then it will be all over again.

Young Franz, who was less hampered by tender emotions, saved a situation which was becoming really painful. In unusually tactful terms, he asked Sister Elizabeth whether she would not stay with them a little while, if she could spare the time.

“Gladly, if I can entertain you, but I am afraid that you won’t be interested in hospital gossip.”

“Please sit down,” murmured Hargon, who had at length regained his composure.

The conversation between the two young people did not make much headway. They discussed medical questions and finally spoke of Hargon’s accident. For the first time in his life, Hargon talked to another human being about his experiments. He described his laboratory and the nature of his work. He tried to explain everything as

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simply as possible, and, if he had troubled to look, he would have seen that, in addition to Sister Elizabeth, he had found a second interested listener in young Franz Krüger, who was utterly astonished at this peep into a world which up to now he had not even known to exist. But Hargon had no eyes for anyone but Sister Elizabeth. He was quite unused to speaking of himself and of the things that interested him, but her eager attention impelled him to open out his heart more and more. He was quite unconscious that the story of his long struggle to unriddle certain mental processes was as thrilling as any drama.

The girl did not look at him, but the sympathy in her face showed with what absorbed attention she had followed his explanations. She did not

interrupt him by any question or comment, but he could see at once when something had puzzled her. Then he explained once again, adding fresh illustrations, until a look of radiant understanding showed him that this difficulty, too, had been surmounted.

“In my work,” he said, “I was at first concerned only with theoretical considerations, I eliminated everything which could not be the cause of mental disease, and thence I arrived at the conclusion that diseases of the brain are due to poisons secreted by some organism. The problem was to find this organism and to discover why it is that the infection occurs so rarely. My chain of evidence was unimpeachable, yet there were frequent setbacks. Perhaps I should have lost courage to go on seeking if in the many hours of renewed disappointment I had not again and again repeated to myself the sentence: ‘No process takes place in Nature, nor consequently in the human

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organism, unless there is some cause at the back of it.’ Doctors who combine scientific research with the exercise of their profession enjoy a privilege to which they owe many hours of exquisite happiness; for they are not investigating a random sequence of causes, but are pursuing a specific end. Our aim is the preservation of the health of mankind and therefore we take up arms against everything that causes disease. Whether, in the light of a higher dispensation, we are acting rightly in opposing the destructive tendencies of Nature, I do not know.”

Hargon was silent for a moment. Ought he really to describe his work so? Was he really only striving to free humanity from a disease? Yes, to-day he was ready to make any sacrifice and to toil ungrudgingly in order to make men happy. The dark spirits which had hitherto crept into his heart and tortured him whenever he did any work or conceived any plan were now mere empty shadows. But how would he feel to-morrow—later, when he was once more disillusioned.

Sister Elizabeth rose and held out her hand to him.

“Your life is so full that you must be very happy in spite of your accident.”

Hargon was horrified. Had he bored her? Was she laughing at him? No, that was impossible. He clasped her hand imploringly. In his dread lest she might not come back, he asked in a choking voice: “Will you come to see me again?”

“Gladly, if it does not tire you too much to talk.”

“My other patients will be needing me now,” she said, and, with a friendly nod to Franz, she quietly left the room.

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“My stars! What a peach!” exclaimed young Franz as soon as she was outside.

Hargon was furious. Like every lover he was extremely sensitive to any jest that had reference to his beloved. “Kindly stop making objectionable remarks!” he said. “Sister Elizabeth is not a ‘peach,’ and I ask you not to speak of her in that tone.”

Under other circumstances Krüger would have promptly returned a rude retort, but he had suddenly acquired such a respect for Hargon that he only muttered something about not having meant any harm and then lapsed into an aggrieved silence.

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VI

HARGON was blissfully happy. With open eyes he dreamed of Sister Elizabeth and never tired of conjuring up her charming face. He decided that she was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen, and it distressed him if he could not picture exactly every one of her finely chiselled features. Sister Elizabeth was delicately proportioned and of barely medium height. What one noticed particularly in her was her deep seriousness and the melancholy expression of her large grey-blue eyes. When she was listening very attentively, the left side of her forehead would be knit in a slight frown. The gentleness of her pretty Viennese face was relieved by a strongly developed, extremely sensitive mouth which gave it an expression of energy. This mouth revealed more than Sister Elizabeth suspected of the hidden sweets of her girlish nature.

The few hours in which Hargon abandoned himself freely and unresistingly to the tumult of this passion which had so suddenly flamed up in him were like precious gifts from a Providence which till then had treated him so churlishly. His awakening from this ecstatic whirl of emotions was terrible.

Why should he suddenly think of that lecture of Professor Lobert's at which he had suffered the profoundest humiliation he had ever known? Who could explain it? But amid all his exultation in these brief,

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happy hours he suddenly saw himself as a student entering the lecture-room seven years before.

The bell sounded for the lecture to begin as he entered the hall through a door at the back and seated himself on one of the last benches. Professor Lobert rummaged in his portfolio for some time before beginning his lecture.

"Ladies and gentlemen!" he began, "I have the pleasure of informing you that one of your number has handed me a most remarkably good paper, which I might almost describe as a work of genius." A loud stamping of feet indicated the students' approval of these words.

"Just a moment, please," protested Professor Lobert. "I don't know the gentleman in question. His name is Ernst Hargon, medical student. Would

you please come forward, Herr Hargon, so that I may hand you back your paper?"

As though at the word of command, all the students, male and female, turned round. Hargon felt as if he were exposed to the cross-fire of innumerable eyes. He would have liked nothing better than to turn round himself. But he remained seated by the wall. Before him, as usual, gaped two empty rows of benches, but what had before been a defence against curious or hostile glances now afforded him no protection. He rose to his feet, feeling miserably embarrassed, and awkwardly made his way down the narrow steps to the professors desk. Why had all the tumult subsided? Why was there no more stamping of applause? Why did every face wear an expression of cold astonishment?

Hargon's face flushed a burning crimson. He was running the gauntlet, and he cursed himself for having handed Professor Lobert a paper which only a short time

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ago had seemed so important. Now it was too late, now the insulting silence must be borne, now the path must be trodden to the end. For anyone else it would have been a triumphal progress, for himself it was a narrow defile hemmed in by scorn and loathing. Meanwhile Hargon in his confusion had not noticed the horrified expression that had passed over Professor Lobert's face. In order to overcome his confusion, the lecturer took up his spectacles and began to polish them carefully with a silk handkerchief.

By the time that Hargon was standing in front of him, he had sufficiently recovered his self-possession to say a few encouraging words and once more express his appreciation. Then, in order to end a painful incident as quickly as possible, Professor Lobert pointed to an empty place in the front row.

"Please sit here. I should like to have a talk with you after the lecture."

Hargon was thankful not to be exposed again to all those eyes. He walked to the bench and was about to sit down when a young girl student in the next seat leapt up with an expression of disgust and indignation. Hargon stood still as though paralysed.

"I ... I beg your pardon.... I didn't meant to disturb you." Yes, he had humbled himself to that extent I He did not know himself what had impelled him to say these words. Had not the girl insulted him shamefully?

And he was apologising for his appearance? Had she not been horribly rude to him, and he had cowered beneath the blow instead of yelling and shouting, instead of protesting against the monstrous injustice to which he was exposed to-day, yesterday, every day?

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“Fraulein Schmidt, will you please sit down,” said Professor Lobert very sharply. “I should like to continue my discussion of the metabolic processes in diabetes.”

The request was uttered in the tone of a command. It did not admit of contradiction and the student obeyed. But during the whole of the lecture she remained seated with her back to Ernst Hargon.

Hanna Schmidt was a merry, good-natured girl. He had often noticed her when she was working with her friends, but in his fear of being repulsed he had always given her a wide berth. Perhaps she had seen him to-day for the first time; or perhaps she had often noticed him before and had studiously avoided him.

He could scarcely wait for the end of the lecture. He had been treated like a leper, shunned like a criminal. But even a criminal would meet with more sympathy from his fellow men if he were clever enough to pose as a hero.

After the lecture, he rushed away without troubling about his paper. He hurried into the Tiergarten, so that in its woods he might be alone in his agony, so that he might be able to weep.

Yes, at that time he still wanted to weep, just as he had sobbed as a child after his first encounter with play-fellows who laughed and jeered at him. When, after having experienced nothing but loving tenderness in his home, he learnt for the first time that he was a cripple, a hideous, hunch-backed dwarf, he had hurled himself at some far bigger boys with the intention of fighting them.

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Some grown-up people intervened in the dispute and asked what had taken possession of the hideous little wretch. At that he had let go the boys and slunk away. His clothes were torn and his face was scratched, but he did not feel the pain, though the tears continued to stream down his face for hours after he reached home. His parents were filled with dismay and asked him

what was the matter, but he was ashamed to admit the truth and crept away into his room.

When he looked back on his life, it was a succession of stages in suffering....

They were bitter hours which Hargon endured afresh on this afternoon and evening. His whole past revived in him, all the rebuffs that he had experienced, all the suffering that had been inflicted on him. And did he none the less presume to stretch out his hand towards a young girl of quite exceptional loveliness? How many men might desire her, men in high position with large fortunes, handsome young men, radiantly unconscious of human distress and misery and carelessly confident of success! For a cripple like himself even to experience such an emotion was an impertinence. Dared he attempt to link the fate of another person with his own?

One more horrible scene occurred to him which disposed of his last remaining hesitation. He, too, had been a young man; he, too, had longed for a woman. But whenever he had tried to approach a member of the other sex he had encountered a harsh rebuff. He recalled the agonising nights when he had woken with a start out of hot, voluptuous dreams and had not been able to get to

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sleep again. He was overcome with such a fierce craving for a woman that he had to rush out into the street, and often he wandered about all night long. He observed women and men of all classes. For them love affairs were a matter of course. He envied all the men their sweethearts. His yearning glances followed every couple whom he met arm in arm and in whose attitude and glances he thought he could discern an unspoken mutual tenderness. He could not understand why men and women so often tormented one another until at length they could not endure to be together. He was an unseen observer when a young man accosted a girl in the street. He noted eagerly how it was done, and he would have liked nothing better than to play the eavesdropper and listen to what they were saying.

At this time his loneliness was doubly oppressive, almost unbearable. The scraps which he overheard of his fellow students' conversation gave him some insight into their amorous escapades, and at length he could not resist the craving to hold a woman in his own arms for once. He knew that

many of his colleagues made excursions into the town when they wanted to have an adventure which they related afterwards in obscene language, but he thought they must be romancing when they declared that in some streets women and pretty young girls sat at the windows and beckoned to the men as they passed by.

In order to find out for himself, and at the same time impelled by a fierce desire, he wended his steps one day towards the town. He wore a wide cloak so that his deformity should not be immediately apparent and he had drawn down his hat over his face. Cautiously he peered along the rows of windows. Yes, in one house

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yonder there were young women at the windows who, whenever a man passed, beckoned to him to come up. Behind a bow window on the first floor sat a pretty young girl, some twenty years of age, who beckoned to him, and, when he pointed doubtfully towards himself, nodded her head vigorously. With a beating heart he walked up the dark staircase of the house.

His heart was throbbing with a strange, agonising excitement, and yet he was ready to plunge headlong into the adventure. On the first floor was an open door at which the young girl was standing and she beckoned to him to come inside. He obeyed hesitatingly and she shut the door swiftly behind him. As he stood in the completely unlighted corridor, she thrust her left arm under his. Her warm and—as it seemed to him—desirous body clung to his own, and he was stupefied by a sweet, voluptuous perfume. Then a hot mouth was pressed to his and, thrilled with an unfamiliar emotion, Hargon returned the kiss with passionate ardour.

“Why, darling, what a hurry you’re in,” said a voice, which snatched him for a moment out of the tumult of his sensual ecstasy. “Just come in here first.”

He was disappointed and could not refrain from touching the woman’s body with his hand. Incapable of making any reply, he let her draw him into the room. He was not thinking of love; he forgot all his preconceived notions of sexual relationships and had only one desire: to hold this woman in his arms.

“Come, take off your things and make yourself comfortable. You want me to be nice to you, don’t you?” said the girl, a short, sarcastic laugh robbing her words of any natural kindliness.

Hargon was still standing at the back of the room. As she took off his cloak she stood aghast.

“Why don’t you put it down?” he asked in a dry, hoarse voice.

“Oh, I suppose you think I’m so taken with you that I shall make extra haste?”

Hargon felt the floor rock under his feet. He walked unsteadily towards the window and took off his hat, and as he did so, the woman gave a sharp, shrill scream, which plainly betrayed her disgust.

In an agony of discomfiture the hunchback suddenly saw the room and the whole situation with other eyes. The sweet, voluptuous odour hampered his breathing, and in the youthful face of this girl he could discern both the horror which his appearance inspired in her and the rebuff which was awaiting him. He was about to hurry away without a word, but she held him back.

“Are you mad? Why do you want to go? You’ve only got to pay me decently. You can’t expect me to do it cheap.”

As she spoke, he could see in her face complete indifference to his feelings; even at such a moment she was inspired only by a hard, inhuman, commercial spirit.

Even a female of this type repulsed him! Yes, he could have her for a fee, for a high fee. He had known that he would have to pay for his adventure, but that he would have to pay a special price—that he had not suspected. The man of revolting exterior must pay dear in order that even a woman of this class may not refuse him.

“Let me out at once,” Hargon shouted to the girl. “I must go! I can’t bear it!”

But she had already regained her composure.

“Don’t make such a fuss! There’s a special tariff for your sort. Surely that’s only reasonable.” And she held a mirror in front of his face.

Hargon clutched her fiercely by the arm. “Oh, so you’re prepared to give yourself to me for a hundred marks? Or perhaps for a mere ninety or eighty, or even less, you slut!”

She struck out at him with a desperate effort. “What are you thinking of? I suppose you think you can take any liberties you like? You ought to be

thankful I haven't thrown you out."

"So you want to throw me out, do you?" shouted Hargon, trembling with anger, and his hands gripped yet more tightly the plump flesh of her upper arms, so that she writhed with pain.

"Let me go at once, or I'll scream for help."

He drew her so close to him that he was again aware of the scent of her body.

"Scream by all means," he whispered, his voice trembling with excitement. "But in that case you won't get the extra fee you want from me!"

"Double my ordinary charge, that's the fee to you," she said mockingly. "Let go my arm and give me the money."

And when he relaxed his hold, she opened her blouse with an insolent, provocative gesture, so that he could see her breasts. "I don't suppose you ever saw anything like that before, much less held it in your arms? Do you think it's to be had for nothing?"

Hargon felt himself turn hot and cold. Without a word he took out his note-case and handed it to the girl so that she could take out as much as she wanted. Calmly

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and deliberately she counted the money and put it in her handbag, which she locked up in the chest of drawers. Then she flung a contemptuous, disparaging glance at Hargon, and, without even a pretence of feeling more friendly towards him, she bestowed on him in cold, business-like fashion the caresses which inflame lovers with hot desire.

This was the only time that Hargon had intercourse with a woman. The thought of going through the same experience again was more than he could bear....

In these hours of agonising recollection Hargon burnt out of himself his longing to possess Sister Elizabeth, much as wounds are cauterised with a red-hot iron in order to save the life of a patient.

In the eyes of this girl, for the first time since he had lost his parents, he had encountered a look of warm human sympathy, and his love for her was so great that he was prepared to make any sacrifice for her sake, even to the renunciation of love.

For hours Hargon fought with himself. Again and again hope surged up in him. Sister Elizabeth might love him so much as to be quite blind to his outward appearance. More painful than ever was the realisation that an impassable gulf lay between him and his fellow men. In his despair he stretched out his hand for the mirror, but all he saw was a head completely enveloped in white bandages. Who could say to what extent it had been still further disfigured by the burns?

Confused fancies crowded into his brain. The walls danced before his eyes, pendulums swung to and

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fro. He felt crushed by the weight of hundreds of little wheels which all fitted into one another but were in a state of such hopeless confusion that it was impossible for the machinery to work. The darkened room expanded to boundless dimensions and it seemed to him that Sister Elizabeth disappeared in the far background.

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VII

ERNST HARGON'S relapse lasted several days. In a state of complete apathy he just submitted to whatever was done to him. He did not recognise young Franz when the latter, relieved of his extension bandage and supremely happy, stood by his bed for the first time. Nor did he notice that Sister Elizabeth came to relieve the other nurse at noon every day. His head was full of buzzings and tickings, as though he could not throw off the memory of the shop window of the watchmaker in Unter den Linden.

Franz Krüger had formed his own conclusions about Hargon's condition, and he would have liked to talk to him. He wanted to tell him that Leni had written to say that she was coming to see him. All his resentment against her was forgotten, and every day he implored the doctor to get him well more quickly so that he shouldn't limp so badly when Leni came. When Franz was not dreaming of his sweetheart's visit he was wondering what he could do to help his companion. It was a long time before he arrived at any conclusion, for he always had to ponder a long time before he hit upon an idea that satisfied him, but when once the decision had been reached, it was unalterable, even though the most learned scholars in the realm should assure him that what he was doing was childish.

One morning, after he had done his walking exercises,

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Krüger seated himself on Hargon's bed. He shook his head disapprovingly. How could anyone be so misshapen! Sister Elizabeth must have her eyes at the back of her head. Surely, however much one sympathised, one could not forget a thing like that. But he promptly checked these idle reflections. At frequent intervals he repeated the words: "Hargon, you must wake up, Sister Elizabeth is coming to you at noon to-day. Hargon, you must wake up, Sister Elizabeth is coming to you at noon to-day...."

In Hargon's head the wheels revolved even faster than usual. The restless machinery trembled as it swung to and fro and each one of its movements was a painful blow, but the incessant humming and buzzing of the clockwork was interrupted first softly and then louder and louder by a strange yet oddly familiar melody which assumed more and more concrete form, resounding above the tumult, and flinging itself against the spokes of

the wheels until it brought them to a standstill. Gradually the phantom clockwork was enveloped in mysterious vapours and, after one more beat, the machinery came to a standstill. The ensuing silence was broken by Krüger's words: "Hargon, you must wake up, Sister Elizabeth is coming to you at noon to-day."

The sick man opened his eyes. He did not recognise the man who was seated on his bed in hospital clothes. He had to get his bearings first. Then, as if suddenly waking out of a painful dream, he asked in astonishment: "Have I been asleep long?"

"Oh, no, only a couple of days or so." Behind this little joke young Franz concealed the emotion inspired in him not only by Hargon, but also by his own achievement.

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He had succeeded in rousing the sick man, and no one would give him credit for it, not even Hargon himself, who did not so much as recognise his deliverer. Oh, what did it matter? And, as though nothing had happened, Franz continued: "My Leni is coming tomorrow."

"Your Leni is coming? To-morrow?"

"Why, yes, I've waited long enough. Now, when I am, so to speak, almost standing on my head on the bamboo pole again—or at any rate balancing on one leg—now she is coming. Probably she has reflected that even with one leg I can perform some very pretty little tricks." Hargon was genuinely delighted for Franz Krüger's sake, and the latter was at any rate so far compensated for his pains that he could now unfold his plans for the future to a sympathetic listener.

Shortly before twelve o'clock Franz tactfully withdrew, and so Hargon was alone with Sister Elizabeth when he saw her with his full consciousness for the second time in his life.

For a moment Sister Elizabeth gazed at him doubtfully, as if she could not believe that he had wakened from his feverish dreams. Then she said in a friendly tone:

"We have been very anxious about you."

"Thank you for your sympathy. It is comforting to know that someone cares what happens to me."

"Are you so lonely?"

"For the last twelve years, since my parents were killed in a railway accident in Rumania."

“Please do not think about that; you must not excite yourself on any account.”

Hargon could not restrain a smile, but horrified at the

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stabbing pains which the movement caused him, he checked himself. Sister Elizabeth had noticed how he winced.

“There, you see, you must keep absolutely still. If it wouldn’t bore you too much, I would like to read you something aloud.”

Hargon’s only reply was a nod, and Sister Elizabeth left the room for a few minutes. Presently she returned with a few books, the titles of which she read out to him. Hargon chose a translation of some Chinese poems, and while Sister Elizabeth in a musical voice read out the wise saws and simple, passionate love poems, her image impressed itself anew on his fancy.

They did not talk much to one another about personal things. Nor did they do so in the ensuing days, although they were always left alone by young Franz, who, however much he might talk about his Leni, gave proof of an amazing, almost tender consideration.

One day the ward sister informed the two patients that the third bed was to be once more occupied. Hargon gave a painful start. Would this put an end to all his wonderful times with Sister Elizabeth? Franz was indignant. “After leaving us alone so long, they might just as well have waited a bit longer,” he said. “What are you going to do now?”

Hargon was touched by this spontaneous sympathy. “What can I do?” he asked.

“Lord, don’t be such a fool! Have yourself moved to the floor where Sister Elizabeth is on duty. There are plenty of single rooms and you can afford one.”

“And leave you here alone?”

“Oh, don’t trouble your head about me! In any case

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you’ve no thoughts for anyone but your Elizabeth. No normal person could stand my asking the same questions about Leni day after day without a murmur.”

Hargon became more and more embarrassed. “But I can’t leave you alone, you must see that.”

Two minutes later Sister Emma entered the room. "Did you ring for me?"

"No, it must be a mistake," said Hargon. "I didn't ring."

"Come, Herr Hargon, it's plain that your wits are still a bit addled. You just told me to ring for Sister Emma because you wanted to have a single room. Have you forgotten all about it already?"

Before Hargon could make any reply, Franz was discussing with Sister Emma which room he was to have. He had found out some time before where Sister Elizabeth was on duty. Moreover, he gave a very good reason why Hargon wanted to be moved. "He must be able to sleep quietly at nights. Who knows what sort of a case they'll be putting in here."

Sister Emma took the suggestion quite as a matter of course and two hours later Hargon was moved to the third floor. Before this the two men took a cordial farewell of one another. Krüger was very much moved and tried to conceal the fact by a particularly rough manner. He promised to visit Hargon frequently, but, as a matter of fact, he never came once, for two days later he left the hospital. Leni took him to her home in a taxi, thereby giving it to be understood that she meant to stick to him. Franz Krüger realised this at once and almost leapt into the air with joy, but his lame leg soon restored him to a sense of reality.

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No one in the hospital attached any significance to the fact that Sister Elizabeth devoted her spare time to the patient in Room 156. In fact her colleagues admired her for it, and declared that their sympathy would not have been equal to such a demand. Sister Elizabeth only smiled at such remarks. "You don't realise what a wonderful man he is. When he talks to me, the hours pass like minutes. The gain is mine, not his."

"But can't you see what he looks like?"

"No, and if I did, I couldn't behave differently."

Hargon took great pains not to let Sister Elizabeth see his face. His bandages were always changed by one of the male attendants, and when Sister Elizabeth sat by his sick-bed, she was only allowed to help him in little ways.

As yet he had no suspicion how terribly his face had been disfigured by the burns. Although he had renounced all hope of possessing Sister Elizabeth, his love for her grew daily. With waking eyes he dreamed of her

and longed for the moment when she would come to him for a few minutes or for half an hour; and in his conversation with her he tried to gain a deeper insight into her nature and character. From the first they had talked about his work, and he had confided to her his wonderful discovery.

“The task I had set myself was so tremendous that in the ordinary way it could only have been solved by a whole group of scientists. But the barrier which separated me from my fellow men compelled me to cope with it alone. It is really wonderful how my fate drove me to explore the very region which had first attracted my attention. What patients could I treat? Who would not

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have turned away from me in horror. I was only allowed to see persons whose mental powers were deranged. Such persons are quite indifferent to ugliness or deformity. They live in a special world which they build up for themselves and which is perhaps more real to them than our world is to us. And they welcome anyone who can enter into their world and adjust himself to their ideas.”

“Was this the only thing that induced you to investigate brain diseases?” asked Sister Elizabeth doubtfully.

Hargon gave her a searching glance. “No,” he answered in a tone of surprising harshness. But for the time being he did not disclose his other motives.

“I tried to discover the unknown causes of mental disorders,” he said one day. “I paid no attention to the work of previous investigators. They had studied the brain. It was known that direct injuries caused serious disturbances. But how could the brain-substance undergo modifications when no external causes were discoverable? Starting from the consideration that mental disorders frequently supervene on diseases caused by microbes, I told myself that some animal or vegetable organism existing under practically the same conditions must be at the root of these secondary symptoms. Microbes, which suddenly find a favourable nutrient medium in the elements of a human body modified by the other symptoms of the disease, must in such cases begin to proliferate and give rise to further disorders. It was a question of tracking down these invisible germs, and I followed the path pursued by other investigators, in so far as I examined various elements in the bodies of mental subjects to see whether

they harboured hitherto undiscovered bacteria. I can assure you that far worse than the nerve-racking

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work, to which I often devoted fourteen to sixteen hours a day, was the agonising doubt whether I was not wearing out my strength for the sake of an utterly mad venture. Again and again I had to repeat my arguments to myself in order that I might not lose heart. The staining methods hitherto employed for detecting bacteria were not adequate to my purpose. I made endless attempts to add to these stains fresh chemical constituents which would stimulate my hypothetical organisms to absorb the pigment and thereby betray their presence. At length one of these attempts was crowned with success and, although it did not reveal to me any fresh facts, encouraged me to embark on further experiments.

Sister Elizabeth listened eagerly. "So you think that all mental activity is provoked by definite organisms?"

"No," answered Hargon with a smile, "not quite that. I, too, am powerless to unveil the mystery of the soul, but there are bacteria which may injure a person's thinking capacity without in any way impairing his physical constitution."

At this point they were interrupted. When Sister Elizabeth came to him next day, she was greatly excited. "I have been thinking about what you told me yesterday," she said. "It is a wonderful idea! You might save hundreds of thousands of people."

"No doubt I could if I chose."

Sister Elizabeth was taken aback. "What do you mean by 'if I chose'? Wasn't that the whole purpose of your researches, and do you hesitate now? What nonsense I am talking?" She broke off and looked charming in her confusion. "You must think me very foolish."

"Elizabeth," he said, and then he started, for it

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was the first time he had called her by her Christian name. "There is yet another possibility."

He broke off and became lost in reflection, and Sister Elizabeth did not dare to disturb him. But she was filled with a terrifying presentiment of some impending calamity. Surely the room was growing darker, as if the sun's rays were losing their power? What had happened to the sick man?

Why had he suddenly changed? Always before, when he had looked at her, his eyes had been filled with humble, imploring love. But now something had come into his eyes which she had never seen there before—a look of harsh, inflexible resolve.

Hargon paid no heed to Sister Elizabeth. Slowly, after a long pause, he spoke a few words, the meaning of which only dawned on her after the sound of them had died away.

“Through the capacity to guide the thoughts of men one might gain the mastery over them—over some, over many, over all. They drove me from their midst. They jeered at me when I was longing for their friendship. They despised me although I had done them no harm. I am qualified to rule over them, yet I have to slink away from them into the darkest corner. I could not win them by love. Now I mean to be master and rule over them all—all without exception.”

Hargon had drawn himself up. With his uninjured right hand he supported himself on the edge of the bed. The sombre passion which flashed from his eyes, the words which issued jerkily from his lips, the trembling of his voice which betrayed his agitation—all intensified the uncanny impression of this scene. He looked like a seriously wounded animal, lying in a clean, comfortable

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cage and conscious only of the uncontrollable longing to get back its freedom.

“Yes, all who have insulted me shall tremble before me. I shall be merciless to them as they have been to me. Do you realise what power has been placed in my hands? I shall use it—to the full.”

Glowing with hatred and passion, the words rushed from his lips. Yes, for years he had toiled to find a means of raising himself to world dominion. He alone with no one beside him. All his researches had been directed towards that end, and fortune had favoured him.

“At one of our lectures a patient was brought in who was suffering from loss of memory. He was about forty years of age and the disease had developed quite suddenly. If anyone showed him a comb and asked him what it was, he gazed round in perplexity. When the comb was put in his hand and he was told to use it, he combed his hair with it. And then he suddenly knew its name. ‘Comb,’ he said, and was as proud of his discovery as a child who has recited a poem. The same thing happened

when he was shown a watch. He gazed uncomprehendingly at the face and no doubt wondered why something was moving on it. But when the watch was held to his ear and he heard the tick, he again said proudly: 'Watch.' What a host of experiments they made with this man! They would have liked nothing better than to have looked inside his brain and, if they had, they would have been no wiser than before.

"But when I saw that patient for the first time a notion entered my brain and fixed itself there ineradicably. Yes, I admit, it came to me again and again, even when I wanted to shake it off. All attempts to drive away this

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idea were to no purpose. As soon as I abandoned myself unreservedly to my thoughts, it was back again, and it is still there to-day.

"Anyone who had power over the memory of men would be able to rule them. I meant to secure such power. I tried a lumbar puncture with this patient. It was a ghastly business. He had no suspicion of the pain which was in store for him; nor was he able afterwards to tell anyone that I had stabbed him in the spinal cord. When he pointed to the spot with a gesture of terror no one understood him; they imagined that he was suffering from some fixed idea. But there was no other course open to me and I did the same thing with other patients. I needed samples of the spinal cord fluid of these people, and any scruples had to be set on one side. I made a thorough examination of this fluid; I arranged hundreds of bacteria cultures and discovered microbes which had never been seen before—as you know, I have made very exhaustive chemical studies—but my only desire was that the knowledge thus acquired, or rather stolen, should serve my purpose. However, I was unable to discover any organism which occurred only in patients suffering from loss of memory.

"I will not weary you with all the stages in my long struggle, including the hours of despairing apathy, when one series of experiments after another proved fruitless. But at length I was able to confirm a discovery which I had made eighteen months before. A sailor was brought to the hospital who had lost his memory on a voyage. A fortnight before he had been in perfect health. Now he knew neither his own name nor that of his country; but he had not yet reached the stage of imbecility. The infection

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which I surmised to be the cause of the disease could only have occurred a short time before. If an unknown microbe was actually the excitant of the disease, I was bound to find it in this case of recent infection, for I had noticed that, when the disease had had time to establish itself, more and more microbes occurred in the body of the patient and these produced new and quite different complications, so that it was impossible to discover which of them had caused the loss of memory. This time the attempt succeeded. I found a spirochæte which until then I had only found in other patients suffering from loss of memory, without knowing whether it was really the excitant of the disease. Now I have in my hand the weapon needed for my struggle. I shall sharpen it and at the right moment I shall use it.”

Hargon sank back exhausted on to his pillows, but Sister Elizabeth cowered motionless on the chair by his bed. She did not understand all that he was telling her, but she guessed more than she heard. She felt as though she were quite alone in some vast landscape. Only a short time before the heavens had been radiantly blue, but, swifter than thought, dark clouds had suddenly gathered. A storm broke forth with such terrific violence that she was stupefied by the din and the thunder. Trees were rent asunder, and she herself was swept along and flung from side to side by a raging hurricane. The ground trembled and gave way beneath her feet, the earth was transformed into a heaving sea. Amid the angry, howling elements, she could find no way out, no escape. She was the sole witness of the destruction of the world....

“Elizabeth, what’s the matter with you?” she

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heard Hargon’s voice as though from a vast distance.

Still utterly dazed she screamed out: “Hargon, it can’t be true, what you have said. Are you mad? Who has given you the right to control the lives of millions of men?”

The sound of her own voice restored her abruptly to reality, and she saw that these gruesome fancies were delusions born of delirium. She gazed uncertainly at Hargon, who was himself horrified at the effect produced by his words.

Then she broke into a clear, ringing laugh, which scared away all the furies of hell conjured up by her imagination....

VIII

SISTER ELIZABETH'S concern for her patients was so genuine and unaffected that they all adored her. Often her position was by no means easy. If even visitors who came to see the patients promptly fell in love with her, could those who saw her every day be blamed for desiring her? But with a few friendly, jesting words she would repel embarrassing advances so skilfully that no one, however painful the rebuff might be to him personally, had any justification for taking offence. Or, if he still persisted, she had only to threaten that she would not visit him again in order, to check any further protestations of affection. For no one whom she had tended even once would willingly forgo her services.

Hargon, though it cost him a great effort, was very reserved in his manner towards her. Had she not once said to him herself that she enjoyed most attending those patients who most urgently needed her help? And she looked upon him as very sick, not only bodily, but also spiritually. This realisation did not embitter him. He tried to resign himself to it as best he could. That a human being should display interest in him was in itself such a tremendous experience that often he could not believe it. He looked forward to her visits with feverish expectation.

Without sparing himself, he told her a great deal about

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his life. He was deeply moved when quite spontaneously she stroked his uninjured right hand after he had told her about Professor Lobert's lecture. What anyone else would have regarded as evidence of love he dared not think of as such. He, too, recognised it for what it was, but he would not admit it, he dared not admit it. Was he not deliberately deceiving her? He was concealing his face from her, because he was afraid that she would turn away from him in horror. The mere thought that she could not fail to see that he was a hunchback was torture. It was only a gesture of pity, he tried hard to persuade himself. Never would she have touched him, never perhaps would she have come to him, if she had not seen him with his head completely swathed in bandages like a mummy. He was furious with himself. Did love for a man really depend on his looks? Would everything be over as soon as his bandages were removed?

In a state of extreme agitation he rang for the male nurse. "Please switch off the top light," he said to the man as he entered. "I rang for you because my bandage is worrying me. Would you be so kind as to change it? That strong light has given me a headache."

The man did as Hargon asked and washed his face. But he looked in vain for the ointment with which to rub the skin. Hargon had hidden it under the pillows.

"I can't think what's become of the ointment," said the man in a puzzled tone.

Hargon pretended to be vexed. "They must have thrown away the pot, and in any case it was

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empty. You must get a prescription for some more. I shall be quite glad to lie for half an hour without my bandages."

No sooner was the man out of the room than Hargon left his bed for the first time. He had great difficulty in raising himself and he took a long time over it. But he had only one thought: he wanted to see himself in the mirror; he wanted to know whether the burns had disfigured him even more. Slowly he walked over to the wash-basin, above which hung a large mirror. He kept his eyes lowered and hesitated. Then he pulled himself together, opened his eyes and gazed....

No, this could not possibly be himself, Ernst Hargon! His whole face was ravaged by scars, or rather it was one huge scar, the colour of which ranged from dark brown to pale violet. The skin on his nose was drawn and shrunken. In his forehead there were deep holes. He tapped himself on the mouth with his finger, and the phantom in the mirror faithfully repeated the movement. He opened his mouth in horror and the image mimicked him ruthlessly. As though in the hope of scaring away the spectre he passed his hand over the glass; but the face peered out from between his fingers; he could not hide it. Suddenly the head in the mirror began to tremble. Hargon fell to the ground in a swoon.

When he came to himself, he was still lying on the floor in front of the wash-basin. The attendant had not come back. Minutes passed before he realised what had happened. He did not attempt to stand up, but dragged himself on his knees to the bed, keeping his eyes turned away from the mirror. Trembling all over he waited for the attendant with clenched teeth. Incapable

of making a movement, he let the man bandage his head again.

Then followed the darkest night in his life, when he stifled for a second time the love for Sister Elizabeth which had threatened to overmaster him only a few hours before.

IX

MANY weeks had passed since Hargon entered the hospital, and his recovery, which had at first been very slow, was now making rapid progress. He realised with horror that the day was approaching when he would have to leave the hospital.

He sedulously avoided everything which had any connection with his future, and abandoned himself to the joy of the present. When once he was discharged from the hospital, difficulties would arise of which he now preferred not to think. When they proposed to take off his bandage, he protested. With a shake of the head, the doctor who was attending him said: "Why, won't you be thankful to get rid of all that stuff? It must be terribly uncomfortable.

"No, please leave it! I don't want to scare people out of their lives."

So the bandage remained. But sooner or later he would have to remove this disguise. He wanted to spare Elizabeth the sight of his terrible scars and disfigurement. Even though he had renounced the thought of ever possessing her, yet her tender care was a constant source of exquisite happiness which he was no longer willing to forgo. Often he lay sleepless through the nights that were growing ever shorter, and foolish yearnings surged up in him. In the twilight of the sick-room it was easy to dispose of obstacles which in the glaring light of day

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would have nipped all his hopes in the bud. He pictured to himself Sister Elizabeth's first visit to him and how splendidly he would decorate his room to receive her. In thought he led her round, his laboratory, explaining his apparatus, showing her how he worked, and telling her the whole story of his researches. Another time they would go for a walk in the Tiergarten, and he would lead her to those parts of the park which, although situated in the very midst of the capital, are only visited by few. He loved this last remnant of quiet nature in the heart of Berlin. He would show her the tiny peninsula in the Landwehr canal where he had often seated himself on a bench and gazed dreamily after the passing boats. A few steps from the bench a willow drooped its long, slender branches to the surface of the water. It must now be in its full splendour. How beautiful was the view

from the Hercules Bridge! On either shore the mighty old trees rose up like dark green ramparts. When the evening sky was ablaze with gorgeous hues in the last radiance of the setting sun, one quite forgot that only a few minutes distant was the vast turmoil of the metropolis. Hargon knew every inch of Berlin—the decaying streets in the centre of the city, the oddly planned suburbs and beautiful lakes on the outskirts, and the districts of unceasing toil, where new working-class quarters had sprung up around great factories.

In long, sleepless nights, he would lead a new life together with Sister Elizabeth. But when he woke in the morning after a brief slumber, all the lovely visions of his waking dreams had vanished, and his dread of what was impending grew from day to day.

Sister Elizabeth had no suspicion of what was agitating

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him. She was happy in the conviction that she had inspired him with fresh courage to go on living, and she felt proud of her triumph. Was she not a little surprised that he never spoke to her of what would happen when he left the hospital? She did not question him, and he was not even sure whether she contemplated seeing him again after he was discharged.

One Saturday she came to his room earlier than usual. She was not in her nurse's uniform, but was wearing a simple, blue silk dress. It was the first time that he had seen her out of uniform, and she asked him eagerly whether he thought she looked nicer like this. To her surprise he did not echo her gay tone. His voice was slightly husky as he asked her why she was not in uniform.

“Why so grave? Do you grudge me a little change?”

“Please answer my question first!”

There was a note of terror in his voice—a terror which Sister Elizabeth did not understand, but which made her answer very promptly.

“I have been invited to spend the week-end with my aunt, who has a little house in Werder. That is why I have come earlier to-day. I wanted to say good-bye to you. I shall not be back until Monday morning.”

“I see,” he said. For a moment he had been horrified because he thought that Sister Elizabeth was leaving the hospital. Now he could hardly help laughing at his fears, but he was very careful not to show how foolish he had been. She would take him for a love-sick fool.

“Let me have a good look at you before I exercise my office as *arbiter elegantiarum*.”

Sister Elizabeth turned slowly round as though she were a mannequin displaying a model.

“May I copy this dress for Madame Hargon, sir?”

“I don’t make my purchases so recklessly. I should like first to make sure about the quality of the material.”

Sister Elizabeth laughed. “What a man of the world! Our ladies don’t usually want to test the material.”

“But one is more inclined to make a hasty decision if the mannequin is pretty!”

“Oh, how untrusting of you!”

“Not at all; but let me see the model a little nearer.”

With a roguish smile Sister Elizabeth bent over him and jerked round her head first to the right and then to the left. “Profile? Full face? Head and shoulders? Can we start the first sitting?”

Hargon’s brain reeled. This was too much! This was more than he could endure. He wanted to pull Elizabeth towards him and clasp her in his arms. He was overcome by a burning desire to press his mouth to her charmingly curved lips, to feel her body against his and to swoon in the ecstasy of a kiss. Slowly he raised his right arm and, as though obeying some compulsion, stroked Elizabeth’s fair hair and neck. She blushed crimson, but not until he tried to draw her towards him did she gently disengage herself.

“Elizabeth! My dear!”

He was only able to say these three words, but in them lay all the overmastering love which he had been suppressing for so many weeks.

Elizabeth! My dear! These words lingered in the

room after she had long been standing silent at the window, gazing out into the garden, lost in thought. Hargon saw that the girl was struggling with herself. He felt that she was trying to find an answer, that she wanted to say something but was silent because she could not find the right words.

The moments of suspense were agonising, and they were the more oppressive since neither was capable of uttering a word that would relieve

the tension.

Never had he been so conscious of his helplessness as in this hour. He dared not even confess his love to the woman whom he loved beyond all else. A cry had escaped from his breast, because the strain had been too great, because it had threatened to tear him asunder. Into those three words had been compressed all that he felt for Elizabeth. He knew that he had finally betrayed himself, that the pitiful part he had been acting for weeks had collapsed. Now she would leave him, and all would be over.

It was some time before Sister Elizabeth came back to his bed. "Forgive me, I must go now. I have stayed with you a very long time; but I will come back the day after to-morrow."

She gave him her hand, and its gentle pressure gave him the blissful assurance that she had understood him.

That night he wrote to Elizabeth. In passionate terms he declared his love. He told her everything that he had left unspoken. But when he began to ask, to entreat her to be his, the pen moved more and more slowly over the paper. Everything that he wrote seemed to him feeble and expressionless in comparison with

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what he felt, and finally he realised that she could not be won in this way.

Suddenly he knew what he had to do. He must not shun the issue; he must provoke it. Not the day after to-morrow, not in the next few days. He would give her time, and he himself must regain his self-possession. But surely it was impossible that she, she of all persons, would forsake him! She would not turn away from him like the rest, she would not repel him; their intimacy would remain, and he would be free to devote his talents and his knowledge to her service and to the service of humanity.

On Sunday morning he sent for the doctor and asked to be discharged. "I am so far recovered," he said, "that I now need only one thing—rest. I am grateful to you and to all who have attended me in the hospital for what you have done. I am sorry that I cannot say 'Good-bye' to Sister Elizabeth. She was particularly kind to me. But I must go; I can't endure it any more. Can I rely upon you to hand this letter to Sister Elizabeth?"

The doctor raised a few objections to Hargon's decision, but when he saw that they produced no effect, he gave his consent. The two men discussed in brief, business-like terms what still remained to be done.

Hargon was to have an artificial arm, though he would not be ready for this until after some time. In order that the letter might not be forgotten, the doctor had it taken to Sister Elizabeth's room immediately. "I shall see you again in the office," he said. "There are a few little formalities to be attended to there."

With the aid of a hospital attendant Hargon dressed

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himself rapidly. Now the bandage, which no longer served as a bandage but only to conceal his face, had to be finally removed. Although it was very warm, he put on his overcoat and turned up the collar. He then drew his hat so far over his brow that it shaded his face beyond recognition. Shortly before twelve o'clock he left the hospital in a taxi.

In order that he might not at the last moment give way to his overflowing emotions, he had written Sister Elizabeth only a brief note. In it he had begged her to excuse him for leaving so abruptly and to forgive him if he could not explain his reason. "I did it with a heavy heart and that is all I can tell you at present. But be assured that I shall come to see you in a few weeks' time! Please accept this assurance as more than a promise." Then, after a few warm and affectionate words of thanks, he concluded: "I know that you trust me and will not question the motives of my behaviour, even if you do not understand them. I, too, trust you."

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X

WEEKS had passed since the day when Hargon left the hospital, weeks during which his love for Elizabeth had cost him a desperate struggle. He had only paid a brief visit to his laboratory, and had been surprised to find that anything in it had remained whole. (Above all he had feared that the stream of gas would have caused an explosion, but, as though by a miracle, the Bunsen burner had struck the ground in such a way as to close the tap.)

He left everything as he found it. Of what interest was his work to him now? Never again would he resume his experiments. The next day he journeyed into the mountains; he wanted to be alone so that he might come to a clear understanding with himself. But it seemed as though a curse followed him everywhere. It was a long time before he could find a lodging. Alike at the big hotels and the small boarding-houses the managers refused to take him in, sometimes politely, sometimes with unconcealed disgust. When he offered to pay double and to avoid the company of the other guests, they only shrugged their shoulders. At length an old peasant woman accepted him as a lodger. But even here he was not safe. The children in the streets ran after him and shouted: "Ugly dwarf!" He could not drive them away. Sometimes he threatened them with his stick, but generally he fled into the mountains. This was not his

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first experience of being mocked and ridiculed, but all these things, to which he had long since learned to shut his eyes, were doubly painful because they reminded him once more of life as it was in reality.

The exalted mood which had possessed him when he left Berlin had long since faded. He wrote letters to Elizabeth, but did not send them off. He lived with her in thought, but could not summon up courage to make any approach to her. Why had he not long ago provoked the decision? Why had he not shown his true face to his beloved? Why had he fled without taking leave of her? Those were questions which he put to himself again and again, which tormented him more and more cruelly, from which he could find no escape and to which there was only one answer: "Because I did not want to lose her! Because I could not summon up courage to hear her say 'No.' "

There was no one here to comfort and cheer him and give him fresh hope. Sometimes he felt as though he were split into two persons: one who joyfully accepted life and whose dreams and longings shaped themselves into the most exquisite reality, the other, a desperate man in the light of whose cold reflection the phantom creations of his longing dissolved into nothingness. Racked by the tumult of his emotions, he could not find the rest he sought. He sent for books, so that he might divert his thoughts by studying scientific problems, but when the books arrived, he was unable to concentrate on what he was reading. Everything suddenly seemed to him meaningless and unimportant in comparison with this experience which had stirred him to the depths of his soul and changed the whole course of his life.

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As time went on, he found it more and more impossible to write to Elizabeth. At first he did not notice how the days slipped past. Was he to apologise for not sending her word of himself when his thoughts were full of her day and night? Did she ever think of him? What had been her feelings when he disappeared so suddenly from the hospital? Surely she must have doubted him when he behaved so incomprehensibly, since she could not have known the motives of his flight? She would bestow her love on other patients. It was her nature to sympathise with suffering humanity. Had he any right to claim her for himself alone?

In the course of his long, lonely rambles about the mountains his decision gradually ripened. He revelled in the beauty of Nature, which he saw with Elizabeth's eyes and for her sake. When he looked up at the great mountains, his beloved seemed as far from him as those solitary heights. He had been near to her and might perhaps be so again, but dared he hope to stay and find his resting-place with her?

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XI

NO less abruptly than he had fled from the hospital did he return to the city. He was fully recovered, and when he visited his doctor, he was told that he could soon be fitted with an artificial limb. He began to resume his former way of life, but a nervous dread restrained him from putting himself into direct touch with Sister Elizabeth. In his free time—for the present he had plenty of free time—he loitered near the hospital in the hope of meeting his beloved. But it seemed as if fate were contending against him; he never saw her.

Often we are puzzled to know why we cannot bring ourselves to take steps on which an important decision depends, but this irresolution is, for the most part, a last effort to ward off an event of which we are dreading the consequences. Hargon wanted to see Sister Elizabeth, but at the same time he shrank from the meeting and instinctively delayed it.

Then came one Sunday in August when, as always when he was waiting near the hospital, he concealed himself behind the projecting wall of a house. In spite of the heat, he was wearing a wide cloak, in order to conceal his deformity as much as possible. The street was bathed in the rays of the hot afternoon sun; the air

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seemed a-quiver with golden light. Hargon paid no heed to all this. He was gazing fixedly at the door of the hospital. Every time that it opened he started. During the visiting hour a number of people came to sit with their relations for a short time and help them to forget their suffering and despondency. Hargon watched them go in and, an hour later, he saw them come out again. Then all was silent in the hospital.

He was about to move away when the door opened once more and Sister Elizabeth came out. For weeks and months he had never tired of picturing to himself the moment when he should see her again for the first time. But now he felt none of the tumultuous bliss of which he had dreamed. He could not move and go towards her, but in him was an unuttered cry which threatened to burst the throat from which it could not escape. Surely she

will come to me, his heart and his pulses hammered out. If she felt anything at all for him, she would guess that he was very near.

Sister Elizabeth walked with bent head towards the opposite side of the road. Then—he felt as though a miracle were happening—she stopped, turned round and walked over to the side of the road where he was standing. She came nearer and nearer, while he, impelled by an inexplicable shyness, retreated into the shadow. Now she could not fail to see him; now she would recognise him. But Sister Elizabeth did not stop for a moment. He saw with dismay that she was about to pass him by. Then he moved away from the wall, took a few steps towards her, and slowly raised his arm in order to take off his hat and greet her. Her attention aroused by the unexpected movement, Sister Elizabeth stopped for a

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moment, and he saw that he had startled her out of some absorbing thought. Her glance strayed past him uncomprehendingly. Hargon could not utter a word, though in his glance was an imploring “Elizabeth!” But when she saw his face with its terrible scars, she shrank away. Quickly, she took a few steps forward as though about to hurry away. He gazed dumbly after her, feeling as though his whole body were benumbed and his heart had stopped beating. This expression of horror on the part of a person seeing him for the first time he had experienced not once, nor twice, nor thrice, but innumerable times. So it was the same with Sister Elizabeth. A terrible agony rent his breast. He was utterly stunned.

But Sister Elizabeth was no longer moving away. She had stopped, hesitated a moment and turned back. Hargon saw with indescribable horror that she was taking some money out of her purse. He was still holding his hat in his hand without suspecting that his helpless movement produced the impression that he was begging. If he was conscious of it at all, it was only as a weak confirmation of his timid entreaty for love. Sister Elizabeth stepped up to him and threw a few coins into the hat. “Take these, my poor fellow, I’m sorry I haven’t more,” she murmured, and swiftly, as though anxious to evade his thanks, she hurried away.

In the shadow of a house stood a poor, unfortunate cripple. At the moment when a few small coins rolled to the ground out of the hat which fell from his strengthless arm, his world collapsed. Everything turned black before his eyes. He staggered and had to lean against the wall of the house, because his legs refused to carry him any

longer. Thus he stood, a man on whom sentence of death had been passed in a few seconds.... How he reached home he never knew. He flung himself on to the sofa. His whole frame was shaken by violent shivering, but not a sound escaped his lips.

During that night the fate of the world was decided. Before morning dawned Hargon had made his preparations for fresh experiments.

PART II

I

IT needed a vast expenditure of energy to accomplish what Hargon had set himself to do. Difficulties of a practical and technical nature threatened again and again to bring to naught the daring plan which he had conceived. He had started from one idea and pursued it to its ultimate logical conclusion. All other feelings were extinguished in his breast. He did not worry about the immediate or remoter consequences of what he proposed to do. He was intent upon one object alone: to make himself the master of all humanity. The power to achieve this end would be given him by the G-bacillus, which he had originally investigated for scientific reasons.

Several weeks were spent in making the laboratory fit for use again and in preparing for arduous researches. He had lost all sense of the passage of time. One day passed like another; all were fully occupied with new and extremely ingenious experiments. With considerable difficulty he managed to secure a post in a hospital which would bring him in touch with patients suffering from loss of memory. He only succeeded by giving away a part of his secret, and at a meeting of scientists he gave a demonstration of his new methods of bacteriological research. Before the eyes of his astonished listeners was revealed an unknown world into which they gazed with no less wonder than the men who first examined through the microscope such commonplace objects as raindrops,

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hairs, and bits of wood, and discovered in them tiny-moving streaks, the significance of which they were at a loss to explain.

Hargon's explanation elicited warm approval from this audience of distinguished scientists; and then he asked them to make it possible for him to continue his investigations, which he was not in a position to do at the moment, since he was refused access to the patients. "I have let you into the secret of all my methods of research, he said. "I only ask one thing in return—the material with which to carry on my work!"

Although the scientists were enthusiastic over Hargon's contribution to research, the difficulties of bringing him into touch with the patients seemed almost insuperable. But for the fact that it was the imbecile and

insane in whom Hargon was specially interested, his wish could not have been satisfied.

For the purpose of his investigations, however, it was not enough merely to examine the patients; a large amount of money was also needed in order to finance the work. A great many experimental animals were required, as well as costly apparatus and helpers who could be entrusted with the purely mechanical work. Hargon was almost destitute. The fortune which his parents had left him had long since been used up. Once he secured a fairly large sum by entering for a medical competition and winning the first prize. But the money only sufficed to pay off his most pressing debts. What would happen when he had actually reached his goal? Then he would need vast sums in order to carry out his plan.

He found a way out of the difficulty. Although

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all business transactions were repugnant to him, he engaged in speculation in the intervals of his scientific labours. He began with small sums, but, thanks to his keen intelligence, he soon became proficient in the world of finance. Every day he engaged in Stock Exchange transactions, large and small, promptly realising his profits, and in this manner he succeeded in accumulating a considerable fortune.

These transactions claimed a part of his time, but the game of speculation afforded him neither pleasure nor excitement; it was simply a nuisance to be borne for the sake of his work.

His only assistants were a man who looked after the animals and an elderly chemist who had been dismissed by his employers after twenty years' service. Hargon only spoke to these two when absolutely necessary and did not explain the purpose of the various experiments. They got their orders from him, which they had to carry out, and although he was not unfriendly towards them, he was conscious that they were on the defensive and that they particularly resented being dependent on a being like himself. But this fact perturbed him no more than did the wholesale mortality among the animals which resulted from his experiments. By extracting spinal cord fluid from patients afflicted with loss of memory, he secured repeated confirmation that this disease was connected with the G-bacillus, which he never once discovered in healthy human beings or in patients suffering from other diseases. He bred this bacillus, and even went so far as

to practise an injection on an old disabled soldier, who, in consideration of a large sum of money, volunteered to undergo the experiment, though,

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of course, without any suspicion of the possible consequences. Hargon awaited the outcome of this experiment with tense excitement. But the old soldier did not develop the disease. A lumbar puncture undertaken a few days later revealed, it is true, the presence of G-bacilli; but at the end of a fortnight they had disappeared again.

Under other circumstances Hargon would perhaps have been so discouraged by this failure that he would have renounced all further experiments. But his inflexible resolve to reach his goal helped him to triumph over his disappointment. He drew from it the conclusion that he had been up to now proceeding from a false assumption. Perhaps he had wanted to realise his plan too quickly and so had omitted some important researches. He decided for the time being to abstain from any further experiments on human beings. In this he was actuated less by the thought that he was committing a crime against the unfortunate victims of his investigations than by the conviction that no further advance was possible along this path. Unswervingly, although he still had no proof of its validity, he held to the view that loss of memory was caused by the G-bacillus. But how was it that almost all were immune against the germ, and that only in exceptional cases did it encounter conditions favourable to its transplantation and growth?

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II

A MERE chance set Hargon on the right track. As with all great discoveries, the decisive factor was not that he suddenly observed something which had hitherto escaped the notice of himself and others, but the brilliant intuition which led him to divine a chain of cause and effect where others had for years passed by unsuspectingly. It was chance that led the great bacteriologist, Koch, to work out the methods of obtaining pure cultures of bacteria. One day when he entered his laboratory he saw on a table a slice of potato on which he discovered little specks of various colours. Countless others before him had seen the same thing; but he asked himself: What is this strange phenomenon of which I do not know the cause? He examined the various specks under the microscope and found that in each of them only one species of bacterium was present. Thence Koch drew the brilliant conclusion that the cultivation of specific bacteria is only possible in a solid nutrient medium. When a microbe falls out of the air, it multiplies very rapidly, because the nutrient medium is sufficient to allow the growth of millions and millions of similar bacteria. They remain on the same spot, if the nutrient medium in which they are situated is solid. But if the bacteria multiply in a fluid nutrient medium, they float about and mingle with one another like tiny, invisible fishes, and there is no possibility of separating the various species.

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Among the cases which Hargon had under observation at the hospital was an alcoholic, who displayed more and more unmistakable signs of loss of memory. This man, who was already over sixty years of age, succumbed to an apoplectic seizure. Hargon conducted the post-mortem examination of the corpse and for weeks investigated the brain very carefully. In doing so he noticed a faint modification of the cell-layers in numerous areas of the cortex. The greyish-white brain substance had assumed a faint brownish coloration. Primarily affected were the association areas of the cerebral cortex, which, as has long been known, serve to link up the sensory impressions with one another. Chemical investigation convinced Hargon that the cerebral substance was interspersed with ingredients which do not normally occur in the brain. For days he pondered the significance of this

phenomenon. He had already prepared numerous cultures of G-bacilli, but never yet had he succeeded in recovering these bacteria from animals which he had inoculated with them. Strange, for in the test-tubes and the incubator the cultures grew very rapidly, and from the vigorous movement of the bacilli it was obvious that they were thoroughly robust. But when he inoculated animals, he found repeatedly that the bacilli recovered from such animals soon died, and that after a few days there were none to be found. Consequently the G-bacillus must encounter in the spinal cord powers of resistance which destroyed it. Only in exceptional cases, where owing to some individual predispositions these powers of resistance were lacking, could the G-bacillus continue to develop.

Suddenly it occurred to Hargon that there might be some connection between the alien substances found in

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the brain and the growth of the bacteria. Automatically, as it were, one argument linked itself with another and led to a daring hypothesis, the basic idea of which was that here was a case where the seat of the bacteria was separated from the region whence they derived their nutrition.

In the deceased patient, owing to the effects of alcohol—and in other patients from other causes—the brain substance had been modified in such a way that it served as food for the G-bacilli, which were normally unable to live in the spinal cord. Hence the bacteria were able to establish themselves. The poison which they secreted and which penetrated to the brain in some unknown way resulted, like the secretion of human saliva, in a constant modification of parts of the cerebral substance, so that a regular supply of nourishment was maintained. So the bacteria were able to multiply profusely and thereby to overcome all the normal powers of resistance. The modification of the cerebral substance which rapidly ensued owing to the secretion of the poison led to serious disturbances and finally to complete loss of memory.

Had Hargon been conducting his investigations purely for scientific purposes, he would have tested once again the conjecture that the seat of the bacteria and their source of nourishment were separated from one another. But in order not to waste yet more time over tedious and perhaps hopeless researches, he contented himself with the hypothesis he had formed, by the light of which he could continue to work at his one and only

task; namely, to modify the G-bacillus by breeding in such a way that every human being would become susceptible to it.

Hargon had a large number of animals which he kept

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for purposes of experiment: sheep, dogs, cats, monkeys, pigeons, guinea-pigs and rats. Hussmann, his assistant, saw that they were well looked after. There was a perpetual warfare between this man and Hargon, for Hussmann could tolerate the wholesale destruction of rats, guinea-pigs and pigeons, but whenever a dog or a cat had to be sacrificed, he was immediately indignant and bewailed the loss of his friends. That animals had to be killed in order to be dissected he could to some extent appreciate; but when one of the unfortunate victims—as he termed his pets—was quite unaffected by an injection, he took it as a personal offence that Hargon should make him get rid of this animal, though its life had been spared and he longed to keep it.

The old man's special favourite was a four-year-old wolfhound, a large, handsome animal, which he had bought himself. Tyras could do all kinds of tricks and was, in his master's opinion, a prodigy of intelligence. Hussmann did not keep Tyras in a box like the other dogs; he was allowed to run about freely and to accompany his master wherever he went. Hargon only interested himself in the animals when he was observing their state of health after an injection, and he had no idea that Tyras was Hussmann's special pet. One day he needed a dog for a fresh experiment, and, as it was Hussmann's day off, he had to select an animal himself. As he was walking across the yard, Tyras growled and barked furiously. Hargon promptly put the dog on a lead and took him into the laboratory in order to try an injection on him. This time, however, the bacilli injected had not been cultivated in the ordinary nutrient medium, but in one to which had been added constituents of the brain of the deceased

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alcoholic. Tyras was very unwilling to submit to the injection, and Hargon had to bind him in order to be able to introduce the needle. Even after Tyras had been set free, he refused to be pacified for a long time. He rushed about, taking frantic leaps, and eluded all attempts to capture him. At about five o'clock in the afternoon the laboratory assistant came back and Hargon

told him of his difficulty. "Unless I can isolate the animal," he said, "the whole experiment will have been wasted."

"Have you injected Hussmann's Tyras?"

"I don't know who Tyras is."

"The clever wolfhound chained up in the yard."

Hargon was vexed. "Why should Hussmann keep animals of his own here? I dislike all this sentimentality. Here we have to regard all animals as dead things. In his own home Hussmann can do what he likes; perhaps the best thing he could do would be to breed canaries; that's all one to me." In his heart, however, Hargon was very much vexed at what had happened; he did not like disputes with his assistants.

"Don't say anything to Hussmann about my having given the animal an injection," he said at length, turning to the laboratory assistant. "I'll take one of the little baboons." The man smiled politely, but behind his respectfully lowered eyes lurked his hatred of Hargon. Hussmann was surly and bad-tempered for the next few days. "So he did tell him," thought Hargon irritably, but he avoided any mention of Tyras. "Let him do what he likes with the animal," he thought. In any case he had given up all idea of making further experiments on the dog, and he had almost forgotten the whole incident when one day Hussmann, quite contrary to his custom, came

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to him of his own accord. "Excuse me, *Herr Doktor*," he said. "But could you just take a look at Tyras? There seems to be something wrong with him."

"Is the dog ill?" asked Hargon in astonishment.

"No, not exactly ill. In fact he eats with twice his usual appetite. But for some time Tyras has been like a different animal. He doesn't do his tricks, and when I call him, he doesn't come. If I didn't know that you hadn't given him an injection, I should almost have taken for granted that that was what ailed him."

Hargon seized the man by the right arm so that he recoiled in alarm. "Tell me what you have noticed in the animal. I want to know exactly." Hussmann gave a detailed account of his Tyras's special talents. He described how attached he had grown to the animal; he was like a faithful friend. "But now he seems quite changed. Often he flies at me so that I'm quite afraid of him."

Hargon hurried with Hussmann across the yard. Tyras was lying on his chain, but as the two men approached, he rushed out of his kennel and sprang at them like a wild beast.

“Is the dog always so fierce?”

“Lie down, Tyras,” thundered Hussmann. In vain. The animal refused to be pacified. It sprang at its master no less than at Hargon, until Hussmann threw it a piece of meat, upon which it pounced with frantic greed.

“I can’t let him off the chain any more. I’m afraid he might break into the cages and kill the other animals.”

“Bring the dog up to me,” ordered Hargon curtly, and his tone was so stern that Hussmann dared not protest.

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In the laboratory Tyras was tied to a heavy table, but he tugged so violently at the rope in his efforts to free himself that all the objects standing on top were flung into confusion. Hussmann tried to calm the furious animal, but coaxing words, stern commands and copious oaths all proved equally ineffectual. Hargon, who as a rule paid no attention to anything that Hussmann did, looked on very patiently at his assistant’s efforts. “I don’t fancy it would be very pleasant to meet that animal if it were at large,” he said at length. “Impossible!” murmured Hussmann despondently. “I sometimes think that Tyras has been turned into a wolf.”

“We won’t kill the dog,” said Hargon slowly, “but I must examine it.” Hussmann, quite crushed by the behaviour of his favourite, raised no objections. Obviously he had no suspicion that the dog had been used for an experiment, and Hargon did not deem it necessary to enlighten him. Only with the greatest difficulty did the two men succeed in strapping down the animal so that it could be anaesthetised for the operation. Hargon then took a sample of the spinal cord, and a test which he carried out immediately revealed the presence of a quantity of G-bacilli.

A fortnight had elapsed since the inoculation—a period which had hitherto always sufficed for the disappearance of all the injected G-bacilli. While Hussmann was still walking up and down the laboratory, sighing and groaning, Hargon, with inflexible calm, convinced himself that the first practical experiment had succeeded. He did not allow himself to be exhilarated by this success, as he had been before when he had made a great discovery. He realised that he had covered a long stretch

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of the road he had to tread, but this fact afforded him neither joy nor satisfaction. He was conscious only of the necessity of pushing on as rapidly as possible, and not for one moment did he interrupt his labours. After briefly recording the result of the investigation, he proceeded to turn this new success to practical account.

Tyras was not allowed to stay in the yard any longer, but was placed in a large barred cage. Hargon promised Hussmann to spare the animal as far as possible, and he allowed the man to stay near Tyras one or two hours every day. But he warned him to be careful.

“Don’t let the animal fly at you or bite you! I have no idea as yet what course the disease will take.”

In the ensuing days Tyras did not exhibit any fresh symptoms. All Hussmann’s attempts to train him were unsuccessful. Tyras could no longer perform any tricks, he did not take any notice when he was called, but one day Hussmann announced with a beaming face that the animal had come up to him quite peaceably when he had brought its food.

The experiment which Hargon had performed on Tyras he repeated on a number of other animals and always with the same success. The G-bacilli did not disappear; on the contrary, they multiplied.

III

HARGON no longer knew whether it was only his absorption with his idea that made him see fresh achievements in all his subsequent labours or whether he was actually making rapid progress. He logically followed up one line of research. He wanted to breed a modified G-bacillus such that all could be infected by it. Many stages had been covered, but each series of experiments was only the logical consequence of the preceding one. He had proved by means of tests that gnats were carriers of G-bacilli. Undoubtedly, then, these microbes, which were only perceptible with the aid of extremely elaborate staining methods, had long existed, but hitherto in such a form that they presented no danger to human beings. If he succeeded in transforming these tiny organisms so that they could flourish under other conditions, the decisive step would have been taken. For to proceed the other way round—to poison man, as it were, in order to make him a carrier of the G-bacilli—was, of course, out of the question.

In the laboratory more and more incubators had to be installed, and he got through a terrific amount of work. For he had to trace the growth and development of innumerable cultures with which inoculations had been made from one animal to another. He was rewarded by the fact that only in very rare cases was an experiment unsuccessful. He did his work with the mechanical

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sureness of a sleep-walker. He found that sheep-dogs were specially good bacillus-carriers. After several inoculations from one animal to another, there was an unmistakable increase in virulence. In all his experiments he noted the curious circumstance that the animals—even the best bacillus-carriers—showed no outward symptoms unless they had been already domesticated, in which case they no longer responded to commands or threats. Only one person could do anything with them, namely, old Hussmann, who would often spend hours playing the most absurd games with them when he was giving them their food. Hargon, as he watched him one day, was involuntarily reminded of a mother bird feeding its young. Howling in all the notes of the scale, the animals turned their heads towards Hussmann and waited impatiently for their meal.

There was certainly no decline of intelligence after the injection. Hargon one day bought a sporting dog from a forester, who sold the animal because it was no good at tracking down game that had been shot. The animal, which was rather emaciated when it arrived, very soon recovered, and no symptoms of disease appeared after the injection. As the dog was remarkably quiet, Hussmann allowed it to run about freely in the yard. Suddenly it darted away at full speed and Hussmann was unable to recapture it. Three days later a letter arrived from the forester. In it he related that at noon on the previous day the dog had suddenly reappeared in the yard. He could not understand it, for it was impossible that the animal should have found its way back all that distance. He was, of course, prepared to bring it back any day if it could be proved to him that this was the

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animal he had sold. Hargon drove over to the forester's immediately and fetched back the dog. On the way he watched the animal, which was gazing at him gravely and fixedly. Was a fresh secret of the G-bacillus being revealed to him? How was it possible that this animal, which had been useless for sporting purposes, should have found its way back to the forester's house, which was several hours distant. On reaching home Hargon sacrificed the sporting dog to the dissecting knife. In the animal's brain, though not so conspicuously evident, were phenomena similar to those found in the human brain.

Hargon's days were so taken up with his labours that he no longer had any time to reflect upon his own fate. At a late hour of the night he sank down on his bed utterly exhausted. After six hours he was back in the laboratory. Now and then his fellow workers told him that in the neighbourhood he was believed to be crazy. He himself rarely went out of doors. If the children saw him they screamed: "The mad professors coming!" and raced away. Hargon avoided all human intercourse. His Stock Exchange business was transacted by telephone or letter. In the morning he glanced through the newspapers to acquaint himself with the principal events of the day and made his arrangements accordingly. He was hardly conscious of the lapse of time. He barely noticed whether it was summer or winter, or whether another spring was advancing over the land.

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IV

HARGON spent over two and a half years experimenting in complete seclusion. Gradually he began to achieve more and more considerable results. An important advance had been achieved when, in an experiment from which all possibility of error had been excluded, he found that G-bacilli had been transplanted without an operation, merely through infection. From that moment onwards he increased his precautions, although he was convinced that, as a result of his accident at the time of the explosion in the laboratory and the subsequent infection which he had happily surmounted, he was immune against the G-bacillus. With a confidence amounting to conviction he prepared for his final experiments.

After all his experiments had been concluded, he was convinced that he would be in a position to destroy the power of memory in the human race. By dint of numerous inoculations from one animal to another, he had succeeded in intensifying the virulence of the G-bacilli to such a degree that they could be transplanted with comparative ease. Everyone was menaced by the germ. If the bacteria penetrated into the human body, the poison would spread so rapidly that the natural powers of resistance which had hitherto afforded a complete protection would no longer suffice. Hargon made all the necessary preparations for infecting a large number of human

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beings with the G-bacillus. He calculated that then the disease would spread like some terrible plague over the whole earth.

But, before launching the G-bacillus upon the world, he had to make sure that he himself was, and would remain, immune against it. For unless he were the sole person to retain his memory he would not achieve his purpose of making himself supreme over all.

Hargon resolved to risk his life and health for the sake of his plan and inoculate himself with constantly increasing doses of G-bacilli. This measure was a last, deliberate tempting of fortune. Suppose he himself were attacked and his mental faculties destroyed! Suppose God punished him by depriving him of his memory! Then, by the extinction of his consciousness, humanity would be spared the fate which he, Hargon, had

meant to bring upon it. He was prepared to sacrifice himself if he was acting wrongly. Now there were only two alternatives: immunisation or loss of memory.

Hargon spent four weeks in complete solitude. Hussmann and the laboratory assistant had been dismissed. All the animals had been killed. They should not endanger humanity if he himself was to be the victim of his experiments. They were all bacillus-carriers and had been kept in close confinement; if they were once set free, they would spread the pestilence.

In this month of waiting, during which his only task was to give himself daily injections, Hargon spent hours pacing the house in which he had worked for almost three years. Memories of his illness revived in him.

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Painful thoughts of Elizabeth, whom he thought he had driven from his mind for ever, refused to be suppressed in these weeks of idleness and of agonising tension. The more he dwelt upon the past, the more inflexible became his determination to match himself alone against them all. They had not loved him. They should feel that he was their master!

Hargon felt no effects from the injections, and he found that the G-bacilli remained for some time in his body and then gradually disappeared. This proved to him that he alone was immune against all infection. Fate had decided in his favour. His only remaining task was to prepare sufficient cultures to enable him to start his war against humanity with a mighty offensive.

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V

CONSCIOUS that the end of the civilised world was impending as a result of its infection with G-bacilli, Hargon strove to possess himself of all the necessary technical resources in order to enable him to become sole ruler of the earth. By dint of skilful speculation he had succeeded in amassing a considerable fortune. From the banks with which he had dealings he obtained large credits, on the plea that they were needed for an expedition which he was arranging and which would result in scientific discoveries of great financial value.

Hargon transacted all his business over the telephone. He was afraid of mixing with other people. The power of his money was not sufficient to overcome mistrust of his enterprise in those who had to do with him personally. He knew very well that it would look absurd for a deformed cripple to present himself as the leader of an expedition. But speaking under cover of distance, as was only possible by telephone, he was able to play a rôle which he could not have filled in real life. The not inconsiderable means which he had at his disposal removed from his path obstacles upon which others would have foundered at the very outset of the undertaking.

He bought a large estate outside Berlin on which he had a huge shed erected. Here he proposed to keep a large aeroplane with the aid of which he could travel long distances. As he did not want to attract

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attention he avoided anything which might suggest that he meant to use the vast piece of land as a flying-ground and the shed as a hangar. As a safeguard against uninvited guests, the ground was surrounded by a high wire fence.

He made out long lists of all the articles which he required. He bought sufficient canned foods to last him several years, and in distributing his orders gave the preference to firms which were accustomed to cater for expeditions.

More difficult than supplying his requirements for a large number of years was the gaining of admittance to flying instruction. Here he could not conceal himself. Several times the cripple was refused outright on the plea

that he would never be granted a flying licence. Appeals to the authorities were fruitless; they declared that his physical constitution debarred him from aviation. But Hargon refused to be discouraged. Again the power of money enabled him to achieve his end. He made an agreement with an aviator for a large number of private flights, and took advantage of these to supplement the theoretical knowledge, which he was already acquiring, with practical experience. He succeeded in overcoming the scruples of the aviator by dint of generous payment, and he proved himself such an amazingly apt pupil that his instructor, who had by no means relished the idea of making trial flights with a one-armed hunchback, was soon reconciled to his task. He went so far as to allow Hargon to steer the aeroplane. But even this did not satisfy Hargon. He needed a machine which he could manage quite alone and which would, above all, carry so much fuel that even after long flights he could make the

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return journey without landing to take in fresh supplies. As the existing types did not satisfy these requirements, he was obliged to restrain a little longer his impatience to deal the decisive blow. He ordered from a well-known German firm a new aeroplane, which was to be constructed so as to satisfy certain definite requirements. Although he urged the firm to deliver the aeroplane as soon as possible, some months, of course, were required for its completion. But he did not let the time lie idle on his hands. The provisions for the alleged expedition were made more and more complete, and large tanks were erected in which vast quantities of petrol were carefully stored.

In the outhouses were accumulated supplies sufficient to stock a large shop. Not one article of everyday use was lacking. There were further vast stores of foodstuffs, a careful selection of medicinal requirements and an enormous library, which he had collected during the last three years. The only people allowed inside the building were the men who brought the goods. He made out long detailed lists to enable him to put his hand promptly on anything he wanted. Frequently he hauled heavy parcels from one storey to another, merely because it seemed to him unpractical that a certain class of provisions should be set down where it was and not on some other floor, to which it properly belonged. At length this Noah's Ark of Civilisation, as he called his storehouse, was complete. A few days later he heard that the new aeroplane had arrived and had been placed in a

hangar on the Berlin aviation ground. Ostensibly as passenger, but in reality as aviator, he performed a number of flights with his pilot in order to subject the

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machine to a thorough test. Only in starting did the heavily laden tanks cause some difficulty, as the machine did not rise rapidly enough. Hargon was forced to discard some of the fuel and to have a new propeller-mechanism added which made it possible to effect a perpendicular start.

From the moment when he received the news that the aeroplane had been delivered, he lived in a state of feverish excitement. In his laboratory he had prepared thousands of cultures, only a fraction of which would have sufficed to infect the whole human race. On the evening of the twelfth of June, after his return from a long flight across Austria, Yugoslavia and Greece, Hargon resolved to bring his experiments and preparations to an end. Calmly he examined the incubators and the test-tubes, each one of which contained millions and millions of poisonous germs. He felt as if he had already completed the whole task, which was to be embarked upon the following day. Even at this fateful moment he was not hampered by any scruples; he had long since smothered any that might have checked him. Now he was conscious only of the craving to achieve the end for which he had been preparing all these years.

He did not think of anyone on this last evening. Sister Elizabeth was dead for him. The calamity which he was about to provoke could no longer be averted. He spent almost the whole night wandering up and down his old house on the Reichskanzlerplatz. Other men, on the eve of great decisions, often find themselves thinking of quite trivial things; they recall incidents from their childhood which had not entered their minds for years; or they start because they fancy they have neglected

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something which had to be done. Over them hovers the coming event like an inexorable fate. Hargon felt no weakness or emotion; a fierce hurricane was unloosed in him. "I shall rule, I shall be master!" He felt as if a power outside himself were urging him to carry out his purpose. There must be no doubts, no scruples, no hesitation and no reflection. To-morrow he would open the first test-tube which was to bring death and destruction upon

humanity, and over the resultant chaos there would be only one ruler, only one master: ERNST HARGON!

VI

IN a hilly region surrounded by a vast girdle of flat country lay the small village of Rathenweiler. From the little railway station at Leuenburg it was an hour's walk along a narrow field-path before the first houses came into sight. The narrow stream of the Rathe lazily wound its way through fields that were in their full summer glory. In the spring this stream would often be swollen to such proportions that the meadows on either side were flooded, but now its waters had so dwindled that the village children could amuse themselves by jumping from one bank to the other. Rathenweiler consisted of only one street and some fifty houses. Just at the spot where the narrow lane from Leuenburg joined the village street, lay an old farmhouse whose distillery had for many years ensured a comfortable livelihood for its owner but had now long since been closed down.

In the fields the people were hard at work. Gaily coloured kerchiefs protected the heads of the peasant women from the unbearable heat of the sun. On this particular day they were all vexed because the children could not help them with their work. "The idea of a school inspection at this time of year! The townsfolk are getting more and more crazy," said fair-haired Hetty irritably, and she crossed her arms with an air of defiance which seemed to imply that the school inspector had just better come to her, and she would send him off with a flea

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in his ear. Hetty was not to be trifled with. She had already been a widow two years, but if a wooer who did not appeal to her taste became too persistent, he got a merciless rebuff. This was known to all the young men of the neighbourhood, and they treated Hetty with a respect which they did not ordinarily display towards the women of the village.

This was by no means the first time that Hetty had acted as spokeswoman for the village. Only a fortnight ago she had sent about his business a terribly ugly cripple who had been loafing round. Val, her youngest little girl, had told her that the stranger, whose appearance had terrified herself and her playfellows, had invited them all to have a glass of raspberry syrup at the inn. He had not been nearly as disagreeable as he looked, but they had hardly dared to raise the glasses to their lips. Hetty had

thought at first that Val, who was a very imaginative child, was making this up. She drew the little eight-year-old girl towards her and gave her a slap, which, though gentle, conveyed an unmistakable warning: "Now tell me just what happened, and mind, no fibs!"

Val stammered out nervously that she and Kurt and Franz and Lena had been playing at the top of the cherry-tree walk when they had seen a man coming along wrapped in a wide cloak. "At first it seemed so odd, and we ran away, but then the man kept on beckoning, and Kurt went up to him. I don't know what they talked about, but presently Kurt called to us, and then we all went to the inn."

Hetty sternly forbade Val to have any more dealings with strange men, and she emphasised her warning by a sound slapping which provoked the child to a brief but

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violent outburst of tears. Then she was given a sugar stick, and all was forgotten. Hetty, too, would perhaps have given not another thought to this incident, if Frau Müller, who kept a little shop across the way, had not told her one day in horrified tones what a hideous fellow from the town had been buying cigarettes at her shop. "Anyone who didn't know what shuddering meant would certainly have found out when they saw him. His whole face one huge scar. And a hunchback into the bargain. What he was doing with his left hand I couldn't quite see; he kept it hidden under his cape the whole time. I was terrified he might touch my goods."

Hetty laughed in Frau Müller's face, but when the latter happened to look out of the window and screamed: "There he is outside, just take a look at him yourself!" she hurried into the street.

"What do you mean by loafing round here and frightening the children?" she shouted angrily at the stranger, who, as she admitted afterwards, really was horribly ugly. "Just you clear off somewhere else. This is no place for people like you!"

The hunchback gave Hetty a sombre glance and walked on without a word. Since then he had stopped going to the village, but only yesterday the boy who worked for Red Hans had described how he had seen a ghostly figure by the Rathe that evening. At first he had not dared to approach, but when he had seen that it was a man, he had crept up. From a distance he could see that the stranger had placed some glass dishes on the ground.

“I saw him pick up one of the things and rinse it out with water. They looked like shallow butter-dishes. When I shouted to him, he started, jumped to his feet

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and ran away with his dishes. But one of them dropped into the water. I heard it fall in with a splash and break in two, but it was too dark to fish it out and take a look at it.”

Hetty wiped the sweat from her brow. “Really,” she said, “Herr Beloff might have protested against the school inspection. Now of all times, when there is so much to do and the children are wanted in the fields. He doesn’t dare say anything. If he gets an order from the school authorities, he’s in a flutter at once. He’ll never get on in life! He’s too timid!” And as she set to work again, she thought of that last dance evening when Beloff had been among the guests and had never taken his eyes off her. Why hadn’t he come up and asked her? She wouldn’t have refused him.

While the women and the men were sweating over their hard labour in the fields, the young schoolmaster, Beloff, was not faring much better. The boys and girls under his charge were a saucy set of youngsters. It was not easy to prepare them for the school inspection. First the trouble with the parents and then the difficulty of getting these little blockheads to sit down and really learn something. The young teacher, usually so gentle and good-natured, had grown quite irritable and threatened severe punishments, until the children, who were not used to this tone from their master, were really frightened. He immediately regretted that he had spoken so harshly, but now at any rate he knew that, unless something unforeseen occurred, the school inspection would go off well. He had entered in a little note-book the things

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which the children knew thoroughly well. So it was merely a case of not confusing them by awkward questions.

When the young teacher fetched the school inspector from the station, he was in a state of extreme agitation, and the dark suit he was wearing, which he only donned on solemn occasions such as Christmas Day or the school breaking-up, merely intensified his discomfort. But his apprehensions were very soon dispelled. The inspector, Dr. Martell, was a

jovial, elderly man, who was certainly not bent on getting him into trouble. Before the lessons began, they drank a glass of beer together, and Beloff invited the visitor to dine with him afterwards.

The inspection was by no means as stern and solemn a business as Beloff had led his children to expect. Dr. Martell listened patiently, without interrupting the teacher. When one of the little girls in her agitation gave a wrong answer, he smiled at her encouragingly, as though she had made not a mistake but a little joke, and his friendly manner soon robbed the inspection of its terrors. It ended by becoming a conversation between the inspector and the school children, who, because they saw that all was going well, gradually threw off their shyness. The schoolmaster had long since forgotten to look in the note-book to see what each of his children knew. He was proud of the little flock under his charge and felt that his teaching had not been in vain.

To the left of the master's desk hung a large map of Germany. Dr. Martell was talking to some boys about their notions of Berlin. He laughed when one of them said: "In Berlin the houses grow into the sky," and he had to correct their fantastic notions of the underground

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railway, which they conceived as something quite extraordinarily mysterious. Finally, as a special treat, he promised that one of the children, whoever did best at the next inspection, should be invited to Berlin.

"Come, Kurt, we'll just see what would be the quickest way to get there," he called to Val's little play-fellow, who had already given him a number of intelligent answers. Kurt rose slowly from his seat. Uncertain what was expected of him, he stood motionless until Dr. Martell beckoned him to the front. Then the inspector pointed to the wall map. Loud laughter filled the room when the little fellow, as though obeying some compulsion, walked mechanically in the exact direction in which Dr. Martell pointed.

"Why, Kurt, what's the matter with you?" asked the teacher. "There's nothing to be afraid of."

Without paying any attention to him, Kurt went up to the map.

"Now show me Berlin, you young rascal," said Dr. Martell encouragingly.

"Berlin," repeated Kurt slowly, as though it was the first time he had heard the name.

The other children grew very restless. They kept on shooting up their right arms as though to stab an invisible opponent. That their little schoolfellow in front was making a fool of himself over the map did not trouble them at all, and the persistence with which they volunteered to give the desired information only made Kurt's situation worse.

Dr. Martell clasped his hands over his head in amused bewilderment.

"Come, don't be so nervous, my little fellow! We've

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just been talking about Berlin. Now tell me again: Where is Berlin?"

With big, astonished eyes Kurt gazed at the inspector as though he were being addressed in an unknown tongue. His glance expressed neither fear nor perplexity; on the contrary, he examined the visitor with interest, as though he were some large, odd, unfamiliar creature.

Beloff was becoming uneasy. He could not conceive what had happened to Kurt and rebuked him sharply. "Now, no more nonsense! Answer the inspector's question. You know quite well where Berlin is."

At the teacher's words, it was as though a dark shadow flitted over the boy's face. He turned round, gazed at the map and then suddenly pointed at the patch of light blue ocean.

"Berlin, my lad," repeated Dr. Martell once more.

Kurt groped about the map as though trying to discover some meaning in the different coloured patches. Then he just said: "I'm going to help," and left the room.

The teacher was speechless. Had the devil entered into the boy? He hurried after him into the passage and gave him a resounding box on the ear.

"Come back at once, you young scamp. I'll cure you of this nonsense."

The little boy started back in terror and tried to run away, but Beloff seized him by the arm and dragged him into the class-room.

"The boy is a stubborn little rascal," he said to the inspector in an apologetic tone, and he turned as red as a turkey-cock in his embarrassment at having to cut such a ridiculous figure.

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"You will come to me this afternoon to be punished for your insolent behaviour. Now go back to your place," he said, pulling Kurt roughly towards the bench.

Dr. Martell was obviously vexed at this incident. The good spirits of the class had fled, and the children were nervous and gave wrong answers or none at all. Beloff kept on looking at the clock and wondering how much longer Dr. Martell was going on, but the inspector jotted down a number of notes and made no preparations to leave.

So the teaching had to be continued. Beloff decided to stop questioning the children and give them a history lesson. Hardly had he begun this, however, when little Kurt jumped up from his seat and, before the other children or the teacher had realised what he was about to do, he had dashed out of the class-room.

Beloff was dumbfounded. Dr. Martell frowned disapprovingly and murmured: "That's a respectful way to behave!"

With an effort Beloff recovered his composure. He sent another boy to fetch back Kurt, but he was so upset by this further unfortunate incident that he set the children a few sums and then asked Dr. Martell to go outside with him.

"No, thank you," replied the inspector curtly. "We will have a talk later on."

Kurt and the other boy ought to have been back long ago, but there was no sign of either of them. Dr. Martell stood by the large window of the class-room and gazed out irritably.... He was bound to report the matter to the educational authorities. But he would give the teacher one more chance to retrieve his reputation.

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Martell resolved to examine the children himself. He asked them very simple questions and at first it seemed as if all was going to turn out well, when suddenly little Val jumped up, pointed out of the window and screamed: "That man there bewitched Kurt!"

All the others started in horror. But the little girl's eyes had evidently deceived her. No one was to be seen outside.

"Do you know where Kurt is?" asked Dr. Martell sternly.

Val began to cry softly and not a word could be got out of her. Dr. Martell, realising that his efforts were fruitless, dismissed the children.

The teacher had looked on helplessly during the last part of the lesson. He felt unspeakably wretched at the thought of what was now to come. For the last year he had been taking the place of the head master, who was ill.

His great day, on which he was to prove what he could do, had ended in a miserable fiasco.

“That won’t do at all,” said Dr. Martell to the teacher after a long pause. “It’s no good drilling facts into children and then at an inspection only asking each child what it knows by heart. That’s not the way to teach. I am very sorry that I shall be obliged to report the incident, but you will realise that what has happened here to-day cannot be overlooked.”

Beloff stammered out a few excuses. Kurt was usually a good pupil, he declared; he was at a loss to explain his conduct to-day, but even while he was making these excuses, he knew that they were useless. What would become of him if he were dismissed?

Dr. Martell caught the next train back. The teacher

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accompanied him to the station. He no longer dared to remind the inspector that lunch had been prepared for him, but walked silently by his side pondering how he could efface the bad impression he had made.

The inspector hardly opened his mouth. Only now and then did he fling a few questions at the teacher, as he might have flung alms to a starving beggar. In his heart he felt sorry for Beloff. He did not like painful surprises when he was making his inspections and he was always loth to send in an unfavourable report. But what option had he in the present instance? Then he thought of the little boy who had behaved so strangely. Could it have been an act of revenge against the teacher? Or what could have come over the child?

“Don’t punish the little lad too severely,” he said suddenly by way of conclusion to a long train of reflections. “That won’t help matters. Flogging won’t make any impression on such a little blockhead.”

Then they both stood on the railway platform and waited impatiently for the train whose arrival would bring the painful situation to an end.

The inspector had long since left, and Beloff was still sitting on a bench in front of the station building. Ought he to take comfort from the fact that at the last moment, just as the train was starting, Dr. Martell had said: “I shall come back in the autumn, and I hope that then everything will go off well.” Had he not made the most careful preparations for the inspection? Had not the boys and girls during the first hour and a half reeled off one

answer after another without a single hitch? If he could at least convict himself of any negligence! He had

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been taken completely unawares. Who could say what would happen next time?

An hour's distance from Rathenweiler, Hargon was walking by the side of little Kurt. With his right hand he fondled the child who had been the first victim of his plan.

Hargon had observed most of what had taken place in the school. For more than a fortnight he had been staying at Falente, in order to be within reach of the village whose water he had infected with the memory-destroying bacilli. He had also gone on to the hillside in the early morning and opened Petri dishes in which G-bacilli had been reared, so that the wind might scatter the tiny, invisible microbes.

Ernst Hargon had set to work very cautiously. On no account must anyone observe him at his mysterious operations. Else suspicions might be aroused and he might be arrested.

One day he had been very nearly caught by a rustic, but had just managed to make his escape. Since then he had been waiting at Falente for the first cases of infection. After the lapse of a fortnight he began to grow uneasy. Could some error have crept into his experiments? But the incubation period would not be the same in every case. It could not be long before the first symptoms of loss of memory made their appearance in the children whom he had infected two weeks before.

Poor boy, thought Hargon, perhaps you are going to have a very hard time. They won't understand that you are ill. Strange that little Kurt should be so trustful with him. Hargon had seen him dash out of the school and

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had noted which way he went. He had waited until Hermann, whom Beloff had dispatched in search of Kurt, had run past him. Then he had followed the little lad and had found him sitting quite happily in Farmer Blechner's meadow, examining the flowers and the grass with lively interest. He had shown no alarm at Hargon's approach, had gladly accepted a few pieces of chocolate and had then readily followed the hunchback. Hargon had tried to

start a conversation with the boy, but in vain. Kurt merely laughed, though there was nothing to laugh at, and altogether seemed in excellent spirits.

After he and Kurt had been walking for over two hours, they met Hermann, who had long since abandoned the search for his playfellow but dared not go back to school because he was afraid the schoolmaster might punish him for not having done what he was told.

“Kurt, you’re to come to teacher at once,” he shouted to the boy at Hargon’s side, but he kept at a respectful distance from the pair.

Kurt evidently recognised his playfellow’s voice. He beckoned to him eagerly, and the boy approached with some reluctance. Hargon stepped back a few paces, so that the boys might exchange greetings undisturbed.

Thereupon Hermann plucked up his courage and told Kurt, though with a good deal of exaggeration, what had happened in the class-room. But Kurt did not take in what was said and remained as gay and cheerful as before. Suddenly Kurt and Hermann started to race one another, until Kurt hid himself behind Hargon. There Hermann captured him.

“Hold Kurt tight,” he said to the hunchback. “I must take him back to school.”

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“Oh, the lessons are over,” said Hargon. “You can go on playing. Here are some pieces of chocolate for you. I will tell your teacher.”

Presently all three went for a walk together. Hargon put various questions to Hermann; it could not be long before he, too, displayed the first symptoms of infection, for he was one of the children whom Hargon had invited to the inn. Hermann was surprised at the stranger’s curious questions. No, he was not ill; on the contrary, he felt very well.

“That’s splendid,” said Hargon. “But take great care of your playfellow. He only looks well; in reality he’s very ill.”

He once more patted the two boys on the head and gave them nearly all the money that he had on him. It was now almost afternoon and time for him to be off. Just outside Falente he parted from them and sent them home. He was possessed with a feverish impatience to get on with his work. What an effort it had cost him to wait a whole fortnight in this little village! Now that he had obtained the first confirmation, he needed no further proof.

He had drawn up a detailed programme of the most rapid and effectual means of disseminating the G-bacilli. During the fortnight at Falente he had studied assiduously the maps of every quarter of the globe. Just as a

commander-in-chief carefully studies the terrain before deciding on his plan of campaign, so did Hargon select definite places in the various countries, which he meant to visit in order to carry out his work of destruction. Rathenweiler was the centre of a number of circles of increasing diameter which encompassed the entire globe,

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and he calculated that, even without any further intervention on his part, the G-bacillus, having once been let loose, would gradually infect the whole world. But if he did not accelerate this process, if the character and origin of the disease should be recognised and measures taken to cope with it, his plan, which had no point unless it were completed, would be only partially fulfilled.

He wanted to subdue the whole world, to be more powerful than any other human being or any other living creature. Engrossed with his plan, impelled by a frantic craving to destroy, he felt himself equal to God.

That evening Beloff was seated in Mayerhold's Cafe. He who in the ordinary way only dropped in for a glass of beer two or three times a week, gulped down one glass of spirit after another in the hope of stupefying himself. To the friendly greetings of the villagers he barely vouchsafed an answer. The children would have spread the news of his discomfiture. Mayerhold did not attempt to restrain the schoolmaster, though he was surprised at his sudden intemperance: "Let him drink his fill for once," he thought; "he'll soon get the habit of it."

Beloff became a regular customer at Mayerhold's. Often he was there early in the morning, for he had no lessons to give, the holidays having begun the day after the inspection. Characteristic of Beloff was his indecision. In his first indignation he had thought of going to little Kurt's parents and begging them to punish the child severely as a warning to the rest. But when he came back from the station there was not a soul

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in the house, and then he had drunk until he was tipsy and not fit to see anyone. He fell fast asleep and did not wake until next morning.

Should he now go to the fields and tell Kurt's father about his son's escapade? Such an idea was highly repugnant to Beloff. He would only be blamed for not having the children under better control. So he only looked

for the boy and questioned his schoolfellows about him. But Kurt was not to be found. Probably he was hiding from the schoolmaster.

So it went on until one evening Beloff was roused abruptly from his lethargy. He had drunk some eight glasses of spirit when suddenly fair-haired Hetty planted herself before him with her arms akimbo.

“What have you done to my Val?” she asked in a threatening tone.

“Val?” he repeated in a tipsy voice. “What should I have done to the child?”

Then Hetty banged her fist on the table so that the glasses shook.

“There’s been enough of this loafing about! It’s time you gave a thought to the children. They seem bewitched. One can’t get a word of sense out of them. My Val has been talking crazy nonsense ever since noon to-day, and Franz and Hermann behave as if they had lost their wits. It’s as if the devil had been playing tricks in the village.”

Beloff’s head was splitting as he shot a timid glance at Hetty, who was standing before him at the table, agitated and indignant. What a splendid-looking woman

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she was! She exhaled a fragrance of the fields, of the wealth of the harvest, of health and strength, which thrilled Beloff with a growing excitement. Disconcerted less by her words than by her looks, he rose and said in a more friendly tone than he had intended: “This is the first I have heard of it. Can I speak to the child?”

Hetty looked at the teacher mistrustfully. But she liked the shy young man, who certainly meant no harm by his suggestion. “Come along,” she said curtly and threw back her head as though to imply that she would not suffer any refusal. They walked together towards the little farm which Hetty, since her husband’s death, had kept in no less faultless order than before. Val was already asleep in her bed.

“The child doesn’t seem to be ill,” said Beloff softly, pointing to her rosy cheeks. “She looks the picture of health.”

Hetty gazed down dreamily at her youngest born. “That’s not what worries me. But since noon to-day there’s not a word of sense to be got out of the child.”

“I can’t understand that,” stammered Beloff. Hetty’s thrilling proximity took away his breath. All the time he saw her bare, strong arms in front of

him and would have liked nothing better than to dig his teeth into them.

“Didn’t you say that some of the other village children were taken the same way?”

“You shall just see. I’ll wake Val.”

“No, don’t,” said Beloff protestingly. “It will be time enough to-morrow. You’d better just tell me first what has been happening these last days.”

Hetty and Beloff sat down opposite one another at the

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plain, well-scoured table. She got ready something to eat for herself and him as though it were a matter of course, and they devoured the little meal in silence. Hetty, who had supped only a few hours before, put almost all the food in front of Beloff and only helped herself to a little in order that he might not feel that he was eating alone.

The teacher ate with relish. Nor did he hurry himself, for it was so pleasant to sit here with Hetty. Then they chatted over a glass of beer. Hetty told him once more about the extraordinary behaviour of a number of the children, and what a sensation it had caused in their several families. Many of the boys and girls seemed to have quite lost their wits.

“Frau Müller tried to bring her boy back to his senses by a sound thrashing. But then he simply ran away and now he’s roaming around and won’t come back.”

Beloff heard all this with amazement. He had been so engrossed with his own misfortune that he had had no thought for anything else. Gradually he became more and more confidential with Hetty. He told her about his trouble and how terribly it had upset him. And as he did so, he suddenly realised that he would lose his post.

“What shall I do then?” he asked disconsolately, and Hetty could only try to console him by stroking his soft fingers with her toil-worn hand. Then Beloff moved quite close to her and cautiously passed his hand over her arm. Hetty felt herself turn hot all over. Lucky that only the oil lamp was burning and by its faint light he couldn’t see how crimson she had turned! But Beloff noticed that Hetty, this strong, sturdy woman, was trembling. He gripped her arm, drew back her head, pressed his

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lips to her warm, eager mouth, and the two embraced in a sudden surge of passion.

In the dead of night they walked out of the house together. Arm in arm they wandered through the sleeping village. Hetty had long since ceased to consider what it was that had brought them together. Surrendering to the enchantment of the summer night, they drew each other's attention to the mysterious play of moonlight and shadow. The village street was flooded with a wan radiance while the farms were wrapped in a veil of darkness. Then they walked out into the fields, which seemed to breathe out consolation and calm. The sand grated beneath their footsteps and a pebble, kicked forward as they walked along, made a faint sound as it struck the ground in front of them.

"Where you are, is life," said Beloff, pressing his arm more firmly round Hetty's waist.

"Without you, life was empty," she answered simply. They would have liked nothing better than to wander about together like this the whole night. Already they were in the midst of the forest, already they could hear the soft gurgle of the Rathe as it tumbled over the stones in a little cascade. Suddenly Beloff slackened his pace.

"My head feels as if it would burst. I'll just cool my forehead." And walking over to the stream, he filled his palm with water and moistened his brow.

"Do you feel better?" asked Hetty anxiously

"You darling, he answered fervently and kissed her on the neck and cheeks. Then he began whispering foolish nonsense to her, and seizing her blouse he tore it

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open and pressed his mouth to her breast. Hetty did not understand a word of what he was saying, but she did not need to understand, for every word vibrated with his love for her. Breathing heavily, she made only a faint resistance to his importunities.

That night they both stayed out in the woods. Pressed close to one another they breathed in the cool, spicy air of the forest. Conscious of each other's nearness, they sank into a deep, dreamless sleep.

In the morning Hetty was awakened by a pert sunbeam, which had long been playing round her mouth and nose and was finally trying to penetrate beneath her eyelids. She started up in horror and blinked her eyes, dazzled by the brilliant sunlight. For a moment she was amazed to find herself lying

here in the forest by the side of the schoolmaster. But then she rose resolutely and, nudging the sleeper by her side, said to him in a friendly though rather impatient tone: "Come, it's broad daylight! What will the people think if they meet us?"

Beloff stretched his limbs vigorously once or twice before getting up. Then he flicked the dust off his suit and hurried after Hetty, who had already set off in the direction of home. When the village came into sight, Hetty turned round to him.

"Keep a little way behind. There'll be gossip enough any way if they see me coming home at this hour of the morning. There's no need for them to know who was with me." She held out her hand, nodded to him laughingly and hurried on.

As Beloff continued to follow her, she stopped and protested reproachfully: "Look here, are you set on

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having a scandal, that you run after me like that?" And her eyes sparkled angrily.

The schoolmaster was not at all disconcerted. "I'm coming with you," he said simply, and stepping up to her side he thrust his arm under hers.

"A pretty pair!" she exclaimed indignantly. But at her lover's touch she turned hot and then cold. For fear lest she should yield to him, she wrenched herself free with exaggerated vehemence and ran away. Beloff followed, evidently enjoying this improvised race, and so they went on for some time. When she hurried her steps, he appeared at her side with a smile, as though wanting to show that he could run much faster than she. Then he let her get a little way in front, but always only just so far that she was still within reach of his arm. Finally Hetty stood still, quite out of breath.

"Look here, what do you mean by this? Do you want to put me to shame? Is this your thanks for the night I've given you?" Her tone clearly betrayed her distress and consternation at his behaviour. He gazed at her in dismay, but the next moment he was smiling again, and before she realised what he was doing, he had caught her in his arms and was kissing her on the mouth.

"Come, that's enough!" she said gravely. "If you follow me another step, I'll never speak to you again."

She accompanied the threat by a gesture of her hand, as though to indicate that she would fling him out at the first opportunity.

"I love you," said Beloff trying to seize her hand.

A sudden suspicion flashed through Hetty's mind. "What's the matter with you?" she faltered. "Don't you understand me?"

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Beloff smiled.

"What is there to smile at? Give me an answer."

"I love you," repeated Beloff with fervent tenderness.

"What's the meaning of this, Herr Beloff?" In the stress of her anxiety Hetty lapsed into the conventional mode of address which she had used towards the schoolmaster only a few days before.

"You must go home. Do you hear? Home!"

His smiling face became serious for a few seconds. Then he nodded again affectionately, as though she had made him a fresh declaration of love.

Hetty was overcome with a frantic dread. She seized the schoolmaster excitedly by the coat collar and shook him, as though in the hope of bringing him back to his senses. She tried threats and entreaties in turn, but all in vain. Beloff did not understand a word. Then Hetty thought of her little Val, and in a panic lest something should have happened to the child, she rushed towards the village. Had not Val behaved just like that yesterday? The child hadn't taken in a word of what was said to her. She had been cheerful and affectionate and had gone about singing all day. If she were given some work, she did it, but it was no use trying to talk to her.

Beloff trotted along behind Hetty like a well-trained dog behind its mistress. She no longer paid any attention to him. She did not care if anyone saw her running along the village street with the schoolmaster, or if they all realised at once what had happened last night. Her one fear was that something might have befallen the children during her absence.

But when she entered the house they were all fast asleep. As soon as she saw that all was well, her knees

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began to tremble. Now she was conscious for the first time of the terror that had invaded her whole being, and she sank down by the table utterly exhausted. Beloff seated himself beside her, smoothed back her hair, which

had fallen over her face while she was hurrying along, and spoke to her in a soothing tone. At first she paid no heed to him, but presently her attention was attracted by the strange words he was using, words she had never heard before, interspersed from time to time by protestations of affection which she felt to be exaggerated and which yet were so comforting.

“Come, that’s enough,” she said gently. “We must have a serious talk.”

Beloff looked at her questioningly, but made no reply.

“What’s the matter with you? If I didn’t know that you hadn’t been at Mayerhold’s, I should think you had been drinking. Come, say something.”

She entreated him more and more vehemently to speak, but his eyes remained fixed on her without a gleam of understanding. Then Hetty knew that something was wrong with Beloff. She was of a robust, fearless nature. When her husband had died two years before, leaving her with four children, she had not folded her hands and given way to her sorrow but had resolutely set to work to support herself and her family. The mystery with which she was now confronted, however, filled her with an unutterable dread. What should she do with the man who was seated here in this room? She could not take him to his house, where he lived quite alone. Perhaps he was ill, perhaps he would do himself some mischief.

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Hetty rose and began to prepare breakfast for the children. Beloff remained seated quietly at the table and watched her with a cheerful expression. As she boiled the milk and woke the children, she reflected that it was best to let the schoolmaster stay where he was. She had no more time now to busy herself with him. The animals must be attended to. The hens ought to have been let out long ago. And it was high time to go to her work in the fields.

When the children entered the sitting-room, they were astonished to see their teacher seated at the table, but Hetty cut short their questions with the remark: “Herr Beloff is going to stay with us to-day.”

Then she had to go and help little Val, who had difficulty in dressing herself. The little girl was looking particularly pretty that morning and it made Hetty very happy to do things for her. She was surprised to see that Val, on entering the sitting-room, went straight up to Beloff gave him her hand and made him a little curtsy. Then, telling Fritz to keep an eye on the schoolmaster and Val, Hetty set off to her work in the fields. Beloff made a movement to get up and follow her, but, on seeing his intention, she said in

a sharp, threatening tone: “You stay where you are!” and pushed him roughly back into his seat.

On her way to the field she met several women from the village and she noticed how they put their heads together and whispered. So they already knew what had happened. But Hetty did not bother her head about that. She had other worries. They could say what they liked about her. If only she knew what to do with Beloff.

“You’re very silent to-day,” said Frau Müller, after

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they had been working several hours together. “Have you lost your tongue?”

Hetty turned as red as a turkey-cock and drew herself up from her bending attitude. “Maybe I have, but it’s no business of yours!”

“That’s a new way to talk,” retorted Frau Müller in an offended tone. “I suppose that’s what comes of keeping such fine company?”

Hetty felt the blood rush to her head. She would have liked nothing better than to go up to Frau Müller and give her a box on the ear. But she controlled herself and went on with her work.

Towards noon she hurried home. All the morning she had had difficulty in suppressing her anxiety lest something should have happened at home. But as soon as she entered the room she saw that her fears had been groundless.

Beloff and Val were playing together, and the little girl was screaming with delight.

He doesn’t seem to be dangerous, thought Hetty. But what a way for a grown man to behave.

“Have you really nothing better to do than that?” she asked him, trying to seem as unconcerned as possible.

Beloff leapt to his feet when he heard her voice, and was obviously delighted to see her again. He hurried up to her and tried to embrace her.

“Stop that,” she protested. “Another time. Not now.”

Beloff made no answer, but just turned back to the child and went on playing. Hetty was in despair. Good heavens! Now she was saddled with this man, who had evidently lost his wits.

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The midday meal was partaken of in silence. From time to time Hetty threw Beloff a stealthy sidelong glance, fearing that he might give way to some rash impulse. But he seemed as gay and cheerful as if nothing were the matter. If only she could consult someone about him. Suddenly she thought of the pastor. Yes, she would go to him and tell him her trouble. Surely God did not mean to punish her so severely because she had given herself to this man last night.

VII

FRAU DR. MARTELL had already been seated some time in the train which was speeding towards Berlin. She was still trembling with agitation. Whenever she moved, a piece of paper rustled in her coat pocket. It was a telegram from her son, summoning her home: "Father so strange. Come at once. We don't know what to do."

Did this mean that her husband had had an accident? Perhaps he had been run over? Perhaps he was no longer living?

Would the journey never come to an end? In her uncertainty as to what could have happened at home, Frau Dr. Martell's excited fancy conjured up before her eyes horrible visions. Her husband was so short-sighted. Perhaps this had been the cause of the accident? He had not seen an approaching motor car, or perhaps he had fallen downstairs. Why hadn't the boy told her the whole truth? Now she regretted that she had not brought Hilde with her straight away. The poor child would be just as worried as she was herself. If the girl had not been so badly in need of a change, she would not have insisted on her remaining at Swinemünde. But she had set off in such a desperate hurry, and at that time she was still hoping that things were not so bad. Hilde had not wanted to stay on at Swinemünde and had implored her mother to take her back, but she had wished to spare the

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girl the shock which was awaiting herself. If only she had someone to talk to! But the other occupants of the carriage were engaged in such a dull and foolish conversation that it was no use hoping for any consolation from them.

At length this journey, which seemed to Frau Dr. Martell so interminable, came to an end. Long before the train had drawn up in the station, she leant far out of the window looking for her son, who she knew would be waiting for her, but when she saw the first people on the platform her eyes filled with tears of excitement, so that she could not distinguish anything.

"Hullo! Mama!" she suddenly heard her son's voice.

At this moment she completely lost her self-control. In a few seconds she would know everything. Did his voice sound agitated? Was it

reassuring? Was he only trying to seem cheerful because he did not want to confess the whole truth at once? She leant out of the window as though hoping to hear everything immediately. Her fellow travellers surged along the corridor behind her on their way out, but Frau Dr. Martell could not bring herself to follow them. She tried to pick out her boy among the people standing in front of the carriage. Then suddenly he was standing at her side. He was a good head and a half taller than his frail, tearful little mother, and it was touching to see how anxiously he bent over her, "Why, mama, what's the matter?"

"Fritz, tell me quickly! What has happened to papa? Is he very ill or..." And into this "or" was compressed all her agonising dread.

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"Papa's health is quite all right. Don't be so upset. Really, nothing has happened to him."

Frau Dr. Martell could hardly believe her ears. "Nothing happened to him? Then why did you wire to me to come back?"

"Come, mama, let's get out of the train first. I can't explain it all in a few words. We don't know ourselves what's the matter. I wanted papa to go with me to the doctor, but I can't make him understand."

Frau Dr. Martell did not take in a word. She only knew that her husband was alive. At this moment Fritz would not have dared to tell her a lie. Already she felt a wave of maternal pride at the sight of her handsome boy. But the next moment she was ashamed of her happiness. For, after all, there must be something wrong with her husband.

Mother and son drove home in a taxi. On the way, Fritz told her that for the last few days an extraordinary change had been noticeable in his father. "First of all when he was delivering a lecture on fifteenth-century art at the University, he suddenly began to say the most extraordinary things. He admonished his hearers—a large number of whom he had known for years—to believe in God, to depart from their arrogant ways and to commune with themselves. The audience grew restless, but meanwhile papa became more and more carried away by his religious enthusiasm. I was not present at the lecture, but I was told that papa seemed to imagine himself a prophet. Then, no less abruptly than he had begun his homily, he broke off, rummaged among his papers for the notes of his original lecture, and read it out—a thing he never does in the ordinary way. When I

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came home that evening, papa was seated in the room turning over the pages of a Bible. I was not a little astonished and made some jesting remark. By way of response, he delivered me a sermon, in which he said that a new era was dawning, that he felt the nearness of God, and that I must pray with him and humbly prepare myself for the day of judgment.

“I don’t know, mama, how you would have behaved under such circumstances. It was a painful situation, but I decided to myself that papa was not quite normal, and that it was better to leave the room without making any reply. The next morning I heard from the maid that papa had not gone to bed all night. At that I was dreadfully anxious. I hurried to his room and found him still sitting at the table with the Bible in his hand. He was gazing dreamily into space and did not see me enter the room. I felt terribly uneasy. I thought to myself: Papa must be very tired. And I tried to persuade him to come to his bedroom. Then I saw that he was holding the Bible upside down and was not reading. I took the book away from him, and at that he started up, as though about to strike me. I said: ‘Papa, what’s the matter?’—‘Oh, it’s you, Fritz,’ he answered quite in his ordinary tone. Then I persuaded him to come to the breakfast table with me. He ate with a good appetite, but without speaking to me. From that moment he hasn’t uttered a word.”

Frau Dr. Martell had listened to her son without interrupting him. “And how is papa in health?”

“Splendid. He looks as fit as possible and works in the garden from morning to night.”

“Did he give his lecture yesterday?”

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“No, I was very worried about that. At first I thought he was suffering from religious mania. But since that first day he has never asked for the Bible. And I didn’t notice any other symptoms to suggest it.”

“Why didn’t you send for a doctor?”

“A doctor, mama? I’ve sent for several doctors, but papa won’t see any of them. As soon as a stranger comes into the house, he locks himself in his room. I can’t force him to let himself be examined.”

“What happened about the lecture?”

“I kept on all day reminding papa about it. I tried speaking to him affectionately, and I tried speaking to him sternly. All to no purpose. He listened with a dazed expression, as though I were speaking some language

which he couldn't understand. Then I got Herr Wiener, the Principal, to ring him up, and papa even went to the telephone, but he didn't answer it. I had the greatest difficulty in explaining to Herr Wiener that papa was suffering from nerve shock or something of the sort and that he wanted to cancel the lecture.

"And now have you told me everything?"

"Everything I know, mama. I swear I'm not keeping anything back."

"Tell me, my poor boy, have you been able to do any work these days?"

"Not very much. But that's no great misfortune in this heat. In any case I shouldn't have done much."

The taxi drew up before Dr. Martell's little villa in Tegel. "Does papa know that I'm coming?" asked Frau Martell.

Fritz looked down at his mother rather pityingly. Apparently she hadn't realised what papa was like. But

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why should he tell her any more now? In a few minutes she would know everything. So he said soothingly: "I didn't want to excite papa. I thought it would be best if you just came in and behaved as though you had never been away."

The moment Fritz opened the front door, his father came to meet him. When he saw his wife, his face lit up with joy, and he greeted her with a warmth of affection quite unlike his usual calm, business-like manner.

Frau Dr. Martell, who all the time had been picturing her husband as ill, was so surprised at this reception that she gazed at her son in astonishment as though she wanted to say: "What's all this you've been telling me about papa?"

Fritz himself was extremely surprised. Was it possible that the joy and excitement of seeing his wife had cured papa's disorder?

There was no mistaking Dr. Martell's delight at his wife's return. "Lina, what a surprise!" he said clearly and intelligibly, and he seemed hardly able to take his eyes off her face. Without another word, he took her by the hand and she followed him unresistingly into the garden. Then he showed her with great pride all the work he had done during the last few days. Deeply agitated by the disturbing events of the past hour, Frau Dr. Martell remained silent. She felt that she belonged to him and knew that he felt the same. What need was there of words?

In over twenty-five years of married life, what had once been a passionate mutual devotion had long since given place to tranquil tenderness. Dr. Martell liked his ease, and Lina had shielded him from all the unpleasantnesses

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of life. The children were well brought up. If there was any trouble with the school, the father never heard of it. He was completely absorbed in his profession, and any leisure that remained he devoted to his studies of the history of art. In fact, these last years they had only lived under the same roof; they had long since ceased to have anything to say to one another. This state of things had very much depressed Frau Lina. She had tried to console herself with her children, but they, too, had little time for their mother; they wanted to live their own lives.

So Frau Dr. Martell had felt as if she were wasting in despondency what should have been the best years of her life. She had made no complaint, but the emptiness in her heart was terrible. When she thought that something had happened to her husband, she had realised for the first time for many years how much she still loved him. And now it seemed as if he were responding to her softened mood.

Could Fritz have been mistaken? But something must have been wrong with her husband. Perhaps he was silent now because he was trying to recover his normal self. He should succeed; she would guide him back to life, even if it meant losing him anew.

Fritz was awaiting his parents in the dining-room. He wanted to ask so many questions. He felt as if a load had fallen from his heart. But his mother signed to him to go away. Later. To-morrow. To-day his father must not be disturbed.

The night which followed was a happy one for Frau Lina. She lay sleepless by her husband's side and

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listened to his regular breathing. No, he was not ill. Only a healthy man could sleep like that. Certainly the conversation she had had with him had been rather curious. She had told him about Hilde and what a splendid time she was having. No other girl in Swinemünde had so many admirers. And

what a magnificent swimmer she was. She had won the prize in the swimming competition. She had beaten all the men.

“Are you listening?” she had asked suddenly.

Thereupon her husband had expressed himself very strangely. “I feel anxious about Hilde,” he had said. “She is in danger. To-morrow a mighty wooer will come and take her in his arms. Talk to the child and warn her. She will never be able to free herself from the embrace of the stranger.”

“What do you mean?” she said in a horrified tone. “Hilde is happy and will remain happy.”

“To-morrow I will go into the garden and pick some flowers.”

That was all she could get out of him. He felt for her hand and stroked it as though he wanted to soothe her. Soon after he was asleep.

When Frau Martell awoke next morning, she was surprised for a moment to find herself at home. Her husband had already risen and was at work in the garden. Fritz was waiting for his mother at the breakfast table.

“What is your impression of papa?”

“I don’t know. He behaves quite reasonably, but there is evidently something wrong with him. Perhaps he has had some shock which has upset his mental balance.”

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“To tell the truth, mama, I was astonished that papa behaved so normally. Perhaps you’re right. Perhaps having you near has soothed him. I should like to go to the University this morning. I haven’t been there for several days and I have a lot of lectures to get in. I’ll be back about noon. We won’t decide to do anything more until we’ve seen how papa goes on.”

When Fritz returned, he found his mother in a very despondent mood. She was very silent and he had difficulty in persuading her to tell him what had happened.

“Do you know,” she said at length, “I can’t get rid of the feeling that papa has had a stroke. What he does is quite sensible as far as it goes, but he seems to have completely lost his power of speech. Or rather, he gets out one or two fantastic remarks, and that’s all. I gave him some money and asked him to get me a pound of pears from a barrow. Five minutes later he came back with an enormous parcel. He had bought fourteen pounds of pears. ‘I said one pound,’ I reminded him. He thought a little and then he recited: ‘1, 4, 14, 4, 18.’ He had suddenly forgotten how to count. I said: ‘1,

2, 3,' and nodded to him as a sign that he was to repeat it, and he said correctly: '1, 2, 3.' An hour later he had forgotten it. Then I tried to suggest sending for a doctor, but the word 'doctor' seemed to have terrible associations for him. He ran away and hid himself, and I had difficulty in calming him again."

"Yes, mama," said Fritz. "I had just the same experience."

"Do you know, I've got an idea. I shall go this afternoon to your Uncle Karl. Papa always listens to

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what he says, though he doesn't often see him. If he were to bring a doctor with him, I don't think papa would have any misgivings.

"Can I come with you, mama? I think it's quite safe to leave papa in the garden. He's happy there. Perhaps Uncle Karl won't be able to leave his shop. Precious time will be wasted if you go to the doctor first and then have to go back again. Besides I don't want to leave you alone to-day."

Frau Lina was delighted to have her son's company and to be able to talk to him. They took the tram to the Invalidenstrasse, where Uncle Karl, who had for years been nicknamed "the philosopher" by the family, had a small greengrocer's shop.

Uncle Karl was an unrecognised genius. He could do simply everything. Of all her husband's family he was the most gifted. In drawing, in music and even in sculpture, though entirely self-taught, he had done quite remarkable work. But he could not concentrate upon any one thing. He lacked, as Dr. Martell had always said, the spark of vital energy needed in order to achieve any real success. Uncle Karl had not been able to retain any post. If a person placed over him said something of which he disapproved, he at once took him to task. He was neither a spendthrift nor yet a libertine, but he simply could not earn anything. Then one day he disappeared. Not until some years later did he write to his family from South America. When he came back, he was very much changed. What he had actually done out there they never discovered, but he brought back with him a small fortune, the interest on which would have sufficed to meet his modest requirements,

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so that there was really no occasion for him to work.

“I can’t stand this,” he had suddenly declared, and to his family’s amazement he had bought a greengrocer’s shop. There he stood behind the counter from early morning till late at night. His family were convinced that the business was only an expense to him, because he gave such generous weight that this consumed any possible profit. But as he never asked them for money, they let him go his own way.

When Frau Dr. Martell and Fritz alighted from the tram, they were surprised and horrified to see that a huge crowd was assembled in front of Uncle Karl’s shop.

“Good heavens, do you think something has happened to Uncle Karl?” exclaimed Frau Martell, and they both hurried across the street to the shop. Outside, the people were standing in long queues, and policemen were busy keeping back the crowd, so that at least the entrance might be clear. The people were being admitted twenty at a time, and they all came out with radiant, laughing faces and large bags of fruit.

When Fritz went up to a policeman to ask what had happened and whether his uncle was selling off his stock, he was assailed with a shower of far from flattering remarks.

“Don’t you go pushing in out of your turn!” shouted a workman, who was standing fairly far back. “Windfalls are good enough for the likes of you.”

“Please take your place at the end of the queue,” said the policeman, pressing him back.

“But I don’t want to go into the shop. I only want to know what’s up.”

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“I’ve no time for explanations. Take your place at the back.” And with that the police-sergeant thrust him aside.

“Can you tell me what’s happening?” said Fritz, turning to one of the crowd.

“Why, can’t you see for yourself? He’s giving away his fruit. Take your place at the back, but if crazy Martell doesn’t like your looks, you’ll come out empty-handed.”

“What?” asked Fritz incredulously. “Is the fruit being given away?”

“It’s been going on ever since early this morning,” interposed a girl from one of the neighbouring shops, who had hurried up to get her share of the fruit.

“How do you know?”

“Why, at ten o’clock this morning a girl came in to our place and shouted: ‘Run over to Martell’s quick!’ When I passed his shop, he was standing at the door and he asked me: ‘Wouldn’t you like some fruit?’ ‘I can’t afford it, it’s too dear for me,’ I answered. Then he laughed, took a bag, and gave me a good four pounds of cherries. ‘There, take that!’ he said with a friendly nod and without asking me for any money. I thanked him and was just about to go when a young man came along. He, too, got a present of fruit. We looked at one another and didn’t know what to make of the old man. Two or three people who were standing outside and had seen what happened came running up, and they, too, received presents of fruit. So it went on. One told another. Many of them didn’t believe it until they saw the huge crowd collected outside the shop. The fruit that was standing outside had disappeared in half an hour, and the people fought to get inside the shop. About noon, when all the

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stock had been used up, a cart suddenly arrived with more fruit. Loud cheers when it was unloaded! The people tried to clamber on to the cart, but the driver kept them off and got the police to help him. They had to protect the old man from the crowd. When they questioned him, he just kept on repeating: ‘I’m giving away everything I possess. Just see how the people are laughing. Isn’t that fine?’ And with that he pressed a bag of fruit into a policeman’s hand.”

Fritz listened in amazement, and if he had not seen the stream of people coming out of the shop with bags of fruit, he would have refused to believe it. Very much distressed, he went to his mother, who was waiting for him on the other side of the road, and told her what he had heard.

“Just go to the police-sergeant,” she begged him. “Tell him you’re Uncle Karl’s nephew. You’ve got your student’s certificate with your name on it. Uncle Karl can’t be allowed to ruin himself completely. We must try to prevent him. At any rate, ask him why he’s doing this.”

Fritz did actually succeed in convincing one of the policemen that he was the nephew of the owner of the shop, and they went into the shop together. As though the crowd outside guessed that this meant an end of the distribution, they showered curses on the young student.

“What business is it of yours if your uncle gives away his stuff? You’re the heir, I suppose? Wait till you’ve a little more sense, you young blighter!”

About ten minutes elapsed before Fritz came back. He was very pale and paid no attention to the people outside, who realised at once that the presentation of fruit

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was to continue. One of them shouted: "Three cheers for uncle! He's the right sort! We'll make him our President!"

And amid general tumult and laughter the crowd sang and bawled: "Three cheers for uncle. Hip, hip, hurrah!"

"Mama, come away from here at once! I'll go to Doctor Keyl."

"What's the matter with Uncle Karl?"

"The same as with papa. He doesn't understand anything. He recognised me, I'm certain of that. When he saw me, he at once packed up two bags of fruit and wanted to give them to me. I tried to draw him on one side—there were other people in the shop—but he pushed me back. At first I talked to him affectionately and asked him what it all meant. Then I threatened him. But it was no good at all. 'Just see how the people laugh when they get the fruit,' was the only answer I got. After all, one can't prevent a man from giving away what belongs to him! I whispered in his ear: 'Come with me to papa. He's very ill and needs you.' But he only laughed, as though I had told him some good news. We can't do anything about Uncle Karl now. I'm worried about papa. There's something seriously wrong."

They took a taxi and drove to the house of Professor Keyl, who, in response to Fritz's urgent entreaties, agreed to accompany them immediately. On the way they explained the situation to him, and finally Fritz described his experience with his uncle.

While the two men were speaking, Frau Lina sat with blank, lustreless eyes. She was on the brink of tears, but managed to control herself. They mustn't know how sick

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at heart she was, how tortured by such unspeakable anguish that she was incapable of speaking a word. She only noticed that Fritz suddenly leant over to Professor Keyl and whispered something in his ear. She did not hear what he said, but she guessed, and the shock loosened her tongue.

"No, he isn't mad, *Herr Professor*, don't think that! My husband is quite in his right mind. He understands me perfectly well. He has only lost his power of speech."

“Please don’t distress yourself, *gnädige Frau*. I can form no opinion at present. I must first see your husband, but I promise not to take any steps without telling you first.”

When Fritz opened the door of the house, the maid came running up. “Has anything happened, Grete?” asked Frau Lina, turning pale.

“I don’t know, *gnädige Frau*. The *Herr Doktor* is down in the garden. It’s only that a telegram has come from Swinemünde.”

“From Swinemünde!” exclaimed Frau Lina.

“Come, mama, calm yourself, please. Probably Hilde is anxious to have news of papa. We haven’t let her know how he is.”

Frau Lina gazed distractedly at the two men as though she wanted to apologise for her lack of self-control.

“Have you read the telegram yet?”

“No, I gave it to the *Herr Doktor*. He didn’t say anything.”

“So nothing can have happened, *gnädige Frau*,” interposed Professor Keyl. “You must above all keep calm. You will make yourself ill if you upset yourself like this. Please, won’t you wait up here while I examine your husband?”

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“I’m afraid he may run away from you,” objected Frau Lina anxiously.

“Well, we’ll have a try. If there’s no help for it, I’ll send for you.”

The doctor went into the garden with Fritz. “Come, young man, why so gloomy?” he said. “Pull yourself together. Your father may be suffering from some passing disorder.”

“Excuse me, *Herr Professor*, for bothering you with our family affairs like this, but I’m frightfully worried about that telegram. Papa can’t read now.”

“But you yourself reassured your mother.”

“I don’t believe what I said. My sister has no need to send us a telegram to ask how papa is. She knows that we shall let her know as soon as we can tell her anything definite.”

“Well, come along now, and don’t look so grave,” said Professor Keyl. “In your father’s present condition he is probably very sensitive. Let him see you looking cheerful.”

At first the two men could not find Dr. Martell. Then Fritz gripped Professor Keyl by the arm and exclaimed in horror: “Just look! He’s sitting behind there. He looks quite overcome.”

With rapid strides the doctor walked up to the sick man, who made no movement when he saw him approaching. There was an infinite sadness in his gaze. In his left hand, which was hanging at his side, he held a piece of paper. Dr. Martell made no response to his son's greeting. Fritz was terribly agitated, for he had recognised the telegram in his father's hand. He walked up to him and was about to introduce Professor Keyl, but the

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latter signed to him not to do so. "There's no need for that. We will bring your father into the house."

Fritz tried to take the telegram from his father and no sooner did he put out his hand to seize it than Dr. Martell let it go. For a moment the young man was taken aback; then, with a sigh of relief, he showed the doctor that the telegram had not been opened. He tore it out of the envelope, and the next moment Professor Keyl had to put out his hand very hastily, for Fritz had staggered and seemed about to fall. He had turned as pale as a corpse and only stammered out again and again the words: "Hilde ... Hilde...."

Professor Keyl was nonplussed. What was he to do with these two men? One of them was mad, and the other had evidently had bad news which had utterly unnerved him. He cleared his throat and asked: "Can I help you in any way?"

"My sister is drowned," groaned Fritz with a supreme effort. Then he covered his face with his hands and sank down on the bench by his father's side.

"This is too much. This is more than I can bear," he groaned.

Professor Keyl stepped up to the young man. "Please pull yourself together. Think of your mother! She has received a terrible blow. But you must not give way. Your mother has no one but you."

Fritz rose to his feet. He could not speak, but he nodded to the doctor to show that he had understood him. They seized Dr. Martell under the arms and led him into the house.

The sick man was very restless. He kept on passing his hand over his face as though to wipe away tears. But

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he was not crying. It seemed as if his tears were dried up, as if he could not weep any more.

Professor Keyl's first examination lasted over an hour. Fritz waited alone in the adjoining room. He had not dared to tell his mother what had happened. He had gone to her in the dining-room for a moment, and the sight of his face had given her another terrible shock. "Fritz, what has happened? What did Hilde say?"

"Mama, excuse me, I must go to Professor Keyl. He wishes me to be present at the examination. Hilde wanted to know what was the matter with papa."

Frau Lina accepted the explanation and concluded that her son was merely anxious about his father. "Fritz, please tell me, did papa make any resistance? Has Professor Keyl pronounced any opinion yet?"

"No, mama, papa came at once, but he doesn't speak a word."

And after that the three members of the family were seated in different rooms. Fritz walked restlessly up and down. How should he break the terrible news to his mother? It would be more than she could bear. He did not dare to face her. What a long time the examination was taking! He no longer had any hope. Since he had seen Uncle Karl and found that he was behaving in just the same way as his father had done in the first days of his illness, he had lost all the confidence which he had felt after his mother's return.

What could have happened to Hilde? Hilde drowned, the best swimmer in the Club? The telegram had said:

"An inexplicable accident...." But he could not telegraph now. And besides, what was gained by knowing how it had happened?

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Fritz was only just twenty-two years of age, but in the hour he spent waiting for Professor Keyl, he felt as if he had grown into an old man.

At length the Professor joined him, looking very grave. "Please go to your father," he said. "I will speak to your mother first. Your father's general physical condition affords no grounds for anxiety. He is remarkably robust. But without question he is suffering from acute loss of memory. Do you know if anything has occurred to upset him, or if he has had any violent mental shock?"

"I know of nothing, *Herr Professor*. Until this happened papa was in excellent spirits, and was very much looking forward to his holiday. He had just returned from a tour of inspection in the provinces and told me all

about his experiences. If anything else happened, I know nothing about it. I thought that perhaps papa had had a stroke.”

“That is, of course, the first thing one would think of, but all the other ordinary symptoms are lacking. Now I want to talk to your mother and suggest that your father comes to my clinic, so that I can make a more thorough observation of his case.”

Professor Keyl was about to go to Frau Dr. Martell when Fritz held him back.

“*Herr Professor*, may I beg of you one more favour? Will you please be there while I tell my mother what has happened? I feel so anxious about her. But I can’t keep the news secret from her.”

“Of course, I shall be only too glad to help. I really am terribly sorry for you.”

Professor Keyl informed Frau Dr. Martell of the result of his examination as briefly and tactfully as possible.

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“I have not been able to form a definite opinion on the strength of my first examination,” he said. “But I think it quite possible that the rather deep-seated disturbance of the memory, which is probably due to some mental shock, can be cured by means of a counter-shock. We must find out in the first place what has actually happened.”

Frau Lina was comforted by the doctor’s reassuring words. “Have you told my son?” she asked.

“Yes, I should like to call him in now.”

When Fritz came into the room, he dared not look at his mother. Frau Lina hurried up to him. “Fritz, Professor Keyl does not take such a serious view of your father’s condition.

Fritz looked at his mother, and Frau Lina was horrified at the profound melancholy in his eyes. “Don’t you think there’s any hope of his recovery?” she asked in a faltering voice. “Or ... has something else happened?”

“Mama, I hope that papa will get better, but I have had bad news.”

“Quick! Tell me at once what has happened! What has happened to Hilde?”

“Mama, can you guess?”

At his words, Frau Martell fell to the ground in a swoon before the men could reach her side.

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VIII

HARGON was in Stuttgart at the beginning of August. He had had two strenuous weeks in Berlin. On his return, he found several letters from his bank, demanding in more and more peremptory terms that he should take immediate steps to repay a portion of the money advanced to him. This he was not in a position to do.

He tried in vain to arrange for the date of repayment to be postponed three months, and he was threatened with sequestration of his estates. This would have made it impossible to put his plan into rapid execution. In order that his purpose might not be frustrated at the last moment by material difficulties, Hargon resolved to obtain the necessary money by fraudulent means. At an extortionate rate of interest he obtained a loan of the required sum for six months. True, he was obliged to offer as security property which he had already mortgaged, but how amusing to think that the people who were placing the means at his disposal in the hope of enriching themselves were compassing their own destruction! If they knew, thought Hargon exultantly, that they are all only my tools, they would stone me instead of cringing before the stranger whom they believe to be a millionaire.

In spite of the caution with which he did his work in Berlin, he was taken unawares one morning, when he had made an expedition to the Grunewald. The mossy

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ground so muffled the sound of approaching footsteps that a stranger had come up and was standing behind him before his attention had been aroused.

“What are those queer dishes you’ve been setting out there?” asked a voice suddenly.

Hargon started in dismay, but he very soon pulled himself together. “I am a bacteriologist,” he explained. “I want to capture in those dishes the various bacteria that are floating in the air, so that I may afterwards examine them.”

The stranger was not at all suspicious. “That’s very interesting,” he said, seating himself by the side of Hargon. “Will you allow me to sit here and

watch?”

“There’s nothing to see,” answered Hargon curtly.

“Come, don’t be so unfriendly, old man! You’ve no cause to grumble because a man sits down by the side of you.”

From the tone in which they were uttered the words were obviously not meant unkindly. “By the way, let me introduce myself,” continued the stranger. “My name is Tillemann. I’m an engine-driver.”

Hargon saw that he could not get rid of the fellow without exciting his suspicion. And so he told him a great many things about bacteriological research.

Tillemann listened attentively. Although he had only had an elementary school education, he had a good clear brain and was able to follow Hargon’s explanations.

Before the two men had realised it, an hour had passed in animated conversation. Then Hargon gathered up his possessions. He refused Tillemann’s offer to accompany him. “My way lies in the opposite direction,” he said,

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hurriedly putting out his hand to take leave of the engine-driver.

Tillemann clasped it warmly. “It was good of you to tell me all those interesting things,” he said. “It helps a man to forget his troubles. Thank you. I shall think over all you’ve been telling me.”

Before Hargon opened the newspapers which he had had sent on to him at Stuttgart, he recalled this conversation. An unpleasant thought that this man, who had behaved to him with such surprising friendliness, would be one of the earliest victims! But no sooner had Hargon opened the first newspaper than this reflection was driven from his mind.

It was his habit to read the newspapers very quickly, glancing over the headlines, reading a few sentences of this or that article and thus getting a grasp of the most important news in a very short space of time. But suddenly he started. A Berlin newspaper—incidentally, it was the only one—contained the following headline printed in large capitals:

“THE VILLAGE OF LUNATICS”

Hargon's breath failed him for a moment. How long he had waited for such an announcement! Did the reporter who had gone to Rathenweiler suspect what had really happened there? Again and again he read the detailed report penned by a well-known journalist. It abounded in phrases such as: "mysterious incidents"; "strange behaviour of the villagers"; "inexplicable

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happenings"; "the whole village crazy"; "an amazing phenomenon"; "imperative that the Board of Health should take steps immediately." Then the journalist described in dramatic terms how rumours had spread to the nearest town that something was wrong at Rathenweiler. Among other things it was reported that:

"Motorists who stopped in the village found the men and women merrily engaged in playing games. It was impossible to get anything out of them. When they were asked questions they only laughed; they made no answer. Or if one of them did open his mouth, he talked such incoherent nonsense that the motorists frequently thought they were being made fun of and drove on indignantly. At first these stories were received with incredulity, but when they became more and more numerous, the representative of the local newspaper set off for Rathenweiler in order to see what was really happening there. I chanced to meet him on the way and we made the journey together.

"The only sensible information we obtained was given by the station-master at Leuenburg, and was to the following effect: 'The people at Rathenweiler must be mad,' he said. 'I hardly ever visit the place, for I seldom stir from here, but yesterday the postman told me that the inhabitants of Rathenweiler were all the worse for drink. Half of them had ceased working altogether, and with a number of them it was impossible to have any conversation; they talked such unintelligible nonsense. When I arrived, he said, they poured me out some beer and put quantities of food in front of me, but only a few of them could talk any sense. These were quite in despair and declared that an evil spirit had descended on the village.

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A hunchback had been playing tricks there some six weeks back. First of all he had laid a spell on some children. Then the village schoolmaster had suddenly gone crazy; he had gone to the house of a peasant woman, and, in

spite of the scandal and the exhortations of the pastor, had refused to leave it. One evening the village magistrate had called a meeting to discuss how to put an end to this disgraceful state of things. A complaint was to be sent to the town. But of all the men who had been so indignant the day before only about half attended the meeting. One of these set off to see what had become of the rest, but in every house he entered the men had gone crazy. Then they were all seized with panic. They just arranged to meet again the following day and dispersed in a state of consternation. After that things went from bad to worse. All the people one met—men, women, children—talked wild, incomprehensible rubbish. None of them went to work any more. Love affairs suddenly sprang up between men and women who hardly knew one another. And now there are only about ten people who are still normal?

“ ‘But why didn’t you report this before?’ the postman had asked in horror of one of those who were still sane.

“ ‘We didn’t dare stir out of doors. The others go off to the fields laughing and shouting, and there they amuse themselves with childish games.’

“ ‘Yes, but how do the people live. Do they seem mad in other respects?’

“ ‘We don’t know how they live. A good many of them have been plundering the fruit trees along the roads. But apparently they still look after their animals. In

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many of the houses there is not a light to be seen in the evening. We are amazed that the families hold together at all. The children stay with their parents, but there have been many absolutely shameless goings-on between boys and girls.’

“ ‘On receiving this alarming news,’ continued the station-master, ‘I communicated with the police in the nearest town, and I would have gone over to see this incredible state of things for myself, but in my position I can’t, of course, just set off at a moment’s notice.’

“ ‘We went to Rathenweiler,’ continued the writer of the article, “and waited until evening for the crazy people to return to their homes. When it was growing dark, they came running along in a regular herd. In front was an old man. Then came a long procession of men, women and children, three or four abreast. At the very end was another old peasant. Without taking leave of one another, they went into their houses. The whole

procession produced an uncanny effect. The people were dressed in the most extraordinary way. Almost all wore articles of clothing, but what strange figures they cut! Some of the men were wearing only trousers. The women had their skirts on wrong side before, and some of them had blouses tied round their necks like kerchiefs. Many of the women had their hair hanging loose.

“I now ventured to enter a few houses with my colleague. Almost everywhere the inmates had already lain down to sleep. Many of them were not in their beds, but had dragged the mattresses on to the floor and were lying on them there. All the houses presented a picture of hopeless neglect. We had the impression that the peasants were just living on the supplies in their larders.

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Half-eaten sausages were hanging over the backs of chairs or from the catches of the windows. A peasant woman was beating up eggs in the pan in which she was already frying potatoes and bacon, as if it were quite a matter of course. We thought at first that she was still normal. The only strange thing was that she was standing by the stove half-dressed. But with her, too, it was impossible to have any conversation. We then saw the family take their meal. A girl of about twelve years of age fetched plates from the cupboard, one for each member of the household, and they all seated themselves round the table. The food was very accurately divided out, each of the children getting one egg and some fried potatoes. But they did not all use knives and forks; many of them used their fingers.”

The reporter ended his article with the express assurance that every word was true. “If an explorer were to describe such conditions as existing in an African or Australian village, every one would read his account with sceptical derision. But this, which I saw with my own eyes, is gruesome reality. It is imperative that help should be rendered at once. In the short time at our disposal it was impossible to inquire into the causes of the catastrophe. I have already warned all the authorities competent to deal with the matter.”

Hargon read every word of the article. Every detail of the happenings at Rathenweiler acted on him like some intoxicating drink. His exultation was prodigious. Yes, let them all go to Rathenweiler—commissioners, government officials, professors and mental specialists. Before

they had grasped what was happening in this village, they themselves would succumb to the pestilence. Let these men, whose lives had been so successful, to whom women had given themselves in love, on whom honours and distinctions had been lavished, let them rack their brains to discover a remedy. But be quick, gentlemen, be very quick! For Hargon means to steal a march on you!

In the intoxication of his triumph the confinement of the hotel room was insupportable. He must go out. He could not endure it in this city any longer, he must push on. Breathlessly he rushed to the garage where his motor was kept. The engine of the powerful racing-car howled like a wild animal about to make a spring. Urged on by a fiendish exhilaration, Hargon raced out into the night, towards other cities and other regions. Horror and disaster followed in his wake.

IX

TILLEMANN, the engine-driver, hastened his steps. He had to be in the engine-house at half-past six, and it was only five minutes before that time. In the course of over thirty years' service he had only on very few occasions arrived at his work unpunctually, and to-day, too, he would have been in time if it had not been for the worry and upset with Anna at home.

The villainy of it! He had brought the fellow into the house himself, so how could he blame the child? He was a smart chap, was Lorentz, a regular dare-devil, but how often had he told him he was to leave his girl alone!

Ten minutes behind time, Tillemann presented himself before the official on duty at the engine-house.

"Well, Tillemann, a bit late this morning, eh? I suppose you wanted to get a good sleep to prepare you for the long journey?"

"Why, not quite that. Something hindered me unexpectedly...." And then he murmured something unintelligible.

Tillemann was not used to fibbing. Should he go on to talk about his family affairs?

But the official made no further reference to the engine-driver's late arrival. Tillemann was so trustworthy that he had always been held up as an example to the others.

"Lorentz is out there already. The engine is quite in order. There's sure to be a great crowd on the platform

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to-day. The special train for the Italian delegation leaves ten minutes before yours. So you must keep an extra good look-out. We shall be having diplomatic complications if you get too close to them." And the official laughed at his own little joke.

"I'd quite forgotten they were leaving to-day," said Tillemann, putting out his hand for his papers. "Well, they won't delay us. Anything else?"

"No, there are no other special instructions, and there's no more work being done on the line."

Tillemann nodded curtly and walked over to the engine-house. He climbed carefully up to his place on his engine, laid down his wallet, fetched his coffee-pot and poured into it the coffee he had brought with him

in a bag. What should he say to Lorentz now when he saw him? Probably he would be quite unsuspecting. Should he there and then forbid him to enter his house again? Should he call him to account? But no, there was no time for that now. They never talked much while they were on duty. The stoker was extremely conscientious. All the time they had worked together everything had gone like clockwork, and Lorentz saw to a number of things that did not really come within the scope of his duties. But he must have it out with him some time to-day. Perhaps he would tackle him when they reached Nuremberg.

Tillemann was thankful to be able to exchange his warm coat for his loose working-jacket. Then he put on a light cap and went off to boil his coffee.

On the way he met Lorentz, who was already returning to the engine with his coffee-pot in his hand. "Hullo,

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old man!" shouted the stoker. "Is this some new fashion you're starting? Presently you'll be waiting to get into the engine until it's at the platform. Then I shall have time to practise a little engine-driving before you arrive."

"Just you stick to your shovel for the present. I'm not going to be ousted yet awhile," retorted Tillemann, and was surprised at his own calmness. Well, all in good time. He would settle accounts with him before the day was over.

When the engine-driver came back, he saw that the stoker had already attended to the fire, for the large iron hook was already lying in the driver's cab. Lorentz was nowhere to be seen. Probably he was oiling the engine. Yes, there was really no time to be lost. The auxiliary blast-pipe was in action and the manometer had risen to over eight atmospheres. One more swift glance at the water-glass, and then Tillemann, armed with a spanner, prepared to make a last test of the engine. He climbed down into the conduit, tapped the brake rods under the engine, and at the end of ten minutes had satisfied himself that everything was in perfect order.

While Lorentz wiped the oil from the engine and from time to time came up to the driver's cab and threw on more coal, Tillemann set all his papers in order. That kept him fully occupied until it was time for the engine to leave the shed.

A shrill whistle. The turn-table in front of the shed began to revolve. A sign from the man in charge, and the engine moved out slowly and

cautiously.

A quarter of an hour before the departure of the

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through train Berlin-Nuremberg-Munich, the platform was unusually crowded. On the opposite track were the elegant saloon cars of the special train, which had been placed at the disposal of the Italian delegation by the German Government and was to convey back to their own country the diplomats who had been negotiating in Berlin for weeks. The Italian Minister was still engaged in a very animated conversation with the German Minister, von Frankenstein, whose skill and tact in presiding over the discussions had been largely responsible for their surprisingly satisfactory conclusion. A number of photographs were taken, including one of the Italian Ambassador's pretty, smiling daughter by the side of the Minister. An inquisitive crowd had assembled to witness the departure.

Tillemann and Lorentz were too busy with their engine to be able to watch what was happening for more than a few seconds. Kunowski, who had been working on the railway a few years longer even than Tillemann, called out jestingly to his colleague, whom he knew very well:

"Hullo, I shall be in front of you to-day."

But Tillemann did not echo his cheerful tone.

"They might just as well have been coupled on to us. What harm would it have done them to travel to Munich with us? We shall be half empty again, of course."

"I wish I were in your place!" shouted Kunowski to the engine-driver, his hand already on the regulator, for the departure signal might be given at any moment.

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Amid cordial shouts of "*Evviva!*" the special train left the station. The platform soon emptied. By the time the ordinary train was due to leave, only a very small crowd was waiting to say good-bye to the few passengers.

It was fortunate that up to the last moment Tillemann was completely engrossed with testing the brakes and checking the various manometers, for whenever he looked across at Lorentz, who was working by his side, he felt as if someone had stabbed him in the heart. How unconcernedly he was cleaning his tools and washing down the driver's cab! For a moment

Tillemann clutched the steering-wheel, because its coolness soothed him. For when he heard Lorentz whistling he could not help thinking that perhaps the fellow was so gay and contented because he was recalling the hours he had spent with Anna. What was it he had said to the girl, when she had told him that she was going to have a child? "What's that got to do with me? It's for you to see that you get rid of it. I've got better things to do than to run with you to the doctor."

He should find out, the villain, what it had got to do with him! To ruin a woman's life and then just clear off! How calmly the devil had greeted him, as though nothing at all had happened!

"Hi, old man!" shouted Lorentz, rousing Tillemann from his meditations. "Wake up! It's time to be off. You can fondle your engine after we've started."

Tillemann leant far out of the window. Yes, the station-master had actually given the signal for departure, and was gesticulating as though he could not understand why Tillemann had not yet started.

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"I shall get away soon enough," murmured the engine-driver to himself as he put on steam. Slowly the train got under way. It was some time before the engine reached full speed.

At 8.4 p.m., when the train started, it was getting dusk. After that the darkness fell rapidly. The two men at the engine were entirely engrossed in their work. Lorentz soon unbuttoned his tunic, for the air was hot and damp, as though charged with electricity. The stoker got so warm shovelling the coal that he had to feel for his handkerchief repeatedly to wipe the perspiration from his face.

"You're a lucky fellow," he said to Tillemann. "I'm in such a confounded sweat to-day. But it won't be long before I shall be watching my stoker do his work."

In the best of spirits, Lorentz sprinkled the coal on the tender. He had not even noticed how silent Tillemann had been that day. The relation between the two men was not like that between a superior and a subordinate. Soon after their first journeys together, Tillemann, finding that Lorentz was alone in the world, had brought him to his house. The old engine-driver was fond of his younger colleague, for Lorentz was good company; many a cheerful hour had he and his daughter spent with him. Yes, and there the circle of Tillemann's thoughts, which pursued him

unceasingly, closed once more. When can it have been that Lorentz started that affair with Anna? To think that he should have been so blind! He had always thought of his daughter as a child who had found a big playfellow in her Karl, as she called him jestingly. Two years ago, at the winter soir  e of the Railway Association, Lorentz had only danced once with Anna.

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She had been quite angry with him. "I suppose I'm not big enough for you yet," she had said to him later reproachfully. "Do you think I brought you to the soir  e so that you should leave me to be a wallflower?"—"Come, 'wallflower' is a bit of an exaggeration," Karl had said. "I saw you dancing the whole time."—"Oh, it's no fun dancing with those stupid fellows. Not one of them dances as well as you."

Then, last summer, at the harvest festival at the allotment colony, surely it could not have been already going on. Tillemann had watched the dancing for some time. How pretty Anna had looked in her light summer dress! It was not only his paternal pride that had told him so; the neighbours had confirmed it and added various coarse jests. He had forbidden them to speak of Anna in that tone; it was too early for her to think of such things.

"When shall we be celebrating a wedding at your house?" bald-headed Jason had asked.

"Are you wanting to put foolish notions into the girl's head?" he had answered. "Or are you by chance a suitor yourself? Anna will find a better man than you, someone who not only has hair on his head, but is something more than you and me."

"Oh, Mr. Engine-driver, so you're not satisfied with your post?"

At that he had drawn himself up proudly and replied:

"I wouldn't change places with anyone, not if he drove a Rolls-Royce every day. My engine can do things that no motor car can do, no, not by long chalks. You must come along one day and see what grand travelling it is. It's exactly what I dreamed of as a boy."

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And then he had gone off to play cards and had left Anna alone at the dance. Had Lorentz taken her then or not until the winter?

The engine-driver, too, was feeling the heat more and more. From time to time he swallowed a mouthful of coffee to quench his burning thirst.

Lorentz, of course, had brought a bottle of seltzer with him again, and had put it in a bucket of water to keep cool. But he would rather die of thirst than accept a drop of that.

Already in the spring Anna had seemed to him very much upset, but he couldn't get a word out of the girl. Then he had begun to have suspicions and had watched her closely when he had the opportunity. Perhaps he had let himself be duped. She had noticed that he was observing her and had assumed an air of gaiety and unconcern. At first he had been taken in, but whenever Lorentz had come to the house, she had been so strange. Then he fancied that he had found the key to the riddle: She was cherishing an unrequited affection for Karl, and he, of course, the lady-killer, did not give a thought to the child.

Tillemann burst out laughing, but there was such an angry note in his laughter that Lorentz looked up quite horrified.

"What's the matter, Tillemann?" he asked. "What are you laughing at?"

"Nothing, nothing," said Tillemann evasively. And yet he felt as if he must have it out with him. Why hadn't the scoundrel kept his hands off little child? Anna was no prude. Perhaps she had even held out hopes to Lorentz. But the shamelessness of leaving his child in the lurch!

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Was she a girl picked up God-knows-where, to be treated as one chose? Was she not the child of his colleague, for whom he had professed such friendship?

Twenty-four hours ago he had not known the whole truth. At the supper-table Anna had sat there looking so pale that he had not dared to question her. He had only glanced at her secretly from behind his newspaper. She had crumbled her bread and eaten nothing, but when she saw that he was watching her, she had swallowed down a mouthful. Then she had gone to bed early and he had done the same, but he felt as if some nightmare burden were pressing on him and he could not get to sleep. He had waited for something, and presently, in the middle of the night, he had heard her crying and sobbing. She thought he was already asleep.

Now he knew all. He had not made it easy for her. He had insisted on her telling him everything. He was not satisfied with vague statements like "We had been together."—"How did it happen? Tell me the honest truth!" he had begged her. "Did you give yourself to him?"—"No, it didn't happen

like that.”—“How, then?”—“Father, let me be. I can’t tell you that. It just happened.”

But he had given her no peace until she had told him in a faltering voice how Lorentz had persecuted her more and more with his sensual lust. “I liked him very much; he was always gay and amusing. But you know that I had been keeping company with Bremer; he wanted to marry me, and I was fond of him. When I told Karl this, he was quite beside himself. He kept on wanting to argue it out with me. Yes, and once, when we went on an excursion

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to Wannsee together, he took me into the forest. I protested. I didn’t want to be alone with him. But he behaved like a madman and tore the clothes off my body. I begged——” And then she was overcome with another violent fit of sobbing. “What’s the matter?” he had asked her. “I begged him to have some pity on you, even if he had none for me. But it was no use.”

After that Tillemann had not forced his child’s confidence any more. He had soothed her and told her that he would make everything all right. “Lorentz shall never enter my house again. I’ll settle matters with him.” Then she had flung her arms round his neck and begged him not to do anything. “It’s really not on Karl’s account I’m anxious, but on yours.” She had no need to be anxious about him. His child was not to be treated like that.

Tillemann rose from his seat and looked across at Lorentz, who was hurling the coal from the tender into the furnace with a mighty swing. No, not now, he couldn’t speak to him now. But he would settle accounts with him before the day was ended.

After a brief halt at Halle, the train tore on at a speed of between fifty-five and sixty miles an hour. The night was pitch dark and the sky overclouded. The sultriness was becoming more and more unbearable. Probably another storm was brewing. Would this journey be his last, perhaps? Did Lorentz suspect anything? For the last hour he had not spoken a word. They never talked much on their journeys, but in the ordinary way they did drop a friendly remark from time to time. Was he merely overcome by the heat? No, it must be something

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else. Tillemann saw clearly that Lorentz was watching him. No, not yet, my man; at present you've no more cause for misgivings than yesterday or the day before. But it won't be so much longer.

Suddenly, as Tillemann was watching the track, he saw that the advance signal of the Pforta block station was at danger. He put on the brake sharply and brought the train to a standstill just before the main signal.

"Kunowski seems to be having a little game with us," Lorentz ventured to remark jestingly.

Tillemann made no reply. He tried to pierce the blackness of the night to discover what was the matter in front. But apart from the red light of the main signal and the faint light of the lamp at the block station a little way ahead, there was nothing to be seen. Meanwhile Lorentz closed the ash-pan damper and stopped the auxiliary blast-pipe, and then he, too, peered into the darkness. At first there was not a sound. Then they heard the rattle of the door of the luggage van and the guard called out: "What's the matter?"

"No idea."

"Does it look like being a long wait?"

Lorentz interrupted the conversation.

"Be quiet a moment. The block signalman is opening his window. I want to hear what he's saying."

"At the main points at Kösen a truck has gone off the rails. It'll be some time before you can go on. The special train is held up, too."

"A nice business," grumbled Lorentz. "That means we shall be confoundedly late. And it'll be all I can do to manage my fire so that we can get up the slope."

Tillemann said nothing at all. The sultriness of the

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night had given him a violent headache. He stared sombrely in front of him and toyed absently with his watch-chain.

After some time Lorentz tried to start a conversation.

"Why, Tillemann, you're looking quite ferocious to-day," he said.

Tillemann made no answer. He climbed down from his place and availed himself of the delay to subject his engine to a thorough overhauling.

The old fellow is quite crazy to-day, thought Lorentz, and he pulled a detective novel out of his pocket, intending to read. As it was very dark on the driver's cab, he opened the shade of the ceiling lamp. Consequently, whenever Tillemann passed the cab, he could distinctly see the stoker's

face. How calm the fellow was! Obviously he was not giving a thought to Anna. He had taken her and then he had tired of her. That was nothing new in the stoker. How often on their journeys he had laughed over his love adventures. Anna meant no more to him than any of the others.

Tillemann found himself making for the third time a test which in any case was not needed. Now would have been the moment to take Lorentz to task. But he was afraid they might be disturbed. The guard had just clambered down and gone across to the block station. He was soon back and Tillemann was obliged to talk to him.

Half an hour passed in this way. When Tillemann was alone again, he strolled up and down by the side of the engine in a state of growing agitation. At home his child was no doubt as restless and unable to sleep as he was here. Perhaps she would do herself some harm. He had implored her to be brave and assured her that everything

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would be all right, but who could say whether Anna might not be overcome by despair. Here, only a few yards away, was seated the father of her child. Tillemann looked at the clock. Over an hour and a half had already passed. Who could say how much longer it would take to get the truck back on to the rails? Why was he putting it off? Yes, he must have time to talk to Lorentz. He would shout out all his contempt and indignation in his face. There must be no witness of their conversation. If they were held up for another hour that would suffice.

Now he was determined to have it out at once. He climbed the steps to the driver's cab. But the moment he reached the top he heard a grating noise. The signal showed that the way was clear.

Lorentz, too, had heard the sound and had already started to shovel on the coal. A brief conversation with the guard, who begged them to make up the lost time, and then, with a loud whistle, the train got under way.

The powerful connecting-rods of the huge engine were working more and more furiously, but it was some time before the train was travelling at full speed again. They had just climbed a long slope and Lorentz was stoking vigorously. The two men were already trying to achieve the maximum acceleration.

A smothered excitement possessed them as they stood side by side in the cab. Lorentz had already seen Tillemann's distorted face in the light of the lamp. He was not easily frightened and had before this faced many a

dangerous situation without flinching. But suddenly he knew that Tillemann was harbouring some design against him.

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After an hour's journey they had reached the summit of the incline. The speed was increasing rapidly. The pointer of the tachometer moved round farther and farther. They were travelling seventy, seventy-five and now eighty miles an hour. The terrific speed filled Tillemann with a voluptuous ecstasy. The strokes on the rails, following one another in more and more rapid succession, rang in his ears like some intoxicating melody. In his head, which was aching dully, the roar of the engine, the grating of the running wheels at the curves, the thumps of the coupling-rods, blended into a fierce deafening clamour, which goaded him on more and more insistently.

Lorentz, too, was thrilled by the speed at which they were travelling. On the few occasions when he had to stoke, now that they were descending the hill, he was obliged to wield his shovel with masterly skill in order that the coal might not land wide of the hole. From time to time he leant far out of the cab and let the swift current of air play about his face and breast. Suddenly he felt drops of moisture. The sky was now completely overcast. Train 68 was plunging at a terrific speed into a violent storm.

"There's heavy work going on up there, too!" he shouted to Tillemann, quite forgetting his anxiety, and he pointed to the sky.

"There's heavy work going on here!" shouted back the engine-driver, and he struck himself on the breast. Train 68 had long since exceeded the highest permissible speed. It flashed into the stoker's mind that the special train was in front of them. But Kunowski would

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probably put on speed too, in order to make up for the long delay.

Tillemann observed the signals very carefully as they flashed past the train. His thoughts were in a whirl. He was worrying about Anna at one moment, and the next he turned hot all over as he thought of Lorentz. He was no longer capable of pursuing a thought to its conclusion. A terrible craving to destroy was surging up in him. The man who had so tortured his child, tortured her to the quick, must die. What more was there to discuss with him? What difference did it make if he muttered a few apologies or

no? What could the fellow have to say to him? And the wild singing of his blood mingled with the roar of the engine.

Suddenly a flash of lightning lit up the large disc of an advance signal. Was the line blocked again already? What did he care? The train should speed on faster and ever faster. Only in the consciousness of this terrific motion could he go on living.

The main signal flew past.

Unsuspectingly Lorentz shovelled on more coal. The pointer of the tachometer moved round still farther. Eighty-one miles an hour. Tillemann could no longer think of anything. He was flying with his whole body. His cap had fallen from his head; his hair was hanging in confusion over his face. He, too, had to tear open his jacket to cool himself a little.

Suddenly a shout at his side:

“Brake! The signal is at danger!”

“Nothing is at danger. We are going on!”

“Look! Can’t you see the red light of the main signal!”

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“To me that means that the line is clear! We must go on!”

Lorentz’s face had turned ashy pale. Suddenly he knew that Tillemann had found out about his affair with Anna. The old man had gone mad. If this went on for another twenty or thirty minutes, they would run into the special train. He hurled himself with all his might on Tillemann and tried to drag him to one side, so as to get at the brake-valve handle. But the old man was apparently prepared for the attack. He thrust Lorentz back with his shoulder, so that he was flung to the other side.

“More coal,” Tillemann roared to the stoker, shaking his fist. “You and I are going to settle accounts now!”

“Have you gone mad?”

“We’ll decide that between us!”

Tillemann no longer seemed to take in anything. Evidently he had gone out of his mind. He turned round and put out his hand for the shovel. Lorentz saw that he was about to stoke. A wild struggle ensued between the two men. Tillemann drew himself up to his full height and seized the handle of the coal shovel. Lorentz tried to wrest it from him.

Breast to breast the two men struggled with one another, and already it seemed as if the younger man would triumph and force down Tillemann. But suddenly, with his free left hand, the engine-driver grasped the coal-

pick, and before Lorentz had realised his danger had struck him on the skull.

The stoker collapsed without a sound. Tillemann lifted him up and flung him into a corner. Then he burst into a wild song. Inarticulate sounds broke from his throat. Filled with a murderous ecstasy, he had only one thought;

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to drive the train forward yet more swiftly. He shovelled the coal into the fire-hole himself, and again the tachometer registered a speed of over eighty miles....

The signalman at block station 513 had noticed with infinite astonishment that Train 68 had not halted in obedience to the stop signal. Was it possible that the violent storm had so obscured the vision of the engine-driver and the stoker that they had not seen the signals? The man in charge of the block station hurried to the telephone and called up the next station.

“Hullo! 513 speaking. Train 68 has just come through without stopping. The special train is only five minutes in front. You must stop Train 68 at once.”

The station-master made sure once again that the signals were at “stop.” Then he hurried on to the platform with the signal lamp in his hand and ran towards the train in order to wave to it as an additional warning to halt.

The storm was raging furiously, and a heavy rain poured down on the station-master, who buttoned up his coat tightly. Then, from a distance, came two misty beams of light from the engine. Train 68 was approaching, as the man realised immediately, with undiminished speed. It did not slow down, although it must already have passed the advance signal. The station-master ran a few steps back in order to be able to ring up the next station more promptly in case the signalling should be ineffectual. Then the huge engine thundered through the little station. Neither the engine-driver nor the stoker were visible on the driver’s cab. Only in the luggage-van was

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there any light. In all the sleeping-compartments it was pitch dark. Like some ghastly apparition Train 68 had passed in a few seconds. There was no longer any doubt: something was wrong with Train 68.

The station-master hurried into his room. In the greatest excitement he turned the handle of the telephone and got into communication not only with the next, but also with the following stations.

“Train 68 can’t be stopped. It is now only three minutes behind the special train. Signal to it with your lamp to stop at once, and place detonating cartridges as well. Try to inform the driver of the special train.”

This message from the station-master reached the signalman at the next station in time for him to place some detonating cartridges. In addition he lit several torches for the purpose of signalling to the train. In spite of the pouring rain he ran some distance to meet the train and waved the torches.

There was no response to his signals. If the men in the cab have gone mad, he thought in horror, at any rate the guard or the train attendants will be roused by the explosion of the cartridges, and the luggage-van guard, too, is bound to hear them. It’s to be hoped they’ll pull the emergency brake. The signalman was somewhat reassured by these reflections, but when suddenly the train which had just thundered past became once more visible in the distance in the brilliant flashes of lightning, he grasped the full horror of the situation. At the very moment when Train 68 passed the spot where the detonating cartridges were placed, the lightning was followed by a terrific roll of thunder, so that the signalman could not hear whether the cartridges had exploded. He ran to

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the place at full speed and was horrified to discover that the cartridges had probably become damp owing to the rain and had not gone off. So the people inside the train had not been warned.

The signalman rushed up the steps to the block station. Still quite out of breath he telephoned the terrible news to the next station, where a further message was being awaited with feverish suspense. No one dared to stop the special train. The distance between it and Train 68 was already so inconsiderable that a catastrophe was unavoidable if the special train put on the brake and Train 68 failed to stop.

Meanwhile there had been time to enlist the aid of several officials at this station. With frantic speed a note was written:

“Train 68 is tearing along behind you at eighty miles an hour and cannot be stopped. To save yourselves put on full steam. No side-track before Röntgen—eleven miles further.”

Detonating cartridges, which had been specially protected against the rain, were to be placed on both sides of the track as soon as the special train had passed. Three men were stationed at intervals along the platform to signal with lamps and torches. The station-master, in a state of intense agitation, kept watch for the two trains from a raised position. A man had climbed on to the roof of the station and was to try to throw the message, wrapped round a stone, on to the driver's cab of the special train.

Then the first lights appeared on the horizon. The special train, which was travelling at a speed of over

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sixty miles an hour, tore past. The light signals had been given in such a way that the engine-driver, who had observed them, was able to slow down the train slightly as it passed through the station. At this moment the stone with the message was successfully flung into the driver's cab, and the train rushed on.

In the corner of the cab of Train 68, Lorentz lay unconscious with a bleeding wound on his skull. Again and again Tillemann's singing burst out. He could see nothing but the blood on Lorentz's forehead. He would destroy him, crush him beyond all recognition, even if he himself had to perish in the act.

The engine-driver had no thought of the human lives entrusted to him. He no longer knew that behind his engine were four carriages in which a number of passengers were sleeping without any suspicion of the disaster which was awaiting them. Untiringly he shovelled on coal. His hands, his breast, his face were blackened with coal-dust. Tillemann was no longer thinking of Anna nor yet of Lorentz. Suddenly he had forgotten everything. He only wanted one thing—rest, relief from the terrible pressure which was weighing on his heart.

Then, in the distance, two red lights. Blood beside him, blood in front of him. Now the moment was at hand!

To the right a station flashed past him. Quite close in front of him, the tail lights of the special train. Mighty explosions rent the air. He felt as though the train were being smashed into fragments.

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He threw the shovel on one side and spread out both arms wide. Then, with a terrific impact, the engine of Train 68 dashed into the last carriage of the special train, lifting it high into the air.

Tillemann was flung down. Huge clouds of steam enveloped the engine and the carriage with which it had collided. At the same moment, with a deafening crash, the carriages of Train 68 telescoped into one another.

Screams and yells pierced the night. Amid the wild clamour of the raging elements, a terrible railway disaster had been enacted before the eyes of the horrified spectators.

The news of the catastrophe provoked the utmost horror throughout the world. From the agitated accounts of the station-masters and other officials on duty along the line over which Train 68 and the special train conveying the Italian delegation had been travelling, it seemed almost certain that it was a case of a political outrage. Who had been the instigators of this atrocious crime? It was held to be out of the question that the stoker and engine-driver, both of them experienced and trustworthy men, should have been at their posts. The obstruction and consequent two hours' delay had obviously been part of the conspiracy. It was conjectured that the stoker and engine-driver had been dragged away by force and that the fanatics who took their place had driven Train 68 to destruction. The corpses of the two men on the engine were disfigured beyond recognition—so much so indeed that it was difficult even to prove that they were human remains.

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In spite of a message of profound regret from the German Government, the Italian Government dispatched a sharply worded protest to Berlin. Not one person in the special train had escaped with his life. In Train 68, twenty-five persons had been killed, and all the others so seriously injured that they could not be interrogated. The most expert officers of the police service hurried in special trains from all over the country to the place of the disaster in order to institute inquiries. The general indignation was boundless.

X

AT the same time the occurrences in the village of Rathenweiler were exciting the attention of the public. The first account had been received with incredulity and it was declared that the writer of it must himself have lost his wits. A whole legion of reporters was dispatched to Rathenweiler. They all brought back even stranger details. It had become quite impossible to converse with any of the people in the village. Even the small number of peasants who had been able to give information to the first few journalists had now lost their power of speech and behaved as crazily as the rest.

The affair was so extraordinary that special measures of precaution were taken. As similar cases had already been reported from the neighbourhood, Rathenweiler and the country for a considerable distance round were isolated. No one was allowed to leave Rathenweiler or the adjacent villages, including Falente and Leuenburg.

A commission of medical men was hastily formed. At the head of it was the world-famous neurologist, Professor Bernhard Fischer, and among the members was Professor Keyl. When the latter read the report concerning Rathenweiler, it suddenly flashed through his mind that the fate of Dr. Martell was connected with what had been happening in Rathenweiler.

He had been deeply affected by the sad events in the school inspectors family. Frau Dr. Martell had never

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completely regained consciousness after her swoon. She lay in his clinic battling for life in an acute nervous fever. The son had accepted this succession of calamities with a strange apathy. He seemed no longer to grasp what was going on around him, but sat as though paralysed from early morning until late at night at the window of the dining-room and gazed out silently into the street. The servants had been told to treat the young man with the greatest consideration. Although Professor Keyl was in no way connected with Dr. Martell's family, he took as much trouble about these three as if they were his next of kin. Before leaving Berlin, he had a brief discussion with his colleagues and with representatives of the Press. In the course of it Professor Keyl made some sensational statements, drawing attention to the remarkable connection between the happenings at

Rathenweiler and the illness which had attacked Dr. Martell and the members of his family. But even he had not the remotest suspicion of the true nature of this connection.

As the result of an appeal for volunteers, two hundred male and female nurses were dispatched to Rathenweiler. But as yet the world did not suspect what tremendous events were being enacted. By the most careful and conscientious labours the doctors endeavoured to discover as rapidly as possible the cause of this peculiar epidemic.

But Hargon worked even faster than they.

Hargon was in the Rhineland. Thence he meant to proceed to France, and after that to return to Berlin with the utmost speed. His car no longer travelled fast enough for him. He must make still more rapid progress. Before the world first realised with horror the catastrophe

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which had overtaken it, it was imperative that the whole of the human race without exception should be infected.

Despite the most thorough search, the police were unable to find a trace of the authors of the railway outrage. The public had not yet settled down to its daily routine after the shock of this frightful accident, when a new cry of horror rang out.

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XI

IVAN KAMINSKI hammered with both his fists on the door of his brother's bedroom.

"Here, get up! It's high time!"

"Oh, leave me in peace," growled Gregor, still half asleep.

A few minutes later he was dressed, and the two men set off for the "Eberhard Frank" mine. They were both dog-tired. They had celebrated Anna Fehrbring's birthday all too well and now they were suffering the consequences.

Silently they hurried along side by side. On the way they met a few comrades, which was in itself an ominous indication of the lateness of the hour.

"You won't be able to keep this up much longer—never in bed till morning," grumbled Ivan.

Gregor only laughed.

"As though Ivan weren't just as bad."

The two stalwart young men had plenty of luck with women. Well, life didn't afford many opportunities of amusing oneself. Why shouldn't one take any that came along, if women were such fools?

Gregor clapped Ivan good-naturedly on the shoulder.

"By noon to-day everything will be forgotten. And then we'll make a fresh start."

Heated by their rapid run the two brothers Kaminski arrived at the gate of the mine just in the nick of time.

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They received their tokens, gave the gate-keeper a friendly nod and then hurried into the dressing-room. It was no longer crowded; most of the workers were already at the mouth of the shaft. Ivan, who was four years younger than his brother, had already finished changing and had drawn up and fastened his overalls while Gregor was still slowly putting on his shoes.

"Wait for me at the gate at noon. I'm off now. I want to speak to you again about Anna."

"Oh, don't worry, the wedding will come soon enough."

Before Gregor could say anything more, Ivan had shouted “ Good luck!” and was gone. Gregor sauntered after him a few minutes later.

There was another brief delay while the mine lamps were being given out, because Gregor could not find his token at once. Then he hurried over to the pit mouth where the conveyance of the men to and from the pit was in full swing.

In the engine-room, Runge, the engine-man, was seated waiting for the next bell in order to bring the cage up again. He was quite alone in the room, through the windows of which the morning light was creeping in. Already his hand was on the control lever. When three peals of the bell told him that all was ready, he pressed it, and on the circular disc in front of him, the pointer, which indicated the exact height of the cage, began to move slowly round.

His supreme trustworthiness had won Runge universal respect, and it was not without good reason that he

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had been given this responsible post, which demanded the utmost concentration. Runge knew his machine. When the miners were descending, he made the cage glide down and up again at exactly the prescribed speed. He loved his work, and felt as though he were the most important person in the whole shaft. Were not the lives of hundreds of men entrusted to him every day? Strange that he could not help thinking of it this morning! Really it was too many. And he turned his attention once more to the movements of the pointer.

In voices which, though weary, had a ring of relief that their work was done, the workers leaving the mine shouted “Good luck!” to those about to enter it. They were in a hurry to get to the washing-room; for they were all possessed with only one wish—to be at home in their beds as soon as possible. The new-comers were almost all disinclined for conversation. They were impatiently awaiting their turn to descend.

Suddenly Gregor saw Ivan right in front getting into the cage. He could not have said himself why at this moment he felt a pang of horror. He tried to force his way through and get in with his brother, but before he could reach him, the last bell had sounded and the cage glided into the depths.

A few minutes later Gregor's turn came. Packed in tightly with his comrades he was standing in the second storey. His good spirits of this morning had fled. He would really stop wearing himself out as he had been doing. Fm getting too old for that, he thought, as he leant against the side of the cage.

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Runge was now sending down the cage for the tenth time. Suddenly he was overcome by a feeling of dizziness. He collapsed and, as he did so, moved the control lever with a jerk. With horror he saw from the speed-gauge that he had accelerated too violently. Immediately he corrected his mistake and then glanced at the indicator to see how far the cage had travelled. Fine, how the long, slim, iron pointer seemed to grip hold of the divisions on the disc one after the other! "Now it's your turn, my little fellow," thought Runge. "Now yours and now yours!" How stupid that all these little lines should be, as it were, blotted out by the pointer! Runge looked at the control lever in front of him and reversed. The pointer travelled more slowly, came to a standstill. Another pressure on the lever. Now it was moving in the other direction. You're going too slowly, thought Runge, I don't like that. There, that's better. Heavens, how the pointer tears along I Now, faster still! Now it's dancing back again.

As though playing with a toy, Runge made the iron pointer travel first in one and then in the other direction.

The guide beams flew past Gregor's eyes. Had the fellow gone crazy? His neighbour thrust out his hand in utter dismay. The men in the cage felt deadly sick. They had just glided once more into the depths, now they were mounting again, now down again, faster and faster.

By the dim light of their mine lamps they saw each other's wan, terrified faces. A heavy pressure weighed on their heads. They began to scream and could hardly

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hear their own cries. For a moment light fell from outside into the cage. They had passed the third sill. Faster and faster they descended into the depths.

Gregor tried to fight against the nausea which was attacking him. In vain. The walls swam before his eyes like some ribbon being unrolled at a

terrific speed. He felt as though the cage were making wild, dancing leaps.

The men fell on top of one another, first in one and then in the other direction. Gregor thrust away his neighbour, who had seized him by the head and was trying to hold him fast. Then everything turned black before his eyes.

The anguished screams of the doomed miners in the cage echoed through the plat of the sill. The unfortunate men could no longer hear themselves, but their comrades in the mine listened with horror to their dying yells.

Ivan, who had waited a few moments for his brother at the plat, was just about to make his way to the place where he worked when he heard the screams, which had ceased to bear any resemblance to human voices. Panic-stricken he hurried back. The cage was already mounting again. Together with his comrades he watched it glide past the plat. Now they could only hear the rattle of the guide beams, not another sound.

They all stood as though paralysed with horror. Something terrible must have happened to the cage. This silence after the previous screams proclaimed inexorably the nearness of death, and the men, usually so unblenching, felt their hearts turn cold.

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“Give the alarm,” shouted Ivan at length to the man who was on duty at the winding shaft.

“Give the alarm,” echoed from sill to sill.

The bells began to peal loudly in the engine-room. The red light denoting “Extreme danger!” appeared on the signal-board.

Attracted by the sound the foreman hurried into the room in which Runge, in order that no one should disturb him at his responsible work, was seated alone at his post, manipulating the control lever of the hoisting engine.

“Runge, what’s the matter?” shouted the foreman.

Runge rose slowly to his feet and with a broad smile made a sign towards the pointer, which was travelling round the disc at an unusually rapid rate.

The foreman felt that he was confronted with a madman. How could Runge leave his post?

Already the pointer showed that the cage was approaching the first sill. Suddenly it stood still and then began to fall, to fall precipitously.

The foreman pushed Runge to one side. Every second was precious. He understood the machine thoroughly and knew what to do in case of emergency. He tried to stop it, but the pointer moved on—moved faster than ever, so it seemed to him. He threw a glance at the large drum. It was still turning, but the cable was no longer taut; it was broken.

The acceleration of the cage was so terrific that the safety apparatus failed to act and the cage fell into the sump-hole. The miners were in a state of feverish

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agitation. They telephoned up: “The cable is broken.” Orders were given for the men in the lowest sill to go to the help of the victims of the catastrophe.

Other men were sent to the rescue immediately through the air shaft. The men at the pit mouth, who were waiting to go down to their work, had witnessed with horror the gruesome episode. Each man thought to himself: if you had made a little more haste, you would have been one of the victims. And this realisation paralysed their power to act. But when there was no longer any doubt that, after the cable had broken, the cage had plunged into the depths, the waiting men emerged from their stupor. Who first gave the command no one knew, but suddenly they were all running towards the engine-room. They were determined to get hold of Runge.

In the general confusion no one barred their way. Very soon they were in the engine-room, but Runge was no longer there. The engineers had fetched him out. He had laughed when he saw them, as though nothing had happened. Then one of them had struck him, so that he fell to the ground with the blood pouring down his face. He had gazed at them with horrified eyes. Then they had seized him by the collar and dragged him to the office. The foreman, who had not yet recovered from the shock, stood by and watched.

“He’s gone mad!” he shouted suddenly. “He sent them to their death. Purposely he sent them to their death!”

“Stop that bawling,” said one of the engineers angrily. “Come along with us at once!”

From the miners’ hospital, ambulances proceeded in

rapid succession to the “Eberhard Frank” pit. The news of the accident spread through the town like wildfire. With terrified screams the wives and families of the miners who had gone to the early shift hurried out of their houses, without waiting to dress themselves properly, and rushed along the road. They paid no heed to the motor ambulances, which passed them at a rapid rate, nor yet to the police cars, which were racing towards the mine, sounding their horns loudly.

Before the office buildings a fierce, excited crowd had collected. When the men had found that Runge was no longer in the engine-room, they had broken all the window-panes and armed themselves with spanners and any other tools they could lay their hands on.

No one knew who had spread the rumour that Runge was in the office, but suddenly they all rushed towards the building and tried to force an entrance. The doorkeeper and a few clerks barred their passage; no one was to be allowed inside. Then the wrath of the indignant miners was turned against the men who were trying to keep them back, and who now fled into the house and shut the door behind them. In two minutes the door was smashed to pieces and the miners had forced their way inside. Everyone fled before them. The first to get into the building began to ransack every room, while the mob outside yelled:

“We want Runge! We want Runge!”

With horror the engineers saw the infuriated mob. They tried to escape by a back door, dragging the struggling Runge along with them, but when they were about to hurry down the back staircase, it was already too late; the whole house was surrounded.

The head foreman, Riebau, who was extremely popular, made a last attempt to pacify the crowd. Courageously he opened a window looking on to the courtyard in front and raised both hands to indicate that he wanted to speak. He was greeted with yet more frantic yells, followed, before he could open his mouth, by a volley of lumps of coal. All the window-panes were smashed. Riebau was hit on the forehead by a piece of coal and fell to the ground. Dr. Nierdal drew a revolver out of his pocket.

“We must protect Runge from lynch law at all costs,” he said.

But Roberts, the engineer, struck the weapon out of his hand.

“Are more men to be sacrificed for the sake of that worm?” he shouted, pointing at Runge, who was huddled motionless on the ground, looking the incarnation of misery. “Do you imagine that we can keep them back by a few revolver shots? It will be five minutes at least before the police are here. In the meantime they will have set fire to the house with us inside it.”

Already they could hear the miners racing up the stairs. Then Roberts seized Dr. Nierdal by the arm and the engineers fled to the next storey, Runge did not move from the spot, his pursuers entered the room and a stout miner named Lunart rushed up to him.

“Get up!” he commanded, seizing him by the collar. Runge did not stir, but only gazed at his captor with an expression of melancholy astonishment.

“Get up!” ordered the miner once again. But before he could drag up the helpless figure, the

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others had fallen upon Runge and were executing a terrible mob justice upon him.

Seized with a murderous ecstasy, the executioners hurried to the window and held out Runge’s corpse. It was greeted with frantic cheers. Someone below shouted:

“Now for the engineers! They’re to blame, too, the——s!”

The miners hesitated a moment. Then they flung up Runge’s corpse into the air and with blood-thirsty shouts tore out of the room to look for the engineers. The latter tried to keep back their assailants by pistol shots, and just at the moment when their position seemed quite hopeless the first police cars arrived.

The infuriated mob in front of the building was dispersed. One of the clerks told the police officer of the perilous position of the engineers and a contingent was dispatched to take the house by storm. The miners were attacked in the rear and, after much fighting, were finally overpowered.

While the fight was raging inside the building, in the mine below desperate efforts were being made to go to the aid of the victims of the disaster. Ivan made superhuman exertions. Never had he felt as intensely as now how attached he was to his brother. Had Gregor been in the cage at the time of the accident? What had become of the relief contingent? They would not get through the air shaft. But every minute was precious. With the aid of a few miners who, like Ivan, volunteered their services, all the

preparations were made, under the direction of the head foreman, for pulling the cage out of the sump-hole.

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At the "Eberhard Frank" mine the flags were at half-mast. Not one miner in the cage had escaped with his life. The official report laid stress on the fact that the men were already dead before the cage plunged into the sump-hole. Unfortunately it had not been possible to arrive at any clear explanation of the cause of the catastrophe, because Runge, the only person to blame for it, had been lynched by the mob. But from the statements of the foreman, who had been seriously injured in the struggle with the miners, it seemed clear that Runge had suddenly gone out of his mind. Instead of attending to his machine, he had played about with the control lever and thereby sent his comrades to their death.

The list of missing was, however, three times as long as the number of miners who could be taken down in the cage in one journey. Of this fact, too, the official explanation was very inadequate. "It is probable," declared the report, "that many of the missing men are still alive in the mine. In the general excitement they may have lost their way and will no doubt be discovered within the next few hours. There has been no other accident nor any damage to the galleries."

In view of the tremendous excitement which prevailed among the population, martial law was proclaimed by the governor of the province.

Next morning the newspapers announced that forty-two miners had perished in the cage. Almost all had had their skulls fractured. Of the remaining 120 missing, eighty-three had been found up to now; they were suffering from acute nervous prostration as a result of the

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shock and had hidden themselves in side galleries from which they had to be dragged out by main force. The ambulance men encountered special resistance from a man called Ivan Kaminski, whose brother was known to have perished in the cage. They found him in the drift where he was toiling at the drill alone, bathed in sweat. He refused to leave his work and struck down an ambulance man. Only by recourse to stratagem did they succeed in overpowering him. Now he was lying in hospital and to all questions answered only "Gregor." That was his brother's name.

The condition of all the sick men gave cause for serious anxiety. The doctors were quite bewildered, as never before had they encountered such a case of mass psychosis.

The news of the disaster at the “Eberhard Frank” mine coincided with a further catastrophe.

XII

PROFESSOR KEYL, who, together with Geheimrat Fischer, was one of the leading members of the medical commission dispatched to Rathenweiler, had fallen sick. This fact had excited very great uneasiness among his colleagues, who had taken every conceivable precaution to prevent the spread of the disease. For they had realised at once that they were faced with a hitherto completely unknown epidemic.

They had two tasks to accomplish: to examine the enormous and daily increasing number of patients, and at the same time to find some occupation for them. A number of the inhabitants of Rathenweiler had been discovered in a half-starving condition. They flung themselves greedily on any food that was given them.

It was remarkable that the victims of the unknown disease did not give the impression of being sick. If they were sent out to work in the fields and shown what they were to do, they sometimes worked quietly and efficiently the whole day as though nothing were the matter with them. Only it was found that by the next day they had already forgotten what they had learnt.

In order that they might not themselves succumb to the pestilence, the doctors had all their food sent from outside. Apart from the water, which was carefully distilled, only beverages supplied in bottles were consumed.

The distillery had been transformed into a large

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hospital. The various rooms were filled with patients, and the doors and windows were draped with fine gauze to prevent the inmates being stung by insects, which might possibly convey the germs of the disease. The living-rooms of the house were hastily converted into a laboratory, where careful researches were conducted almost day and night.

The only person who was not surprised at the symptoms of the villagers was Professor Keyl. Again and again he was reminded of Dr. Martell, in whom he had observed just the same phenomena. He mentioned this to his colleagues, laying special stress on the fact that Dr. Martell had conducted a school inspection at Rathenweiler a few weeks before.

“That,” he declared, “is conclusive proof that the disease is infectious. The incubation period is from a fortnight to three weeks, according to the

constitution of the individual.”

He himself carried his precautionary measures almost to excess, so that among his colleagues he was thought, though quite unjustly, to be terrified of contracting the disease. When he visited the patients or took a walk through the village, in order to look into the houses and observe the absolutely indescribable conditions, he invariably wore a mask over his face. He always wore rubber gloves. And he was indefatigable in drawing his colleagues' attention to any negligence. Only in the evenings, when they were sitting together in the livingroom of the farm-house, anxiously discussing the as yet meagre results of their investigations over a glass of wine, did Professor Keyl abandon all precautionary

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measures. Yet he was the first doctor to succumb to the disease.

Geheimrat Fischer, to whom one of his colleagues brought the news that Professor Keyl had suddenly begun to babble incoherent nonsense, tried to hush the matter up, at any rate for twenty-four hours. In vain. One doctor told another. The nurses and attendants, who had performed almost superhuman labours during their stay of close upon a week, discussed it with pale, terrified faces.

Thereupon Geheimrat Fischer summoned all the doctors to a special conference. He wanted to take further measures to guard against infection, but his efforts were frustrated by the terrible anxiety which had seized upon all his hearers. They hardly heeded the words of the scientist, whom ordinarily they treated with such profound deference. Obviously they were dreading lest they themselves should be attacked by the disease, and at length one of them expressed what all were thinking.

There was no point in working there any longer. They would merely catch the infection. The only thing to be done was to leave the people of Rathenweiler to their fate. The Government must be asked to take measures to isolate the affected districts, and the unfortunate victims of the disease must be enabled to go on living by regular consignments of foodstuffs.

Geheimrat Fischer opposed these suggestions with the whole weight of his authority. He declared that they were all stationed at a post which might be of importance for the whole human race. It was up to them to prove that they were true scientists, ready to risk their lives for a great cause.

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By this impressive appeal the famous scientist succeeded in winning over those who were already wavering, but he could not prevent his colleagues from deciding that Professor Keyl must be isolated immediately; a special room was to be prepared for this purpose. For who could venture to associate with him closely any longer?

With horror the nurses, laboratory workers and doctors watched Professor Keyl, as with a smiling face, he let Geheimrat Fischer lead him to his sick-room. Obviously he had no suspicion what it meant, but with secret dismay every witness of this melancholy scene thought to himself: When will my turn come?

XIII

EVERY day the newspapers brought news of fresh catastrophes and mysterious happenings. All over Germany there were serious break-downs on the railways. If this went on, the food supply of the towns would soon be jeopardised. Trains were left blocking the lines for unexplained reasons. The motor traffic, too, was coming to a standstill. It happened more and more frequently that even drivers who had hitherto been thoroughly careful and trustworthy suddenly lost control of their cars; if they were fortunate, they ran into a ditch, but often they collided with a tree or with other cars.

An incident, harmless enough in itself, provoked a downright panic in Berlin at the end of August. One evening, as dusk was falling, the electric lamps in all the streets were lit. A few seconds later they were extinguished again. Then they were turned on, then out again, and this flickering alternation of light and darkness continued for nearly ten minutes. Immediately rumours spread through the city that the electricity supply had failed. Perhaps the workers were on strike, perhaps other serious troubles had arisen.

These ghostly antics of the electric light excited the utmost consternation among the populace. The explanation of the strange occurrence did not become known until the following day, when it was announced in the newspapers that the man on duty at the Berlin power

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station who, by reversing a few switches, could turn on all the street lamps in the city, had suddenly gone out of his mind.

When this odd behaviour of the lights was observed, some officials hurried to the little tower in which the man performed his duties. In this tower there was an apparatus which showed when the darkness had reached a point at which it was necessary to turn on the street lamps. Evidently the man had done tills at the right moment, but after that he had seated himself in front of his switchboard and had played with the switches, moving them first in one direction and then in the other.

The streets were unusually full and large crowds collected in front of the newspaper offices in which the announcement was displayed. As in time of war, people became more communicative with one another, and the

remarkable occurrence was widely discussed. But so far from being reassured by the explanation, the public became increasingly nervous. On all sides they heard of cases where a relation or friend, or even a wife or child, had lost their reason.

What, in heaven's name, did it all mean? Had the pestilence which had broken out at Rathenweiler already spread to Berlin? It could not be mere chance that these cases of loss of memory were being reported on every hand.

The public became more and more agitated. Each man eyed his neighbour suspiciously to see if he was already infected, and then laughed uneasily at his own behaviour. It was clear that a breathless suspense was weighing upon all.

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In foreign countries, too, the events in Germany had not failed to attract attention. The Paris Press and the sensation-mongering newspapers of other cities were experiencing an unparalleled boom. The papers were crammed with details of this plague which had descended upon Germany.

Le Soir was the first French paper to announce that cases similar to those in Germany had occurred in the department of the Seine. In spite of an energetic denial by the Government, who were anxious to avoid alarming the French public, it appeared next morning that the report in *Le Soir* had been in accordance with the facts. In the Chamber there was an excited demand for an immediate closing of the frontiers in order to prevent further spread of the disease. It was insisted that no one from Germany ought henceforth to be allowed inside the country without being examined. It was decided to set up large quarantine stations, so that the state of health of anyone desiring to enter France might first be subjected to observation for a considerable time.

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XIV

HARGON had been working strenuously for weeks. He only allowed himself four hours' sleep every night. He had already ruined one large racing car by the furious speed at which he travelled. That was in the neighbourhood of Lyons, but he had managed to reach the city and to find a motor-car dealer who supplied him with a new car for a comparatively small sum.

During the brief halts for meals at small towns he glanced rapidly through the newspapers and in them all he found what he was seeking: news of further extraordinary accidents, which were obviously due to sudden loss of memory on the part of one or more of those concerned in the catastrophe.

Several times Hargon was fined for driving at an excessive speed. If a policeman stopped him, he had only one anxiety: that they might search his suit-cases in which the test-tubes and Petri dishes with the G-bacillus cultures had been carefully packed.

Before starting on his journey, Hargon had made detailed notes of the most effectual plan for distributing the bacillus cultures. All the countries through which he passed were to be infected as uniformly as possible with the fatal poison.

To see the hunchback at his steering-wheel was a gruesome experience. As a rule he drove bare-headed, so that passers-by, startled by the sound of the motor, saw a

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car whiz past them driven, as it seemed to them, by the devil himself.

Hargon had only fourteen days' start, for the first cases of sickness occurred after this comparatively short space of time wherever he had planted a new focus of bacilli. He no longer troubled to read the details of each catastrophe. He only made hasty memoranda of the places where it was proved that the G-bacillus had taken effect, and with sinister satisfaction he noted how bloodshed and disaster followed in his wake. There was a wild singing in his brain day and night. He felt as if his body were racing against the car, which was carrying him farther and farther into France and thence into Spain.

Suddenly he turned back, dreading lest he might be held up on the way. One evening, after he had been studying his maps in the little French town of Bréo and had noted the distance he had so far travelled, he was overcome with fear that he might not be able to cover all the ground in time.

The news of the closing of the frontiers proved to him that his misgivings were justified. He had not originally contemplated difficulties of this nature. If he were unable to traverse freely all the national frontiers, he would no longer be in a position to expedite the dissemination of the G-bacillus.

After a wild night journey through Northern France, he succeeded in reaching the German frontier just before the new restrictions came into force.

Progress along the German highroads was extremely difficult. Again and again Hargon encountered the

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wrecks of what had once been elegant motor cars or little two-seaters; they had been abandoned by their owners, who were perhaps no longer among the living. Although Hargon immediately grasped the significance of these innumerable tokens of individual catastrophes, he was quite unmoved by the terrible tragedy represented by each of these shattered cars. He had only one thought: to reach Berlin in time, to get out his aeroplane, and with it to fly to America as rapidly as possible.

He wanted to chastise the whole world, not merely one country, one nation, one continent. Even when he was travelling at a speed of over sixty miles an hour, this seemed too slow in comparison with the burning unrest within him. His eyes glowed feverishly, his pulses beat faster. He felt as if a heavy load were weighing on his breast and hampering his breathing. Every minute of delay seemed a serious waste of time. All the while he dreaded lest he had forgotten something, lest he should arrive too late. From time to time, when the hum of his compressor, cleaving the air like a saw, testified to the terrific speed at which he was travelling, he gave vent to shrill cries, which died away unheard amid the furious roar of the motor, but echoed in his own ears.

Hargon avoided all conversation. It did not escape him that with each new place he reached the state of panic was increasingly evident. All the

people wore a bewildered expression. They stood about anxiously in the streets of the little towns, or, like distracted swarms of bees, they ran to and fro in utter confusion and senseless agitation without knowing where they belonged or what they had to do. Often Hargon was forced to go a very long way round because the roads were blocked, no one having

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troubled to clear away the overturned lorries or abandoned motor cars. Now and then he managed to steer his car through the fields and then back on to the high road. But often he had to turn round and take another route in order to make any progress at all.

So the journey to Berlin took him longer than he had anticipated. Although he allowed himself very little rest, it was not until the second evening after crossing the frontier that he approached Potsdam. Amazing! The whole city was in darkness. Thousands of people were in the streets but all wheeled traffic was suspended. The powerful headlights of his motor swept over the heads of people engaged in excited discussion who, startled by the sudden dazzling glare, stared at him as though he were a ghost. He sounded his horn without ceasing, for all the people were walking in the roadway and paid no heed to the fact that a car was approaching them. Many did not jump to one side until the car, which was proceeding at a walking pace, bumped against them.

Hargon saw the hopelessness of trying to reach the road to Berlin through the main thoroughfares. He turned off and went a long way round because he was afraid that the crowd might end by blocking his passage completely. Not until late at night did he reach Berlin, which presented the same picture as Potsdam. The streets were still thronged with people, who did not attempt to get out of his way, and, when he tried to drive on without heeding them, adopted a threatening attitude.

A little way beyond Halensee his car was completely surrounded. He could move neither forwards nor back-. wards. For a moment he contemplated forcing a passage through this wall of humanity, but he at once realised the

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futility of such an attempt. They would jump on to the steps of his car, drag him out and trample him to death.

He switched on his powerful head-lamp, whose light completely dazzled those standing in front of the car. Taking advantage of this moment of general confusion, he jumped out of his car, and, in a few seconds, was lost in the crowd. Then he hurried on foot to the flying-ground where he kept his aeroplane. He reached it in two hours. Out here complete quiet reigned. Now and then he met people walking past the high wire fence which enclosed the flying-ground, but they respected this barrier, which baffled all their attempts to enter the aerodrome.

Hargon had two weeks' start before the outbreak of the pestilence. He was dead tired, but he dared not take any rest. Every day, every hour was precious. In desperate haste he opened the doors of the hangar, in which his aeroplane, abundantly stocked with fuel, had been standing for several weeks. He cranked the motor without any difficulty and then let it run light for some time in order to warm it up before starting. Meanwhile he stowed into the machine all that he needed for his long flight—provisions, maps, and, above all, the test-tubes and dishes with the fatal G-bacillus cultures carefully packed in suit-cases.

He had intended to start before dawn. He switched on the powerful lamps which made the flying-ground as bright as day. In vain. There was no light. Evidently the electricity supply was cut off. A start in the dark would be doomed to failure; his machine was too heavily laden and would not rise rapidly enough from the ground. Trembling with excitement he was forced

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to wait for sunrise. His nerves were so overwrought that he could not sleep during the short interval before dawn broke. Restlessly he paced round the machine, examining it again and again to see if he had forgotten anything, until at length it was light enough for him to venture the start.

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XV

IN the cities life came to a standstill more rapidly than in the villages. In Berlin, the first great city upon which Hargon had brought destruction, the people rioted in a savage, reckless ebullition of sensual lust.

From the moment when, after Professor Keyl had succumbed to the disease and the pestilence was known to have spread to France, the whole medical commission had fled from Rathenweiler in the hope of saving themselves, the population had been seized with a veritable frenzy.

In a very short time all the technical services, which played so important a part in the life of the city, had ceased to operate. The first means of transport to be brought to a standstill was the underground railway. In the space of a few hours the break-downs were so numerous that hardly had the damage been repaired and the trains restarted in one place before fresh troubles were reported from other parts of the line.

On the same day there were numerous tramway collisions and accidents. A number of newspapers could no longer be printed because, owing to quite senseless manipulation and incomprehensible mistakes on the part of the staff, all the machinery was seriously damaged.

In the few newspapers which continued to appear an appeal from the Government was published which referred to the hourly-increasing dangers of the terrible

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pestilence and begged the public to co-operate in fighting against it. But to whom was the appeal addressed? More and more people were succumbing to the disease. Families were filled with despair or with a spirit of brutal self-defence. One watched the other suspiciously to see if his turn had come. The dread of contracting the disease became so intense that men fled from their wives as soon as their incoherent talk proved that they had already fallen victim to the pestilence. Parents ceased to trouble about their children, and drove them from their doors for fear of infection.

A large crowd marched plundering through the streets, and no one dared to resist them. In a few hours the provision shops in every quarter of the city had been looted. Then all the other shops shared the same fate. Anyone

who did not immediately submit to the frantic mob was ruthlessly struck down or shot.

The yells of the populace and the crashing of the broken glass only inflamed the frenzy of the rabble. Everything in the shops was smashed to pieces. Materials were torn to shreds and furniture was flung out into the streets. A mutual bombardment with eggs was conducted amid wild bursts of laughter.

Heavily laden with the most absurd objects the plunderers struggled homeward. Many were stopped on the way and robbed of their booty. Fierce scuffles ensued. The shops and the main business thoroughfares presented the aspect of a field of battle.

The confusion was intensified by the fact that the dislocation of all the public services was far more complete than if a general strike had been in progress. The supplies of gas, electricity and water had failed. There was no

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longer any means of transport. Of the police who went on duty in the morning only a fraction returned at midday. The rest had either joined the plunderers, discarding their uniforms and seizing any valuables they could lay their hands on, or they were already attacked by the disease.

A last attempt to quell these unexampled disorders was made by Colonel Bertram of the Police Department. He summoned the Reichswehr by telephone to Berlin. After a last appeal, from which all suspected of the disease were excluded, the attack was launched from two directions against the riotous mob in the Leipzigerstrasse. Armed with rubber truncheons the police advanced from the Spittelmarkt, while the soldiers, with fixed bayonets, marched to the attack from the Potsdamer Platz. But as thousands of people were collected in all the business houses, the clearing of the streets presented unforeseen difficulties. Stones were showered down from the roofs on the police and soldiers. Major Holten ordered his troops to fire at anyone who appeared on a roof. In order to drive the crowd from the Leipzigerstrasse it was swept by the fire of the machine-guns. Then some divisions tried to force their way into the houses and drag the people out.

The operation made only very slow progress. Some men and women rushed straight into the machine-gun fire as though demented, and then, struck by the bullets, collapsed in the middle of the road. Those who

followed them were not deterred by this, and they, too, fell victims to the bullets. The Leipzigerstrasse became a field of corpses.

When Major Holten saw that the attempts to gain possession of the street would only result in senseless

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butchery, he ordered the firing to be suspended. The soldiers erected a wide belt of *chevaux de frise*, so as to isolate the whole centre of the city, and anyone attempting to escape from the occupied area was arrested.

By this time it was evening, and Major Holten and Colonel Bertram decided to discontinue operations until the next morning. Large camp fires were lit to prevent the outbreak of fresh disorders under cover of night.

A few hours later a huge sheaf of flame lit up all the central part of the city. Obviously conflagrations had been started in several places. The fire alarm was given, but, instead of the fourteen fire brigades expected, only a few engines arrived, and these, although they entered the occupied area, were quite helpless against the destructive fury of the flames. The water pressure was far too slight to feed the hose pipes adequately, and the attempts to localise the fires were equally unsuccessful. The flames spread more and more rapidly.

Gruesome scenes were enacted in the business houses. Amid the glare of the conflagration the people rushed madly about the ruined buildings. They dashed into the streets and tried to escape, but there they encountered the police and the Reichswehr and were simply trampled underfoot.

The fire assumed more and more formidable dimensions. Huge clouds of smoke, driven by the wind, trailed over Berlin. The smell of burning, which had spread to every quarter of the town, told the already panic-stricken population that somewhere in the city a vast conflagration was raging.

Towards morning Major Holten was forced to order his troops to retire. The centre of the city was isolated

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for a considerable distance round. It was impossible to master the flames.

This gigantic fire resulted in a state of complete demoralisation. Hundreds of thousands of people snatched up as many of their possessions as they could carry and fled from their homes. Terrible family dramas were enacted. Anyone who was ill or helpless was left behind. A frenzied panic

seized upon all those unfortunates who were already suffering from the mysterious disease. A savage instinct of self-preservation led to frightful bloodshed and butchery.

The restaurants and places of entertainment on the outskirts of the city were thronged with people. All who did not take to flight tried to stupefy themselves in some way or other. People who could play musical instruments promptly formed themselves into voluntary orchestras, whose strains incited the crowds to frenzied caperings and savage orgies. In song and dance and fierce outbursts of sensual passion all sought forgetfulness of the terrible, incomprehensible horror which had descended upon them overnight and from which there seemed no escape.

Men and women who had been strangers a few moments before lay in each other's arms, lost to all sense of shame, and gave full rein to their lascivious desires; but in their eyes lurked a gleam of mistrust: was the love partner perhaps already infected by the disease? If anyone became aware of this suspicion, the discovery often overcame the last remnant of sanity. In paroxysms of hate, men strangled women even in the act of embracing them, because like plague victims, they were carriers of death.

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The strains of the music plunged them all into wildest ecstasy. Women seized upon men who took their fancy, kissed them with voluptuous ardour, and tearing the clothes from their bodies, offered themselves to their lovers-elect, who in their turn became inflamed with animal lust.

Almost all the restaurants presented the same picture. On the floors of the ball-rooms lay half-naked men and women, sleeping exhausted in each other's arms, or shouting obscene remarks to the dancers as they passed. Any alcoholic liquors that could be found were dragged off the shelves and out of the vaults. On the tables lay broken bottles and glasses. The floor was swimming in liquor. And again and again the appetites of the crowd were whetted anew by a music which had ceased to resemble anything human. Soon those who were not yet affected by the disease had ceased to be distinguishable from the rest; they behaved even more madly. And amid savage tumult and shouting the orgy continued, day and night.

More terrible even than those who were seeking oblivion in debauchery were those vampires who took advantage of the catastrophe to sate their greed of money and possessions. Dark figures slunk through the streets and, creeping up to the dead, tore the rings from their fingers or, if this took

too long, simply cut off their hands. They looked for shops in which there had been gold or jewels; even if these had already been plundered, they hoped to find something left.

These wretches did not realise that gold and jewels had become nothing else than a useless burden. They still hoped that in some other country or at some other time

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they might live in wealth and plenty by means of the treasures which they were accumulating. Untiringly they set out from their homes several times a day, carrying empty sacks into which they flung everything which seemed to them of value. Panting beneath the heavy burden, they sped back as fast as their feet could carry them, so as not to lose any time. Then, without waiting to rest, they dashed off again. Their rooms became crammed with enormous piles of loot. But their craving for gold and treasure brought upon them the same fate as that of King Midas, who starved miserably when he had obtained satisfaction of his wish that everything he laid his hand on should turn to gold, and food and drink were transformed into gleaming, lifeless metal. No less foolishly did these people hunt for glittering treasures—diamonds, pearls, gold and other jewels—instead of seeking what they needed most—food.

One of these had returned to his flat carrying a suit-case crammed with loot twenty-seven times in the course of a few days and had amassed riches such as the wealthiest millionaires had perhaps never possessed. But suddenly his expeditions ceased. He sat surrounded by gold and jewels, digging his hands into the piles of treasure and playing with rings, chains, and bracelets, like a child playing with pebbles. He liked hearing the metallic clang when the objects struck the ground. Then suddenly he tired of this play. He went out into the street and revelled in the beautiful autumn day, which afforded him a purely animal delight. He no longer knew that for days he had been greedily collecting vast treasures.

He, too, had been overtaken by the disease.

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But not all displayed brutal instincts which at their worst resulted in atrocious murders. Miracles of heroism, devotion and self-sacrifice were also accomplished. People fought desperately to save their families from houses attacked by the flames. At the risk of their lives they forced their

way into rooms where the fire was already raging and tried to drag out those who had almost abandoned hope. Others, who had already sustained serious injuries from the flames and the collapsing timbers, did not flinch from the danger of an agonising death; their longing to help their loved ones was stronger than their fear of a gruesome end.

Superhuman labours were performed by the staffs of the hospitals. When the pestilence broke out, numerous wards were cleared of patients in order to accommodate those who had lost their reason. Barracks were also erected to shelter the victims of the epidemic, but, owing to the accumulation of catastrophes, all these people, who were really in no need of medical attention, were discharged to make room for the seriously injured. Doctors, nurses and hospital attendants toiled day and night. There was no longer time to clean out the operating theatres. The surgeons, who waged this desperate struggle up to the very end, felt as though they were wading through a sea of blood.

The number of those still capable of rendering assistance diminished from day to day. Many doctors fell ill of the disease. The screams and wails of the seriously injured, who no longer received adequate attention, grew ever louder and shriller. The last remaining helpers, who were worked to death, were

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barely able to go to their aid for a moment and procure them some slight relief.

Those who remained at their posts to the end were so overwhelmed by the unspeakable misery and suffering which they were perpetually witnessing that their eyes had sunk deep into their sockets and their faces were ashy pale; they only performed their duties from a dull sense that they must go on helping. They had no time to ask each other whether this terrible massacre would ever come to an end. In any case it would have been useless, for who could have given them an answer? When they met one another after a few hours' sleep, they exchanged nods and the look in their eyes said: so you are here again to-day?

On the other hand, some of the doctors, nurses and assistants had long since fled. They were replaced by voluntary helpers, who quietly offered their services and, without asking for thanks, gave what aid they could to the unfortunate victims.

Berlin had become a mass of idle, frantic human beings, reeling towards the abyss and longing that they, too, might be attacked by a disease which would bestow upon them that most precious of all gifts—oblivion.

XVI

IN America the progress of events in Germany and the other European countries was being followed with increasing alarm. At first people had laughed at the absurd lies printed in the newspapers of the Old World; they were so fantastic that it seemed amazing that normal human beings should concoct and circulate such nonsense. The serious railway catastrophe, in which the whole of the Italian delegation had perished, was regarded as a political outrage. But then came news of fresh disasters which followed one another in such rapid succession as to suggest that either a powerful nihilist organisation was spreading terror through all Europe or that events were in progress the seriousness of which it was impossible to estimate.

Shipping between America and Europe soon began to languish. Only those who had urgent business in the other continent crossed the ocean. Commercial traffic, too, came to a standstill. On the European Stock Exchanges, in so far as they still functioned, prices fell precipitously and on a hitherto unprecedented scale, and this led to an acute slump in the New York money market. As in times of very serious economic crisis, all financial dealings were paralysed and the Stock Exchanges were closed.

The news from Europe read very much like bulletins from a theatre of war. *The Evening Post* published every

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day a map of Germany and the adjacent countries on which were marked all the places and districts where strange, inexplicable events were reported to have occurred.

The focus of the catastrophe was undoubtedly Germany, which had not only been the scene of the first sensational incidents, but was now the source whence streamed a flood of bad news. Phenomena similar to those in Germany had later occurred in France and Spain. Cases of loss of memory were also reported from the other European countries, although in them the pestilence did not spread as rapidly as in Germany.

Suddenly communication with a number of wireless stations became impossible. No replies could be got from Berlin, and attempts to get into touch with the city through other European stations were unsuccessful.

In all the countries of the world, in proportion as the news of these inexplicable happenings accumulated, the population became more and more uneasy. Itinerant preachers in mean attire wandered from place to place proclaiming that the end of the world was near, and gathered an enormous crowd of adherents. They inveighed against the luxury and self-seeking of men, upon whom God was now sending innumerable punishments from heaven.

“Commune with yourselves!” they shouted to the panic-stricken crowds. “Repent while there is yet time. God has given you a respite! Not until later will you be visited by the instruments of His justice! Forsake your corrupt ways of life. Before the moon has changed many times you will be faring just as they are faring in Europe.

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If you have allowed this brief space of time to slip away unused, God will have no mercy on you. Your repentance will be too late.”

At this period of growing anxiety many people began to preach with burning eloquence, and they believed their own words. They marched at the head of their followers, teaching them by example. They stripped the upper part of their bodies and scourged themselves before the eyes of a multitude inflamed with religious ecstasy.

The numbers of those who joined the itinerant preachers and travelled about the country in the guise of flagellants increased from day to day. In the cities the people laughed at first at these extravagances. Even in New York a modern Savonarola had arisen. The people tried to turn him to ridicule, and, when that failed, he was put in prison. Thereupon his disciples tried to take the building by storm, and were only driven away with difficulty. During the night the prisoner was secretly transferred elsewhere. When this news was conveyed to the deputation of his followers, who were demanding the immediate release of their leader, there were scenes of wild disorder.

Now no longer merely one preacher addressed the crowd; no, ten, twenty and even more appealed to them in words of burning eloquence not to break faith with their leader. They all begged to be imprisoned in his stead. Then, in spite of the press of motor traffic, they all fell upon their knees in Huxton Place and sang hymns which were only interrupted by intervals of prayer.

No one dared to molest the vast, misguided multitude. The huge square was closed to all traffic. Only towards

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night could the worshippers be driven away. But next morning they were at their posts again and the same spectacle was repeated.

The population of the cities for some time refused to yield to this frenzy. It was still hoped that some natural explanation of what was happening would be forthcoming. But secretly everyone was consumed with dread of what the next days might bring.

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XVII

INSTEAD of the two days he had reckoned upon, it took Hargon five days to reach New York, for he flew out of his course to Newfoundland, where he was obliged to make a forced landing. It was twenty-four hours before he secured the spare parts he required. In the meantime, instinctively apprehending danger, he hid the boxes containing the cultures in empty canisters. In reply to all inquiries as to the motive of his journey, he declared that he was making an expedition for purposes of scientific research to Canada and the Northern States. But first of all he wanted to make a stay in New York.

Already on Rocky Island he had been besieged with questions as to what was happening in Europe. He gave no information, declaring that he had been so absorbed in the preparations for his expedition that he had had no time at all for bothering about outside happenings, however distressing.

On the aerodrome outside New York the same scene was enacted, though on a larger scale. The arrival of a German scientist in an aeroplane created a veritable sensation. Besieged by reporters, whose questions told him almost more than he himself knew, Hargon was obliged to give as detailed information as possible.

They questioned him about the most incredible

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happenings. He could only keep on repeating: "No, I didn't notice that, it didn't occur with us." What he heard startled him and sent that rush of blood to his brain, of which he had so often been conscious since the day when he had first heard little Kurt give such strange answers to the school inspector's questions. So his work was making progress. Soon he would be ruler of the world. No one could resist him. He was stronger than all. If they did not love him, let them hate him.

In Hargon's honour a splendid reception was organised to which a distinguished company was invited. Although the guests endeavoured to conceal the disgust inspired in them by the scientist's appearance, Hargon was quite conscious of their suppressed repugnance and antipathy. He loathed this festive meeting. For a moment he was startled to find that he experienced none of the malicious joy and contempt which had filled him

only a short time before in a similar situation. But a few seconds later this was forgotten, and he listened greedily to the questions of the guests, who besieged him with entreaties to tell them what was really happening in Germany and other countries.

By means of astute answers to their questions, Hargon elicited more and more details concerning the recent catastrophes. His whole body was in a fever of excitement. His ear was like a palate that craves delicious food and is satisfied beyond all expectations. His hands were trembling so violently that he could not even hold his glass without spilling the contents. To the guests who noticed this excitement he declared that it was due to fatigue and to his horror at what they were telling him.

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For a moment the conversation was interrupted. But very-soon it was resumed and everyone had some special item of information to contribute.

So before Hargon's eyes there was conjured up a picture of all the things which were happening in Germany and the rest of Europe and which it was feared might spread to the New World. It was not until a late hour of the evening that he could retire to rest. He paced feverishly up and down the room. It seemed to him as if his body might burst at any moment. He felt strong enough to match himself against a giant

But in the night he hurried out of the hotel and raced to the aerodrome in his motor car. To the astonished watchmen he explained that he must overhaul the motor once more. If anything was not in order it must be repaired immediately, because he was going to continue his flight at midday.

The aeroplane was fetched out on to the flying-ground. Hargon got inside. He let the motors run warm. Then he told the attendants to take away the clogs from the wheels, as he wanted to turn round, but instead of turning round he made an attempt to start, which succeeded the very first time. Five minutes later the aeroplane was out of sight.

This unusual behaviour on the part of the German scientist excited the utmost amazement next morning, when a representative of the mayor called to welcome him. But who had time or inclination to worry about a German aviator? Everyone was weighed down with other cares.

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No one suspected that in the aeroplane was seated the man who was spreading death, destruction and disaster over the world. At a terrific speed Hargon flew right across America in order to scatter his bacteria cultures over all the principal centres of population.

XVIII

IN the spacious lounge of the *Deutschland* the hum of conversation subsided for a moment as Commodore Fahrenkamp entered the room accompanied by two officers. All the passengers gazed anxiously at the captain, who, in the opinion of the six thousand people who were trying to escape on the huge vessel, bore the sole responsibility for their safety. From a corner someone called out: "Good morning, Captain. Has the permission to land been received from New York yet?"

With a grave face Fahrenkamp waved aside the passengers who were hurrying towards him.

"They are still negotiating," he said with a shrug of the shoulders, "but I hope that all who are in a satisfactory state of health will be allowed to land after a brief detention in quarantine."

Not far from the grand piano in the spacious reading-room were seated Herr Braspenning and Consul Röder.

"Just see how affably he speaks to them all," said Braspenning softly. "Yet all the time he's spying round to see if anyone is infected."

"Do you know how many cases there are already?"

"I have no idea. A little while ago I went for a walk on the D deck and after that I passed what used to be the third-class inside cabins. The door of 716 was only ajar and inside I heard a young girl sobbing violently. I knocked at the door, but the girl paid no attention. She

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was so absorbed in her grief that she heard nothing. I was just about to call the steward when the child realised that someone was there. She started up, rushed to the door and screamed before she reached it: 'Bring back my mother!'

"I recoiled in horror. As you may imagine, I thought the girl had gone out of her mind, but when she saw me, she sobbed still more violently, fell at my feet and implored me to help her. I tried to calm her and to persuade her to pull herself together. After about a quarter of an hour she told me that she had been roused in the night by her mother.

" 'She sat down by my bed and began to sing a most extraordinary song. At first she only hummed the melody, then I thought I could make out a

few words, but they were strange unfamiliar sounds. I felt terribly frightened. I turned on the light. When I cried "Mother, what's the matter with you?" she fondled me, but I couldn't get a word of sense out of her. Then in my anxiety I ran to the steward and asked him to send a doctor at once. Alas for me! I had pronounced my mother's death sentence. The steward looked at me very strangely when I told him that my mother was not well. Then a ship's officer came up. He introduced himself to me and when I asked: "Are you the doctor?" he answered curtly: "I'll take your mother to the doctor."

" 'He told her to come with him, but she didn't understand. He said to me: "Tell your mother to come with me." "But she doesn't understand me either," I answered despairingly. Then they told me to leave the cabin. I refused, because I was anxious about my mother. They pulled me out by force, holding a handkerchief

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over my mouth to stifle my cries, and dragged me away. A quarter of an hour later they brought me back to the cabin. My mother was no longer there. I rang for the steward and asked him to take me to the captain at once. Then he looked round nervously and whispered to me: "Be quiet, little lady. Your mother will not come to any harm, but if you make a fuss, you'll be put with the sick people too, and then you'll have no chance of leaving the ship." I saw that he was sorry for me, and I implored him to let me visit my mother at any rate for a few minutes. He answered impatiently: "No one who visits the sick people is let out again. I appeal to you in your own interests to hold your tongue. When we are once in New York, you will be better able to help your mother than here on the ship. You certainly won't get any help from the captain." '

"You can imagine," continued Braspenning in an agitated tone, "how upset I was. But we are utterly helpless here. Under martial law they can do what they like with us."

Consul Röder looked round anxiously.

"Well, it's no use worrying," he said. "I, too, have noticed a number of things. Do you know that we are already at least two days behind time? Yesterday I passed two officers who were talking very excitedly. When they saw me, they stopped speaking. That aroused my suspicions, and I walked to the ship's side, opened a window and pretended to be looking out. They resumed their conversation in a whisper. I closed the window

cautiously and was able to glean a few fragments of the discussion. One of them said: 'If these troubles with the engines continue, it'll be a fortnight before we reach New York.'

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"To which the other replied: 'Don't exaggerate. We haven't lost thirty hours yet. Even if we are making less way, we can be in New York in three to four days at latest.' "

Braspenning, who was of an impulsive temperament, exclaimed indignantly:

"I can't understand the sense of all this mystification. Why can't they tell us that we're going more slowly. We ought to have been in New York by to-morrow afternoon, and now apparently we shan't arrive for another three days."

He had spoken so loudly that a few passengers seated near caught what was said. A look of sudden horror came into their faces. The terrible experiences of the last few days, the mysterious disappearance of passengers with whom one had been seated at the luncheon table only a short time before, and the stern regulations of the officers in charge of the ship, had aggravated the general nervousness to the utmost. Moreover they had not yet shaken off the gruesome recollection of the events connected with the departure of the *Deutschland*.

For days a bitter struggle had been waged for all the berths on the vessel. Hundreds of thousands from Bremen and the neighbouring towns alone had tried to escape on the ship from Germany. From all parts of the country families had motored to Bremerhaven in the hope of leaving their native land by some vessel or other. The fugitives had camped day and night in front of the travel bureaux and the offices of the shipping companies, so as to be among those who secured cabins. Fantastic prices were offered, but even higher sums were paid in order to bribe officials to reserve a ticket. The shipping company

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was unable to cope with the enormous crowds of applicants, and it seemed doubtful whether it would be possible for the *Deutschland* to put to sea. Although in Bremerhaven at first comparatively few persons were attacked by the pestilence, which was already doing terrible havoc in other parts of the country, some of the sailors were missing every day. To judge by the

last reports from the districts especially affected it seemed that the disease, when it once appeared, claimed more and more victims at a rapid rate.

An extraordinary meeting of all the directors was held. Only with difficulty did General Director Henning succeed in averting a panic. In burning words he appealed to the sense of duty of his hearers:

“We who are responsible for German shipping must stick to our posts. Above all we must not lose our heads. The captain is the last to desert his ship. I propose that we take as many persons on the *Deutschland* as is consistent with the safety of passengers and crew.”

It was decided unanimously that all class distinctions should be abolished and that the cabins should be occupied by as many persons as could be got into them. Anyone who was not prepared to sacrifice his comfort would have to stay at home. Part of the freight space was also arranged to accommodate passengers, so that instead of 2,500, the *Deutschland* was able to carry 6,000 persons—an infinitesimal number in comparison with the multitude of those who wanted to travel. Anyone who had the good fortune to secure a berth was envied and hated by the rest.

On the day before the departure General Director Henning had a private conversation with Commodore

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Fahrenkamp, the captain of the *Deutschland*. What was said never became public, but next day the passengers learnt that the *Deutschland* was to be under martial law for the duration of the journey.

All access to the Columbus Quay was barred for some distance round. A medical commission was installed in the station buildings. All the crew, engineers and ship's officers had first to be passed by this commission. What tragedies were enacted here the ship's doctors afterwards recounted in whispers.

Commodore Fahrenkamp wanted to take his wife with him to America. He was one of the first to be examined. The doctors were prepared to dispense with this formality, but he insisted emphatically that no exception should be made in his favour. After the examination, Dr. Xavier had remarked with a smile:

“Well, Commodore, you'll certainly live to be eighty!”

“Thank you very much,” he had answered jestingly. “I hope I shall be in good company.”

Shortly after, amid the greatest consternation, a pause was made in the examinations. The Commodore had already gone on board. Suddenly he was fetched back.

“Well, what’s the matter? I’ve got plenty to do still.”

“Commodore, you must come at once,” said the third officer.

He did not dare to tell the captain the truth. Frau Fahrenkamp had been the first to be rejected. She had exchanged a few friendly words with Dr. Xavier, who was a frequent visitor at her house. When he asked her whether she had any news of her brother-in-law, Otto, who lived in Munich, she answered:

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“The hyacinths will bloom again.”

“But, *gnädige Frau*, why do you say that?”

She laughed, as though amused at the doctor’s serious tone. Dr. Xavier beckoned up his assistant and whispered a few words in his ear. The assistant led Frau Fahrenkamp to one side.

When Commodore Fahrenkamp entered the room, Dr. Xavier hurried up to him.

“Commodore, come outside with me,” he said, “I have to tell you some bad news.”

He drew him into a little room and told him that his wife was already attacked by the disease.

Fahrenkamp protested excitedly.

“There must be some mistake. Only yesterday I made all the preparations for the journey with her. It is simply impossible.”

“Commodore, we doctors are confronted with a riddle. We don’t even know the source of the disease. It is suddenly there. Which of us who come in contact with the sick may not already be doomed?”

Dr. Xavier proposed to Fahrenkamp that a cabin should be reserved on the ship for his wife. He would examine her again. No one must come in contact with her. He also promised the Commodore not to tell anyone what had happened.

Fahrenkamp was horror-stricken. After a few moments’ consideration he curtly refused Dr. Xavier’s offer:

“What are you thinking of? Am I to be the first to offend against strict orders? A fine example for a captain to give! No, there is nothing to be done. My wife must stay behind.”

Fahrenkamp went down and fetched his wife. With a radiant face she let him take her arm and only smiled when he spoke to her. He asked her one question after another, but in vain. She understood nothing, not even that he was taking leave of her.

"I shall come back," he whispered softly in her ear, and was heart-broken that she no longer understood even these words of consolation.

A taxi was sent for, and Fahrenkamp told the man to take his wife to the Bethany Hospital; he would fetch her away after his return from America.

Fahrenkamp's face was set and stern as he boarded the ship. He listened unmoved to the weeping and wailing of passengers whose relations had been refused permission to accompany them. They could at least voice their suffering. What would have been their horror had they known that he too had already been touched by the hand of fate?

Six thousand passengers and a crew of 1,200 had been fixed as the maximum number to travel with the *Deutschland*. Eighty-eight passengers and seventeen members of the crew were rejected. Behind the barricades thousands had collected, who tried to force their way to the ship. The police and the shipping company officials kept back the crowd by ruthless exercise of force. On being told that another 105 persons could travel, Commodore Fahrenkamp gave orders for the eighty-eight passengers and seventeen members of the crew to be selected without delay.

This news raised the excitement of those waiting outside to a feverish pitch. They all pressed to the front. In vain did the sailors try to clear a narrow passage for those

who were still to come on board. Suddenly the vast crowd broke through the ranks of the sailors and police. At headlong speed they rushed towards the quay. Only for a short time could they be held back at the closed gates of the station.

The last passengers and the seventeen members of the crew were hurriedly selected, but the situation was already out of control. Soon the station buildings would be stormed, and who could say how much longer it would be possible to maintain discipline among the staff?

Two gangways were drawn up and the hatches closed. The last passengers rushed to the foremost gangway. They numbered more than

eighty-eight, but as they had come through the medical examination rooms they were not turned back. Louder and louder came the roar of the crowd, which was launching a fresh attack on the station buildings. No one was allowed to see off any of the passengers. The quay was deserted. Only a few sailors were awaiting the word of command to loosen the ropes and draw in the third gangway.

Commodore Fahrenkamp was watching the last passengers go on deck, when suddenly he saw a mass of people rushing on to the quay. "Make haste!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

The last passengers were hurrying on board as the new-comers approached. Now there was not a second to be lost. Not another person must be allowed on the ship; otherwise all their precautions would have been to no purpose.

The siren hooted loudly. Around the last gangway, which was being drawn away, a struggle ensued between

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the sailors and those who saw the possibility of escape so close at hand. They tried to hold the gangway fast, but the crew of the *Deutschland* thrust it back. The hatches were closed. More hoots. The ropes on the quay were loosened.

This proceeding was greeted with frantic screams by the ever-growing crowd. The officials on the quay realised that the danger of the ship not being able to get away was now immeasurably increased. In order to make it possible to loosen the steel hawsers the police attacked the crowd at the threatened points, and, after a savage struggle, the hawsers were loosened. Some of the crowd clung to them in desperation and were thrown violently against the side of the ship. The hawser slid from their helpless hands and they fell heavily into the water.

Almost imperceptibly to the eye but a little farther every second the *Deutschland* drew away from the quay. There was none of the singing which ordinarily accompanies a ship's departure. The shouts of horror and dismay which went up from the crowd as they saw the disappearance of their last hope of escape mingled with the wails of many passengers who felt as if they were journeying to their death. Some of those on the quay plunged recklessly into the water and tried to swim after the ship. They hoped that perhaps someone on board would throw them out a rope, but not a hand was stretched out to help them.

Like a heap of startled ants those left on shore ran along by the side of the ship, shouting savage curses at those who had had the good fortune to escape.

Pale with horror the passengers and a part of the crew watched the wild antics of the wellnigh demented crowd.

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But the *Deutschland* steamed on inexorably. The terrible quay was soon left behind. The long station looked smaller and smaller, and soon it was no longer possible to distinguish the individual figures.

The passengers threw embarrassed glances at one another. They felt almost ashamed of being among the saved. The terrible memory of the departure weighed like a nightmare upon everyone, but almost all were at the same time engrossed with their private troubles.

Many of them, who had sacrificed a fortune in order to escape on the ship, were indignant during the first few days because they did not find the comfort which they had expected. But the first person to voice his resentment met with such a fierce rebuke that no one else ventured to complain.

Soon the passengers were tormented by new cares. No one knew how the rumour first started that America would not allow them to land, but on the second day of the journey it was already being widely discussed. Then began the strange disappearance of the passengers, and it was even whispered that they were not interned, but thrown overboard.

To all who were tempted to despair Commodore Fahrenkamp set an example of calm and unswerving attention to duty. He refused emphatically to answer any questions relating to the progress of the vessel. Nor were the officers allowed to give any information. At length the passengers resigned themselves to their fate.

Braspenning's suggestion that the *Deutschland* was making too little way had the effect of a bombshell. The

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crew were besieged with inquiries, and not all of them were as reticent as the officers. Many of them had noticed for some time that the ship's progress was less rapid than at first, and they suggested that perhaps some of the boilers were not working. Was that merely some technical trouble?

the passengers asked. The crew had not been told anything either, answered the men, but probably that was all it was. At any rate, the ship was still making way.

“The ship is still making way!” screamed Fräulein Bartenfeld, the film actress, laughing hysterically. “The ship is still making way!” she repeated and then she began to sob convulsively.

Shortly before dinner a discussion took place between the Commodore and the principal officers in the chart-house. In a few words the captain told his colleagues that they were only making fifteen knots an hour. During the last few days some of the crew had shown symptoms of acute loss of memory. The sick men had immediately been relieved of their duties, but some of them had already done serious damage to the machinery by senseless manipulation.

“... It is impossible to set a watch on every member of the crew to see that nothing goes wrong. I will not detain you now with an enumeration of all that has happened, but we can only travel at half-speed. I think it best to let the passengers know what has occurred. Further I must tell you that our urgent telegrams to New York have not yet elicited any answer.”

Sailors are not in the habit of wasting words. They resign themselves to an existing situation. The officers proceeded to discuss what measures should be taken to

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husband the food supplies. Then Commodore Fahrenkamp drafted a brief notice, which was posted up on all the decks.

“In consequence of slight damage to the machinery, the *Deutschland* is unable to maintain the prescribed speed. There is no cause for alarm, but it is expected that the ship will arrive in New York a good deal behind time. For this reason I am under the necessity of rationing the food supplies. We trust that passengers will bear in mind the exceptional circumstances and resign themselves to the inevitable.”

COMMODORE FAHRENKAMP.

In spite of an outward appearance of calm the captain of the ship looked forward to the coming days and hours with very great anxiety. In the course of over forty years' service Fahrenkamp had quite realised that the progress

of a vessel may be impeded by forces of an altogether unprecedented nature. Where should he begin? What measures should he take to guarantee the safety of the thousands of lives entrusted to his care, when without any warning his best hands suddenly lost their reason and did serious damage by absolutely criminal mishandling of the machinery? What effect could threats of severe punishment have on men who were completely crazy?

Racked by a terrible uneasiness, Fahrenkamp did not retire to his cabin that night, but spent the time making long, repeated tours of inspection.

At two o'clock, just as he was at the wireless station, suddenly one of the ship's engineers came running up in a state of great excitement and told him that the rudder

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machinery was so seriously damaged that it had become quite impossible to steer the ship.

Fahrenkamp could not believe his ears.

"Have you lost your wits, man? What fairy tales are you telling me?"

"Captain, for God's sake, come at once! We are turning round in a circle!"

Fahrenkamp gazed at the engineer incredulously. Then he rushed out of the wireless station. One glance overboard convinced him that the ship was already at a standstill. He hurried to the stern, climbed down to the rudder machinery and found already assembled there a large number of engineers, who were discussing in agitated tones the probable cause of the serious break-down.

When Commodore Fahrenkamp appeared, Berger, the chief engineer, reported to him: "It's quite impossible to make a short job of the repairs. They will take at least ten to twelve hours, and even then it is doubtful whether the damaged parts of the machinery can be replaced quite satisfactorily."

In vain did Fahrenkamp try to discover how the catastrophe had occurred. Nobody knew.

"Then we must just steer with the screws!"

Brief instructions were given, and a section of the engineers set to work immediately to repair the damaged rudder. Commodore Fahrenkamp himself took charge of the steering of the ship. There was no question of his leaving the bridge again that night.

The *Deutschland* had got out of her course, and a good deal of manœuvring was needed to get her back into it again.

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Before the majority of the passengers had any inkling of this new catastrophe, the engines which were still intact were working at full pressure. Fahrenkamp had given orders that all the crew were to be on duty that night and that there were to be two men at each post. The engineers were ordered to keep watch on each other. It was impossible, however, to put these measures into full effect, because some of the crew were already sick, and a large number of the engineers were working feverishly to get the rudder machinery into working order again.

Dawn was already breaking. Considering the serious difficulties which had to be coped with, the *Deutschland* had made fairly good progress.

Suddenly, as a result of the irregular working of the rudder machinery, one of the two port axles broke.

The news of this fresh disaster had a terribly demoralising effect. A portion of the crew had now been working for eighteen hours without intermission. They had all exerted themselves to the utmost to save the ship, the passengers and themselves. Many had performed superhuman labours. And yet for some inexplicable reason this new catastrophe had occurred. Commodore Fahrenkamp immediately handed over his post to Captain Leeser, while he rushed down to see how the rudder was getting on. Shortly before he reached the engine-room, there was a loud crash. He heard screams and two men rushed towards him with horror-stricken faces.

The attempt to couple the quadrant had failed, with the result that the quadrant had flown back and seriously injured the engineers, Kersten, Malius, Krüger II and Burgun. They had notified the ambulance staff and with

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great difficulty had succeeded in dragging out the injured men from beneath the quadrant, which was swinging to and fro.

Commodore Fahrenkamp gave orders for the work to be suspended immediately. All the chief engineers had been injured, and he was afraid that the others would do more harm than good.

This blow, too, the captain endured with composure, but he knew now that, if no help came from outside, they were lost. The next few hours

might easily bring further mishaps, which would make the navigation of the ship quite impossible.

After half an hour's waiting he learnt that it was as he had immediately feared: there was no hope of a speedy convalescence of the principal engineers. This meant that the rudder machinery could not be repaired. Fahrenkamp sent for the purser. They had over 7,000 people on board—that is to say, more than double the ordinary maximum number, and, in view of the difficulty of steering and of the fact that the speed had diminished to a few knots an hour, there was no possibility of the food supplies holding out until they reached New York. A careful determination of their position showed that they were about 1,000 sea miles from New York.

Under these circumstances the Commodore decided in desperation to summon help from New York. One telegram after another was sent off, and the *Deutschland* begged more and more urgently for the immediate dispatch of hydroplanes with expert engineers who could replace the injured officers and repair the damage.

These appeals did not meet with a definite refusal, but neither did they evoke any promise to comply with

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Fahrenkamp's request. Quite absurd questions were asked, and it was obvious that the Americans were purposely pursuing tactics of delay, because they could not finally make up their minds to dispatch the engineers.

While the Commodore, surrounded by the wireless operators, was anxiously awaiting the answer which spelt life or death, various conversations took place in the White House between the Senators and the President of the United States. A violent dispute was also waged at the Naval Board.

The example of France, who had closed her frontiers against all immigration, did not fail of its effect on the Americans. They too were disposed to put a ban on any invasion from Europe. Who could say how many of the passengers unwittingly carried within them the germ of the disease, and were consequently a source of danger to the whole country?

"Don't allow the *Deutschland* to approach our shores," demanded Senator Brush in excited tones. "Our first consideration must be the safety

of the American citizen, even if seven thousand human lives have to be sacrificed.”

The President had scruples connected with foreign policy. His attitude would not be understood in Germany, and a serious diplomatic conflict might ensue. Under present circumstances that must be avoided at all costs.

Senator Brush opposed all these arguments with the vehemence of a man of advanced years who cannot tolerate any disagreement with his own views.

“Who in Germany would resent our attitude? What

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do you propose that we shall do with these people? How can it lead to political conflicts when there is no longer either Government or subjects?”

But while the discussions were still being pursued in the White House, at the Naval Board the die had already been cast. In the teeth of a strong opposition, Admiral Roosebloom decided to send several aeroplanes to the aid of the *Deutschland* at once.

“The honour of the American Navy demands that we should not leave shipwrecked men in the lurch. What is to happen to these people when they are once here is not for me to decide. But we will not incur the reproach of having failed to do our utmost to avert the catastrophe.”

It was proposed to send out battleships to meet the *Deutschland*, but these would not be able to reach the unfortunate ship before one and a half days at earliest. Meanwhile, the appeals from the *Deutschland* became more and more urgent and desperate.

“Large numbers of the crew are ill. We are only travelling at a quarter speed
Stop Unavoidable in view of the more and more serious damage to the machinery
Stop Danger of catastrophe continues Stop The *Deutschland* is little more than a
drifting wreck.”

At the same time the *Deutschland* sent out SOS messages. These were picked up by a number of ships, but before altering their course they inquired what had happened. Fahrenkamp did not dare to withhold the truth. He answered: “Spread of the mysterious pestilence among the crew. Ship no longer navigable.”

Thereupon the other ships were silent for a time and then came embarrassed answers such as: “In the

interests of own crew and own passengers help impossible.”

The *Deutschland* was avoided like a ship with plague victims on board.

This news decided Admiral Roosebloom, especially as, on application to the White House, the answer was: “We are still debating.”

At 5 a.m. Roosebloom appealed to the Naval Flying Corps for volunteers. At 8 p.m. the squadron was already formed. At 8.15 p.m. the *Deutschland* was notified that a squadron of sixteen aeroplanes carrying engineers and expert mechanics was being despatched:

“Starting 9.15 p.m. Maintain constant wireless communication.”

After twelve hours’ waiting for a decision from New York Commodore Fahrenkamp left the wireless station in a stooping posture. The prevailing mood on board was one of dull despair. The *Deutschland* had only travelled six sea miles since morning. The officers who tried to reassure the passengers no longer inspired any confidence. To the repeated inquiries why other ships did not come to the rescue, they only returned embarrassed and evasive answers.

Towards evening the despair reached its climax.

The one-time *de luxe* Cabin No. 17 was occupied by Fräulein Bartenfeld, the film actress, her parents and her brother. Distraught with terror that they would perish with the ship, she had been sobbing and screaming for several hours. All the occupants had fled from the adjacent cabins because they could not endure the sound

of her lamentations. At length the steward, in the name of those passengers who wanted to go back to their berths, begged the parents to calm their daughter. The actress lay whimpering on the sofa and had not seen the man enter. Suddenly she began to listen. A look of frantic terror came into her eyes as she recognised the steward, and he too started when he saw her. That woman is mad already, he thought, and was about to leave the cabin, but at that moment the actress flung herself upon him, shrieking so that she could be heard for away:

“I’m not mad yet, you murderer! Do you want to take me away, too? No, I’m not mad! Have pity on me! I don’t want to die yet, I’m so young!”

The steward tried to pacify the frenzied girl, but she paid no heed to his words. When he attempted to leave the room she clung fast to his coat, and he tried in vain to shake her off; with every step he dragged her along the floor. At length there was nothing for him to do but to wrench himself free by force, and she fell to the ground. But before he could get outside, she had leapt to her feet and had reached the door first. With lightning speed she turned the key in the lock and hurled it out of the cabin window.

“Now stay here!” she shouted at him. “You want to throw me overboard like all the others who have disappeared!”

The parents had looked on at this scene paralysed with horror. Now they attempted to reason with their daughter, and it seemed as if she were pacified by the sound of their familiar voices. They helped her to the bed, where she sank down helplessly. But just as the

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mother was fetching a glass of water and the father had gone up to the steward to make his apologies, she was seized with a fresh paroxysm of terror and wrenched open the drawer of the bedside table, in which she had concealed a loaded revolver. It all happened too quickly for intervention to be possible. The actress fired several shots in succession at the steward, at her father, and at her mother, who had tried to rush towards her.

“I want to make an end of it!” she screamed in a theatrical tone, as though she were playing a great scene on the stage.

“I want to make an end of you, of myself, of everything! Why should we go on living and endure the final horror!”

The door of the cabin was forced open from outside. The corridor was crowded with people who had rushed up in alarm. A terrible picture presented itself to the eyes of those who entered.

The actress had shot her parents dead. The steward only gave faint signs of life. She herself lay bleeding and unconscious on the bed. She had tried to kill herself by a shot through the temples, but the bullet had swerved and destroyed both eyes.

The actress and the steward were conveyed to the sick room, but the steward expired before he reached it. The actress was blinded.

This triple murder excited the passengers to such a degree that they rose in open rebellion against the ship’s officers. Everyone shouted for the Commodore, who had not been seen for some hours. The passengers hastily armed themselves with any objects they could lay their hands on.

When Fahrenkamp arrived, no one recognised him at first. In the twelve hours of waiting his hair had turned snow-white, and his upright figure had become bent like that of an old man. When the Commodore saw what was happening on deck, he made a sign that he wanted to speak. Now a number of people recognised him, and they greeted him with menacing shouts. He waved them aside and announced that a telegram had just been received from New York to say that sixteen hydroplanes bringing naval officers and men were on the way to the *Deutschland*.

No one went to bed that night. Everyone was listening for the hum of the motors, as though the hydroplanes could accomplish miracles of speed.

Through the silent crowd there still passed the “ship’s executioners,” as they were called, looking for those who had newly succumbed to the disease. The passengers observed with horror the work of the doctor and his assistants. All had resolved not to speak a word to them, in order not to betray themselves if their turn had really come. But almost all the sick were discovered, because they reacted immediately when spoken to, and always in the same way. At first they listened uncomprehendingly as though hearing some strange, unfamiliar sounds. Then they opened their mouths, but hardly one rational sentence crossed their lips. They murmured something, which was generally unintelligible, and—a sure sign that they had contracted the disease—they made no resistance when they were led away.

“They run like sheep to the slaughter,” whispered

Consul Röder to Braspenning. “If the doctor tried to take me, I’d knock him down.”

“Come, come! Nothing happens to them!” said Braspenning soothingly. “They are only isolated.”

“Didn’t you hear Frau Schwalm say how she went on her knees to the doctor and implored him to let her go to her daughter who was taken away yesterday? He refused.”

“No, it wasn’t quite like that,” said Braspenning. “I spoke to the doctor afterwards. Frau Schwalm could have visited her daughter, but only on condition that she stayed with her. Then she started screaming about the

brutality of separating a mother from her child. But she didn't visit her daughter."

"You may say what you like," insisted Consul Röder, "but I believe that they simply do away with a large number of the patients, especially now that the food supplies are so short. It means so many mouths the less. In any case they shan't get me alive."

At 4 a.m. Consul Röder was led by the doctor to an isolation cabin without making any resistance.

All through the night the wireless station of the *Deutschland* kept in touch with the air squadron, so that the latter had no difficulty in finding the position of the huge ship. At half-past six in the morning the sound of motors told the passengers that deliverance was at hand.

The airmen were welcomed with indescribable jubilation.

Men and women wept for joy at the arrival of the heroes who, despite official warnings, had dared to stake

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their lives in order to save their fellow men who were drifting helplessly on the ocean.

Motor boats put out from the *Deutschland* and hurried towards the hydroplanes. Within an hour, ten engineers and thirty sailors, all wearing gas-masks, had been taken on board. They also brought with them the urgently needed spare parts for repairing the quadrant.

Four hours later the steering machinery of the *Deutschland* was in good order. Amid shouts of joy from the passengers she hurried at a speed of thirty sea miles an hour towards the harbour of New York, which was visible after thirty hours' journey.

In the last few days the number of sick on board had increased to an alarming extent. The head physician himself could no longer attend to his duties and was among the patients. Over 1,500 passengers, over 200 of the crew and forty-seven officers and engineers, were accommodated in the cabins of the E and F decks, where they were completely isolated.

All the other passengers were to experience a terrible disappointment. A number of American torpedo-boat destroyers approached and encircled the *Deutschland*. At the same time the captain was ordered not to enter the harbour, but to disembark the passengers in boats. They were transferred to

specially chartered steamers and immediately conveyed to Ellis Island, where a quarantine station had been set up for all the occupants of the German vessel.

A Government decree forbade anyone to leave the quarantine station until after a three days' probation

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period. The sick were housed in special isolated barracks. A large number of American doctors had arrived, who performed their duties protected by gas-masks. With unspeakable horror they surveyed this crowd of over 1,500 human beings, who had entirely lost their memory.

Only two persons had been given permission to proceed to Washington immediately, namely, Commodore Fahrenkamp and the first officer. During the night they were conveyed in closed cars to the German Embassy where they were received by the German *chargé d'affaires*. The three men immediately engaged in a discussion. Fahrenkamp gave a brief account of his experiences and of the terrible events of the journey. His report culminated in the sentence:

"Unfortunately, I no longer have any doubt that all of us who were on the ship will succumb to the disease."

"You, too?" asked Herr von Klinkhammer, the German Ambassador, in horror.

"I, too," answered Fahrenkamp gravely, thinking of his wife, who was lying in the Bethany Hospital and of whose condition he had no news.

Von Klinkhammer cleared his throat in order to overcome his embarrassment.

"You will have a hard tussle to wage with Senator Brush to-morrow. He wants you to take all the passengers back to Germany."

At that Fahrenkamp laughed for the first time in ten days. But the laugh sounded so crazy that his two companions gazed at one another in consternation.

"Take them back to Germany? Do you imagine that I could get the ship further than 1,000 sea miles from here?"

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Then they can all drown like rats. That will at any rate be quicker."

"Please explain that to Senator Brush to-morrow," said Herr von Klinkhammer. "It's really terrible."

The two chief officers of the German ship, who had hardly been out of their clothes for days, slept until the following morning. At eleven o'clock they drove with the German Ambassador to the White House, where the interview with Senator Brush was to take place. Commodore Fahrenkamp spoke English fluently, and asked that the services of an interpreter should be dispensed with.

It was over half an hour before the three men were admitted to the presence of Senator Brush. In a state of extreme nervousness they walked silently up and down the large, comfortably-furnished ante-room, awaiting their summons. At length they found themselves confronting Senator Brush. Herr von Klinkhammer introduced Commodore Fahrenkamp and the first officer, Herr von Bondy. The captain took a step towards the senator and was about to put out his hand, when suddenly he halted with a puzzled air. He staggered slightly, clutched his head and began to whistle a plaintive air.

The others were speechless, and Herr von Klinkhammer tried to save the situation with a jest, to which, however, the senator paid no attention.

"You seem very cheerful, Captain Fahrenkamp," he said, "but I fancy we have something more important to do than to listen to sailors' songs."

Fahrenkamp was not in the least taken aback. He sang the song to the end; then he said, like a schoolboy who has been asked to recite a poem:

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"Our home is the ocean, our grave is the deep... And after that he murmured something quite unintelligible.

"Captain!" exclaimed Herr von Bondy. "For God's sake, what's the matter with you?"

But the old man only smiled, as though the things of this world no longer concerned him.

At an extraordinary session the Senate decided that none of the passengers, ill or well, should be allowed to leave Ellis Island. At the same time wireless messages were dispatched to all ships on their way to America from Germany and other European states, warning them that henceforward all journeys to and landings in America were forbidden. Ships which were short of food would, as far as possible, be supplied with provisions by means of aeroplanes.

The warning in many cases came too late. True, a number of ships reversed their course in obedience to this strict injunction, but others sent word that they were drifting about the ocean and could not be steered. Similar incidents to those which had occurred on the *Deutschland* were reported.

For hours the SOS appeals from the ether seemed to shriek into the very heart of New York, but after his alarming experience, Senator Brush strongly opposed any proposals to render assistance. Everything must be done to prevent the spread of the disease to the United States. Were millions to be sacrificed for the sake of saving a few thousand lives? It was a case of self-preservation or of utter ruin.

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No one dared to contradict these arguments, which were based on a pious conviction. While New York and America maintained a completely passive attitude, terrible tragedies were being enacted on the ships, which drifted helplessly over the ocean like coffins filled with living men, until they had the good fortune to sink or run aground.

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XIX

THIS complete isolation of the New from the Old World was followed by a rigorous closing of the frontiers of all those countries in which the terrible disease, whose cause had not hitherto been discovered, had only occurred sporadically and had not yet become so widespread that the whole population was threatened by it.

What wasted effort! In his fortnight's start, Hargon had already flown over vast stretches of North and South America. Just as in Europe he had proceeded in accordance with a definite plan, so now he systematically carried on his work, undisturbed by the population, who had no suspicion of his criminal activities. The only result of the preventive measures was that the pestilence spread less rapidly than it would otherwise have done. But how could men protect themselves against a danger which they could not recognise and to which they had already fallen victims at the moment when they thought themselves adequately armed against it?

In the United States the most ruthless treatment was accorded to all who had contracted the disease or who showed suspicious symptoms. In the neighbourhood of the big cities gigantic internment camps were set up, in which the sick were housed. The feeding of these unfortunates was organised on a lavish scale.

Every day long processions of cars with provisions set

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off to the internment camps. No healthy person was allowed to come into contact with the infected. Special food stations were set up, and it was noticed that the sick soon made their way to them regularly every day at the same time. Each one took only as much as he or she needed, and in general the inhabitants of the camps appeared to be on friendly terms with one another.

In the internment camps there were, however, not only sick, but also healthy people. Many people resigned themselves to being debarred from all further association with their fellows for the sake of remaining with parents, wife or husband. Volunteers came forward—priests, nurses, and members of other professions—who were prepared to live with the victims of the disease, in spite of the danger of contracting it themselves. Through

them the outside population for some time got news of what was happening in the camps.

The course of the disease was not the same in all cases. In many the loss of memory was so acute from the outset that the victims were incapable of conforming to even the simplest everyday customs. The first symptom displayed by those who had contracted the disease was a serious disturbance of the powers of speech, but for a time it was possible to converse with them, though only to a limited extent. Sometimes they would utter—above all to their relations—a few quite rational sentences. From all the reports of the voluntary workers it was clear that the patients had no idea that they were ill. If they had enough to eat, they were quite contented. They and their companions led an entirely new existence, which had no relation to their former life.

It was evident that the victims of the epidemic tried to

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occupy themselves in some way. They played strange, incomprehensible games, and they contrived to hold some sort of intercourse with one another, though exactly how this was done remained a mystery. They fingered everything in the camp, as though hoping thereby to grasp the meaning of the objects. Before taking the food that was offered them, they smelt it, very much as an animal sniffs its food before devouring it.

All those who voluntarily entered the internment camps refused any protection. Some tried at first to guard themselves against infection by special hygienic measures, which, however, proved quite ineffectual, and sometimes they succumbed to the disease even earlier than others who had entered the camp before them.

There was, in fact, no escape from the pestilence. In many cases it was a fortnight to three weeks after infection before the first symptoms appeared, while in others the incubation period was from four to six weeks, or sometimes even three months.

But this attempt to save the United States from the horrors of the disease, despite the ruthlessness with which it was enforced, failed, as it was bound to fail, because sooner or later the people in town and country alike became unwittingly infected by contaminated water or by contact with persons already carrying within them the germs of the disease.

In many cases also people endeavoured to conceal members of the family who had lost their memory, in order that they might not be removed to the camp. Each

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of these persons constituted a fresh source of danger to the rest. In the space of a few months the pestilence had gained ground to such an extent that there could no longer be any question of a systematic campaign against it.

Just as in Europe public life had come to a standstill in one country after another, similar conditions appeared in America, only somewhat later. All the technical triumphs achieved by man in his age-long struggle against Nature were utterly wiped out.

The number of healthy people became less and less. They had only one thought: how to keep themselves alive. All money-making activities were completely suspended. Government and political life had long ceased to exist. In an incredibly short time whole cities were depopulated. Healthy and sick alike abandoned their habitations, which had now become a wilderness of stones.

At the time when in America the first great catastrophes were occurring, in Europe, in one country after another, the people were dying like flies. Nature, more merciful than men, came to the aid of the millions who were looked upon as crazy by their few healthy fellow-creatures. They wandered about seeking vainly for food in the barren fields; weakened by privations of every kind their powers of resistance rapidly declined and numbers fell victim to the serious epidemics which broke out. Their corpses lay in the cities and in the villages, and no one troubled to bury them.

An overpowering odour of death infected the silent

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streets of the cities. In a number of houses, which were no longer anything but caves affording shelter against frost and snow, a few poor creatures had taken up their quarters, but what should have been a protection was, for the most part, only a last refuge before death.

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XX

FROM South America, Hargon had pursued his way to Spain. An inexplicable dread restrained him from revisiting Germany, where he had begun his work of destruction. He ought to have flown to Berlin long before this, for he had no G-bacilli left. But from the moment when he crossed the Atlantic for the second time the wild frenzy which had driven him from place to place and from country to country had evaporated. He was conscious of a terrible emptiness. What it was that had wrought this change in him he did not himself know. Every time that he deposited a bacillus-culture in a river, or opened his dishes in a new tract of country so that the wind might scatter the poisonous germs, he was seized with a more and more violent loathing of himself. But as long as he still had bacillus-cultures, something impelled him to go on distributing them. He reproached himself with hesitating at the moment when his work was approaching completion and tried to fight down a growing indifference to the results of it all.

On his flight back across the Atlantic his weariness increased to such an extent that he was hardly able to steer his machine. How splendid it would be, he kept on thinking, to disappear beneath the waves without leaving a trace. Wherever he looked he saw nothing but water and clouds. Never had he been so conscious of the vastness

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of the world as on this solitary flight across the immense tract of ocean.

He began to feel qualms of conscience at having presumed to meddle with the ordering of the universe. But then he thought of his student days, of those happy weeks in the hospital and of the terrible end of his romance; and that sufficed to stimulate afresh his resolution to go through with his work to the end. They did not love him; they drove him from their midst; let them hate him then. He was their master!

Hargon spent the winter months in Spain, in the little mountain village of Santa Murannia, which was several hours' walk from the nearest railway station. When he decided to land on the plain, he had no idea where he was. He alighted in a solitary field. Far and near not a soul was in sight. Then he

climbed up into the mountains, in order to hide himself, as he had been forced to do all through his life.

So he found Santa Murannia. None of the villagers wanted to take him in. He heard the children shouting in the street: "The devil has come!" Finally he succeeded in finding a lodging with a peasant to whom he presented his valuable watch.

In Santa Murannia no one as yet had any inkling of what was happening in the world. Telegraphic communication with the nearest town was suspended, but no one troubled to get it restored.

"They will come up if they have anything to tell us," the people answered when Hargon asked why the line was not repaired.

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In the evenings the villagers entertained each other with gruesome tales of a terrible pestilence which was said to be doing havoc in the world and to have already attacked Spain. But up here in the mountains they were completely shut off. The villagers pursued their ordinary occupations and had no desire for intercourse with the outside world. Only from time to time in the summer one of the young men would set off to some other part of the country and, for the most part, never come back.

Hargon spent some weeks in this village. He was fleeing from his own act. He brooded incessantly as to the reason for this sudden extinction of his zeal. The last years and months had been so filled up with the untiring search for the G-bacillus and its subsequent dissemination that sooner or later he was bound to succumb to fatigue. But could he justify this suspension of his activities? Perhaps the efficacy of the G-bacillus would abate? Pestilences appeared and disappeared. He would not attain his goal. He was not yet sovereign of the world. With what contempt and hatred the peasants here regarded him! He had to be thankful that they harboured him at all. For a moment Hargon was almost ashamed that he had asked any such favour of these simple folk, whom he himself was planning to destroy.

When spring came, his period of inaction was at an end and he vanished from Santa Murannia. He had housed his aeroplane in a large deserted barn, which afforded adequate protection against the weather. And now, spurred on by a new frenzy of impatience, he hastened towards Berlin.

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Hargon flew very high, for once already he had been fired at as he crossed a frontier. Not until he was approaching Berlin did he descend abruptly to a height of 600 feet.

Already he could recognise the different buildings. But what had happened? The city looked as though it had been bombarded by hostile aeroplanes. There were ruins everywhere. Many houses were burnt to the ground. Of the trees along the streets, some lay prostrate while others were mere bare, melancholy stumps. Not a soul was to be seen. Only when Hargon was some 150 feet above the city did he see a man run out of a house, gaze up at the aeroplane in horror and crouch as it passed, as though afraid it might graze him.

Hargon flew round Berlin twice. Everywhere it presented the same scene. The Leipzigerstrasse and the neighbouring streets were a mere heap of ruins. If Hargon had not recognised the Anhalt and Potsdam railway stations, he would have had no idea where he was, and he had the greatest trouble in finding his aerodrome. There, however, everything was intact, and he effected a rapid landing.

Ten hours later he knew that he had triumphed. But what a triumph!

XXI

THIS city in which millions of human beings had once found shelter, in which millions had known suffering and rejoicing, was nothing else than a huge, ghostly heap of stones. The streets, in so far as they still remained, were deserted. Everywhere lay the rotting, unburied corpses of those who had perished of starvation, and of the sick, whom there had been none to tend.

In what had once been one of the busiest shopping streets a gruesome spectacle presented itself to Hargon's eyes. Here a terrible battle between large numbers of people had apparently been waged. The corpses lay piled on one another just as they had fallen when the fatal bullet overtook them or they were felled by a blow from a hatchet. In vain did Hargon try to determine the cause of the conflict. He found the corpse of a woman in a terribly contorted attitude. From her clothing it was evident that she must have been quite young and, despite the nauseating stench, Hargon went up to the corpse intending to look at the girl's face, as though this might solve the riddle of her death. He turned over the body and stood transfixed with horror. In the course of his medical career he had seen many terrible things and they had ceased to excite his disgust. But when he saw the completely decomposed face of this young girl, which had lost all human semblance and become an almost liquid mass, he shuddered with horror.

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This is your work, said a voice which refused to be silenced. What had this girl to do with your feelings and sufferings? You are responsible for the deaths of all these unfortunate victims who have perished through loss of memory in such vast numbers that the human race is disappearing from the face of the earth.

Hargon wandered through the city. He felt as though he must drain the cup of horror to the dregs, as though he must see all that had happened, he, the only person in the world who could not only consciously gauge the full measure of the catastrophe, but was himself responsible for it.

Hargon walked over the battlefield which had been conjured into existence by his act and he felt as though turned to stone. Now and then he

fancied that he saw human forms glide like phantoms into the entrances of the half-ruined houses. But when he tried to overtake them, they had vanished and were nowhere to be found. He seemed to be wading through blood, and yet, as though in obedience to some inward compulsion, he had to stride on through all these scenes of horror. He had quite deliberately brought this catastrophe upon the world. Dared he now evade its consequences?

Evening descended and this city of ghosts was wrapped in sinister darkness. The wind howled through the utterly deserted streets. It seemed as if the huge city were wailing and sobbing, as though it were accusing him, Hargon, who was alone responsible for all this misery. He was appalled at the thought of spending the night

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among these corpses. He could endure the pestilential stench no longer.

In extreme agitation he tried to find his way to the flying-ground. He no longer knew how much time had elapsed; he was hardly able to distinguish anything in the darkness. How he reached the aerodrome with its strong barbed wire fence he did not himself know. He had left the gate open. Why not? In this city which death, the assassin, had razed to the ground, in which all human life had been wiped out, there was no longer anyone who could trespass. He made his way to the house, hoping for a few hours' sleep in which he could forget what he had seen, but hardly had he lain down to rest when a terrible vision of the young girl's decomposed face rose up before him. He leapt to his feet and waved both arms in the air as though to drive away the phantom. Then he rushed out and wandered restlessly about the huge flying-ground. Only when he was too exhausted to go any farther did he seat himself for a few moments in his aeroplane. If he could have prayed, he would have implored God to vouchsafe him a few hours' sleep. But he could not, could not even pursue a thought to the end. Again and again there rose up before him the vision from which he was trying to escape. And louder and louder he screamed: My work, my work! All my work!"

Morning dawned. On the brink of madness he ran along the inside of the huge barbed wire fence. Suddenly he stopped as though rooted to the spot. He had seen a man outside, a young man, who—he could not describe it in any other way—had eyed him like an animal. Hargon was about to hurry towards him, but already the

man had run away, taking long leaps. Hargon called after him:

“Stop, for God’s sake, stop!” But the louder he called the faster the stranger fled, and Hargon reproached himself bitterly for having given the man such a fright. He ran swiftly along the fence hoping that he might perhaps meet someone else.

After a quarter of an hour he saw that he was being watched by a woman, who was hiding behind the fence. She did not venture any nearer. He beckoned to her, but she did not respond to his invitation. More and more people arrived; they were strangely dressed, and it was evident that Hargon’s appearance seemed no less amazing to them than theirs did to him.

Hargon hurried into the house. Concealing himself behind a window he watched through a pair of field-glasses what the people outside were doing. They collected in a group and put their heads together as though discussing something. Then one of them advanced and looked round. The others followed him. The whole group may have numbered some forty to fifty persons. They cannot possibly be afraid of me, he thought. In order to show them that he did not mean them any harm, he came out of the house, raised his right arm and walked towards them. Like a startled flock they hurried away. He ran to the gate and tried to find them, but in vain; they were hiding from him. Then, far away in the forest, he saw them walking slowly along, one behind the other. All his efforts to make friends with them were fruitless. They were afraid of him.

Yes, now he was lord of the world. But where was the proud sense of triumph in the fact that even the survivors

feared him, that he could drive them before him like an army of slaves, that they were absolutely at his mercy? Everything in him was dead. In the face of the infinite misery which he saw around him, of how little account seemed the relationship of men towards himself, whether in the past or in the present!

He was almost dropping with fatigue, but something urged him back into the town, to visit other streets and other houses. At length his legs refused to carry him any longer; he went back to the aerodrome and collapsed in a swoon by the side of his machine.

Not until some hours later was he roused from this state of utter exhaustion. Impelled by a ravenous hunger, he dragged himself to the house. All the supplies, which were to support him for many years, were still intact in the store-rooms. As there was no water in the taps, he opened a few bottles of mineral water, which he gulped down greedily.

Suddenly through the window he saw a number of people running to and fro behind the fence and gazing at the aeroplane with innocent curiosity. Thereupon Hargon resolved to adopt other tactics. He took a few packets of biscuits, opened them, and walked slowly out so as not to frighten the people. When he was quite near to the fence, he threw the packets over. Like a flock of frightened birds the people scattered in all directions. But soon they came back. One of them cautiously shook the packets, from which the biscuits fell out, picked them up, smelt them, began to nibble, and finally ate them with obvious relish.

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The others followed his example and soon a regular scuffle over the biscuits was in progress.

Hargon hurried into the house and fetched more biscuits, which he threw to those standing outside. Already grown more confident, they no longer ran away. But when he spoke to them it was as though he were talking into empty space. No one understood him, no one heeded him. Their only concern was whether they were to get more biscuits.

This spectacle was repeated day after day. Hargon fed a continually increasing number of people with his stocks of provisions. But they only stayed until they had got their food.

When they had gone, Hargon made his way into the city. He must witness the whole extent of the calamity. How frightful was the havoc that had been wrought in Berlin by the destructive hurricane which had passed over it! In many of the houses there was still evidence that they had been occupied by human beings; all the furniture was still intact, as though the occupants had merely left them for a short time or gone on a journey. In others nothing had remained whole. The fittings of the shops were smashed to pieces; many articles were still lying in the streets, partially destroyed by rain and snow. By dint of careful observation he discovered that there were still people living in the city, but that they did not dare to let him see them. He sought in vain for anyone who could understand what he said.

He could not refrain from his daily excursions into the city, and he soon discovered what was the motive that impelled him. He wanted to help, he wanted to restore the dead to life, he wanted to undo what he had done.

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Sometimes he cherished a crazy hope that all he was now experiencing was merely a hideous dream which was repeated day after day with new and ever more revolting details.

The reality immediately tore this pitiful delusion into a thousand shreds.

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XXII

A WONDERFUL summer came over the land. Hargon's food supplies were rapidly diminishing. The crowd of people whom he was helping grew larger and larger. Where they came from was a mystery to him. Probably they concealed themselves in the woods or dwelt in houses to which they returned in the evening.

At length he managed to discover how a few of the survivors lived. In the neighbourhood of a large provision shop several persons of all ages had found shelter in houses which were in an utterly neglected state, without one window intact. Towards noon they assembled in the shop, from which they presently emerged, each holding a tin of preserved fruit. Some of them opened these tins by breaking the lid with a stone and swallowing the contents there and then. Others carried the tins away and perhaps shared the contents with others. Only thanks to the fact that there was an enormous stock of tinned foods in the cellar of this shop had these few people been able to survive. There might be other similar cases. But would not these unfortunate creatures, too, perish when the supplies were exhausted?

Towards the end of the summer Hargon resolved to make a few flights. Perhaps what had happened in this wilderness of stones which had once been a mighty city

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was an exceptional case. Perhaps hundreds of thousands, even millions of people had fled into the country and been able to support themselves there. It had struck him that he constantly saw new faces among his guests at the fence, many of whom did not take any of the food that was offered them, but voluntarily left it for the others. They must therefore be sufficiently supplied with food, since they only came out of curiosity.

It took Hargon over three weeks' hard work to get his aeroplane ready. Then he started. He had taken with him everything that he needed for a long flight. Only one thing was missing—the G-bacilli!

He flew from country to country in long stages. When he descended, he could safely leave his aeroplane unattended. No one ever went up to it and damaged it; the people did not even know what it was.

Wherever he went, he found exactly what he had already seen in Berlin. The pestilence had simply mown down the people in the cities, which were almost entirely depopulated. New scenes of horror constantly revealed themselves to his gaze. He could not escape them. They seemed to him to combine into a gruesome symphony, so that sometimes he could fancy that he heard all the cries of anguish and despair sent up by millions amid the most atrocious suffering and distress.

Hargon no longer pronounced any judgment on himself, because he was incapable of doing so. He knew that all he was now doing was inspired by the subconscious wish to give help where before he had dealt destruction. But with iron determination he forced himself to ignore these impulses. When he wandered through the desolate streets of unfamiliar cities, when his foot struck against

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corpses, he did not stir a finger to clear out of the way the dead who were polluting the air with the odour of putrescence. He strode over them as though they were merely a tiresome obstacle and not the victims of his deed.

He could not stop at any one place. He had to go on, to taste more and more of the horror, as though only by this means could he grasp what had induced him to bring such disaster upon humanity.

By the winter he was back in Berlin again. Now no more people strolled round his house, in whose ice-cold rooms it was no longer possible to remain. He went into the forest in search of wood for fuel. But everything was covered in snow. There was nothing for him to do but to break up a few window frames. With the wood thus obtained he was able to light a little stove in the porter's lodge which gave out enough heat for the night.

Now he had to go into the city day after day. He went into the houses, almost all of which harboured dead bodies, to look for wood. One day, as he was about to break up the door leading to the veranda of what had once been a large villa, he heard a faint noise behind him. He wheeled round swiftly, and at the same moment a powerfully-built man rushed at him and felled him to the ground. The stranger lay on Hargon and dug his teeth into the neck of his victim, who could not utter a sound. In any case, what would have been the use of calling for help? Help from whom, and, above all, for whom—for the man from whom none had been able to save themselves?

He tried to pull his revolver out of his pocket, intending to shoot down his assailant, who made no movement to prevent him when he felt for his weapon. But just as

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Hargon had got the revolver in his hand, he let it drop again. He had unchained the elemental forces of a deadly catastrophe from which there was no escape. Now he was at the mercy of this young giant's unbridled strength. Let the fellow strangle him! Then he would no longer be driven to survey these gruesome scenes, which were like some heavy, throttling chain that he was powerless to shake off. Hargon kept quite still, and it was this that induced the stranger to relax his hold. He rose to his feet and went into an adjacent room. Not until after a few minutes was Hargon able to follow him. Blood was trickling down his back from the wound inflicted by the teeth of his adversary.

With boundless astonishment Hargon saw that the stranger, who was quite young, was sitting by the side of a young woman, who was suckling an infant. The man rose to his feet when he saw Hargon, as though about to attack him anew, but he waited a little, watching suspiciously every movement of his enemy.

Silently Hargon walked away. He felt as though he had witnessed the birth of a new life.

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XXIII

IN the course of his expeditions through the city Hargon happened to pass what had once been his laboratory. The little house was unchanged, but he hurried on swiftly. He did not want to see it. If only he had never lived there! If only the explosion of the steriliser had killed him!

Instinctively he took the road to the hospital, which he had trodden so often after his return from the mountains, in order to wait for Sister Elizabeth. Already he was standing at his old post of observation opposite the large gateway. Never again would it open and let out visitors who had been with the patients. Then Hargon went across. He pressed the icy-cold latch, the door yielded, and he entered. To the left was the porter's lodge. An old man was sitting huddled up in the arm-chair. Wasn't that Rabel, reading his newspaper? Hargon drew nearer. The old man did not move. Hargon overcame his dread and raised the man's drooping head. It was the head of a corpse. By the spectacles he at once recognised Rabel, the old hospital porter, who had quietly passed away here in his arm-chair. The face of the dead man was already disfigured beyond recognition.

Slowly Hargon mounted the staircase. It was difficult to breathe, for the whole house was filled with the odour of putrescence, which filled his nostrils like some sweetish, loathsome gas. Many of the doors were open. He looked

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into the wards, where the beds were standing in rank and file like soldiers. He entered one of them, but there the air was so frightful that he had to struggle towards the window. He broke open a large pane in order to be able to breathe. Then his gaze wandered round the room in a sort of frenzy. In all the beds there were two or three corpses. On the floor were those who had perhaps collapsed in a last dying effort to escape from this abode of horror. He could see that they were patients by their clothing.

Hargon was suffocated by a terrible nausea. He had to hold on to a bed-post to keep himself from falling. The room was filled with the loud humming of thousands of flies and other insects. They flew against his face, and he had difficulty in driving them away. Loathsome creatures

crawled over his feet, and at every step he trampled on maggots, wood-lice and cockroaches.

Although Hargon felt as if he could no longer endure the horror inspired in him by this gruesome spectacle, something drove him on from one room to another. Many of the doors he had to force open; corpses were lying in front of them, which he had to thrust back in order to enter.

This place, where once hundreds had found relief from their pain and suffering, had become the chosen abode of the most ghastly horror. The distorted attitude of many of the dead showed what hideous scenes must have been enacted here before eternal sleep brought them merciful release from their torments.

In one room he found the huddled corpse of a nurse. In God's name, could it be Elizabeth? All his loathing and dread were forgotten as he carefully examined the

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corpse and tried to determine whether it was that of the woman whom he still loved.

Then he hurried from room to room and from ward to ward. Every breath he inhaled might sow the germs of death. How long would it be before he himself fell victim to the terrible pestilence which must have raged here and of which all the inmates had died within a few days? After all, it mattered so little whether he went on living and for how long. How fortunate were those in whom the G-bacillus had extinguished recollection! They no longer knew anything. They had failed to grasp the terrible things that were happening around them. They had perhaps perished miserably. But by no longer knowing nor understanding anything, they had been spared the conscious realisation of what humanity was undergoing.

Even in the operating theatre Hargon found corpses. Perhaps they had been laid here because there was no room for them anywhere else. Then he came to a side wing of the hospital in which the offices were housed. These were hardly changed. Everywhere there was the orderliness of which the matron had so often boasted to him.

Hargon was still seeking Elizabeth. She was not among the dead nurses lying in the wards. Had she perhaps succeeded in escaping? Was she one of those whose lives had been spared?

At length Hargon found a number of rooms which, though he had never seen them before, he at once recognised as the nurses' quarters. It occurred

to him that Elizabeth had once told him that she shared No. 27 with Sister Anni. That was the room yonder. The door was

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ajar, as though someone had just gone out. For a moment Hargon indulged the fancy that Sister Elizabeth might still be in her room, and he made a movement to turn away. How should he dare to face her? But immediately he realised with a pang the madness of such a notion. Not one human being was alive in this abode of death and desolation!

Cautiously he opened the door of No. 27. The room was perfectly tidy; but on one bed there was a slight hollow as though someone had sat there only a few moments ago. Hargon's eyes took in the simple room at a glance. Over one bed hung a bookshelf. He walked up to it and, on looking at the titles of the books, recognised several volumes which Elizabeth had lent him during his illness. So this was her library, this was where she had lived. And he had soiled and polluted this room by entering it. Hargon did not dare to touch anything. He felt as though his hand were leprous and the objects would fall to the ground if he attempted to touch them.

Beneath the open window was a writing-table on which lay a volume bound in red leather without any inscription. At sight of it all Hargon's scruples vanished. He knew that this was Elizabeth's diary. She had once told him very shyly that she still made notes of the most important events in her life, just as she had done when she was quite a young girl and had been given a diary at her confirmation.

In frantic haste Hargon opened the book. He skimmed through a few pages. These were Elizabeth's experiences of years ago. He turned over a few more pages. Had she written anything about himself? Some brief notes followed, as though she had wanted to preserve some reminders of her experiences. Then his name appeared.

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"To-day another terrible discussion with Hargon. The poor fellow, who feels as if he were persecuted by the whole human race, is on the verge of madness. I must struggle against him. I feel that a terrible danger is threatening from him. I cannot believe that what he has told me is true. Doesn't he realise what bloodshed his act would entail?"

The letters began to dance before Hargon's eyes. He turned over a few more pages.

“He has no idea that I know what he looks like. Yes, I was horrified when I saw him brought in, but I never think of that when I look into his eyes. This man who preaches such bottomless hate can give proof of such warm humanity. I must free him from his crazy delusions. He is a genius. What could he not do for his fellow men, if he devoted himself to their service!”

Some time later she wrote: “Still no word from him, and I am in such need of his consolation. There is not a soul to whom I can confide my anxiety about my mother.” Hargon’s heart contracted, and he felt as if he were bleeding from innumerable wounds. “Mother, forgive me if at the funeral to-day I could not help thinking all the time about Hargon. You are none the less near to me all the time.”

“To-day I have committed a great wrong. How could I be so heedless. I am too engrossed in my grief. If that beggar who spoke to me to-day were Hargon ... it is inconceivable....”

Hargon leaped to his feet. He uttered shrieks which no longer resembled anything human. He yelled like an animal in its death agony. In his despair he clawed his breast with his right hand and tried to tear the skin from

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his body. He was racked by an excruciating pain, as though his body were being stabbed by red-hot irons. His eyes were bloodshot and starting out of their sockets with the terrible exertion of screaming. Suddenly a stream of blood gushed from his mouth. Then he fell down and lost consciousness.

Hours later Hargon awoke out of his swoon. It was some time before he realised where he was. Then suddenly he was once more tortured by the agonising recollection of his crime. He crawled out of the room on his knees and, with a last effort, raised himself on to his feet. Something between a groan and a scream, which was meant for the name Elizabeth, escaped from his throat; the sound echoed and re-echoed through the vast building.

Hargon rushed from room to room. He dragged the dead bodies from the beds, as though hoping to find among them the corpse of Elizabeth. He had shrunk with loathing from these lifeless bodies, yet one of them might be Elizabeth!

He hunted for hours but to no purpose: not one of the already half-decomposed corpses could he identify as that which he was seeking. Then it grew so dark that he could no longer see. He collapsed in a swoon in the

operating theatre and fell into a sleep that had all the appearance of death. But his release had not yet come.

When Hargon awoke next morning, his one thought was to put an end to his life. He could endure this no longer. True, he had already been visited with scruples, and had discontinued his criminal activities a full year

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ago. But he, the sole conscious witness, dared not flee from the deadly consequences of his act. He determined that now, like all the rest who had perished here, he would creep away into some corner and wait for death to set him free.

He whispered the name Elizabeth, but he could no longer hear himself. He tried to scream it, but only an inarticulate sound escaped from his lips. He had lost his power of speech. But of what use would it have been? Was his life not yet at an end?

In the hours which followed he wrestled despairingly with himself. What a boon it would be if he could cut short the martyrdom of continued existence! But had he the right to do this, after inflicting endless suffering on millions of people who, like himself, had hoped for a little love and happiness in their lives. Dared he flee from the agonies which he was now suffering and which would pursue him until his last breath?

Towards noon Hargon returned to the aerodrome. He worked hard to get the aeroplane ready for another flight. It was weeks before the task was completed, for Hargon now had so little physical strength that on many days he could only work for a few hours. Often he was unable to get even half an hour's sleep. The terrible scenes which he had witnessed in the hospital never forsook him. But worst of all was his despairing realisation that what he had done could no longer be undone.

Hargon resumed his feeding of the people. At first only a few came, but the number gradually increased, and he now allowed them to enter the flying-ground. They

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examined the machine curiously but did not touch it, and they did not go inside the house. If Hargon brought them something to eat, they approached him and took the food. Otherwise they kept at a considerable distance.

Before leaving the flying-ground for ever Hargon paid one more visit to the hospital. He closed the door behind him so that no one should stray inside. Then he carefully searched every part of the building. When he had made sure that there was not a living creature in the house, he set fire to it at several points. Elizabeth's room he had only entered for a moment to fetch the diary.

After that he waited in the street until the flames shot up from the building and curled out of the windows on every storey. Thus did Hargon prepare a funeral pyre for the unhappy victims of this house in which he had tasted such pure happiness as his limited human understanding was powerless to grasp.

The master of the world had become the least and basest of its creatures.

PART III

I

ALONE in his aeroplane Hargon flew round the world. Wherever he went, he met the same evidence of the entire destruction of all human civilisation as he had already witnessed in Germany.

Once he made an attempt to undo his own work. In the city of Obregon in Mexico, where the terrible pestilence had only just made its appearance, he wrote articles in which he pointed out that loss of memory—for the terrible epidemic which was afflicting the world was nothing else—must be due to the action of bacteria, which for inexplicable reasons had suddenly appeared in these enormous numbers. There was only one way of escaping infection, namely, by prompt immunisation.

Although this article attracted a great deal of attention, no one put any faith in it. On the contrary, since Hargon had lost his powers of speech, it was believed that he, too, had contracted the disease, and he was shut up in a concentration camp together with the other sick people. Here for the first time he witnessed at close quarters the changes which people underwent as soon as they succumbed to the G-bacilli. Many of them immediately lost all their understanding of the work which they had hitherto performed. If parents and children or other near relations were brought to the camp, they stayed together, but did not in the least realise why they did so. All the sick people were cheerful and good-tempered. They had

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no presentiment of the tragic fate which was awaiting them. Soon the supplies of food became more and more scarce, and provisions were wrenched from the hands of the nurses and attendants as soon as they began to distribute them.

Hargon devoted himself to the service of the victims of the disease. Their numbers grew from day to day, and soon no one troubled to keep any guard on them.

Now Hargon was able to escape. He hesitated for a time. In hours of despair he considered whether he should not at any rate expiate his deed to the extent of assisting these unfortunates over the immediate future. But what could he do? He was condemned to helplessness and was even forced to witness the outbreak of a serious epidemic of typhus without being able

to help the patients. At length he saw no other alternative than to drive those who had not yet fallen victim to the terrible disease out of the concentration camp by force.

The misery of those who lay prostrate with fever, murmuring unintelligible words, was indescribable. Hargon's heart was rent and his whole body tortured by an agony of distress. Then, when death came and the wailing and moaning were succeeded by a dreadful silence, Hargon crept away, once more an outlaw.

Again Hargon flew round the world in his aeroplane. Just as before he had been impelled to complete his work as rapidly as possible, so now he was forced to witness and suffer the consequences of his act. He longed for rest, but he dared not put an end to his life. He had blasphemously raised his hand against God and Nature.

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There was no atoning for his crime. God had punished him by condemning him to be the sole conscious witness of this transformation of His world.

Only once more had Hargon looked into Elizabeth's diary. He shrank from intruding into her spiritual life. He had no right to discover now what he had failed to understand at the time, what he had never realised during all the weeks she had tended him. But he wanted just to find out what she had felt when the pestilence had made itself unmistakably evident and was extending its ravages more and more widely. In September she had written:

"If it were not so crazy, I should believe that all the inexplicable things that are happening now are Hargon's work. But no man could be capable of such an act, the consequences of which he could not fail to foresee. And that Hargon should be such a man!"

Yes, he had been the man! He had known what would happen! He had made feverish efforts to promote the rapid spread of the pestilence. And he had once dared to blame other men!

The entries in Elizabeth's diary became more and more brief after September.

"I am weighed down by a paralysing conviction that Hargon put his words into effect. Shall I accuse him? Shall I proclaim to the world what has happened? Would anyone believe me? Should not I myself be looked upon as crazy? Even if people grasp what has taken place, is it not too late

to be of any help?—Terrible things are happening. Who will ever forgive Hargon?”

Who would forgive him? No one.

To go on living, to go on seeing, that was the curse which had come upon Hargon and to which he submitted

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unresistingly. How often, when he was seated at the steering-wheel of his aeroplane, did his fingers itch to make an end of things! But no, for him there was no blessed forgetfulness. By his own act he had deprived himself of the one boon bestowed upon all other men—oblivion. Thereby he had unwittingly pronounced his own sentence.

Hargon had committed an unparalleled crime, but the agonies he suffered were so terrible that all the tortures and martyrdoms ever invented by the mind of man paled in comparison.

If he had not counted every day that he was forced to go on living, he would have long since lost all sense of the passage of time. Carefully he calculated the distances which he proposed to cover. He had long since been obliged to fly back to Berlin and fetch more fuel from the large tanks which he had stored there.

The decay of the huge city was proceeding more and more rapidly. Hargon no longer met any people. He could still recognise a few streets here and there, but otherwise Berlin was like a stony waste which had never been inhabited by man.

Gradually Hargon's food supplies were drawing to an end. Much of the food had not kept as long as he had anticipated, and also he had given away such large quantities that the supplies could only hold out for a few more years. But this did not trouble him. What a release death would mean, no matter whether he starved or crashed to the ground.

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II

ONE day it seemed as if Hargon were really to meet his end. At a height of nearly 6,000 feet his motor all at once stopped working. The aeroplane began to fall precipitously. Suddenly the lonely man felt a thrill of joy that death had come at last. Automatically he performed the necessary manipulations in order to glide down. The attempt succeeded beyond his expectations, but the machine hit the ground so violently that the benzine tank exploded on the spot. In the nick of time Hargon managed to get out of the aeroplane. Ten minutes later nothing was left of it but a heap of metal fragments.

For many hours he remained seated near the scene of the wreck. He had no idea where he was. All his maps had been burnt. But did it matter in what country the disaster had occurred? Would fate now permit him to share the fate of the millions of human beings who, owing to their loss of memory, had been unable to go on living? The world was laid waste. The human race which, through the gift of memory, had been able to raise itself to lordship over the earth, was dying out. By a merciful fate it had been spared the consciousness of its ruin.

But Hargon lived on. Death passed him by. Chained to the earth, he was subject to the same conditions as the

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few survivors of the gruesome holocaust. Now, when he could no longer witness the scenes of catastrophe, his feverish unrest subsided and was succeeded by a numb exhaustion.

Now he was quite alone. Day and night he was tortured by agonising thoughts. How often he remembered the conversation which he had once had with Buchlender in the hospital. On him lay the curse of a knowledge from which there was no escape.

For two days and two nights he lingered by the scene of the accident. He no longer took any food and was waiting for death. Sooner or later he must find release! For the first time after many years he had a blissful sense of approaching extinction.

But on the third morning he awoke with a start from feverish dreams. Something had touched him. He opened his eyes and saw with amazement that a number of men and women were standing around him gazing at him curiously. But as soon as he moved they ran away. He got on to his feet and set off in pursuit, but his efforts to overtake them were fruitless. The faster he ran, the faster they fled. It was as though they were playing a game with him.

Hargon was soon exhausted and began to suffer agonies of thirst. Suddenly he was conscious of such a passionate desire to go on living that he sought eagerly for something to drink. After wandering about for a long time he found a spring at which he could quench his thirst and he seemed to imbibe fresh strength. Who are these people? he thought. How do they live? How did they manage to survive?

Then he began to wander about the forest in

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search of some living creature. In vain. Not a soul could he find anywhere. He even began to wonder whether his fancy had deceived him. By this time his hunger was so overpowering that he kept his eyes open for something to eat. After an hour's search he discovered some shrubs bearing fruits which he at once began to devour with ravenous appetite.

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III

FROM this time onward Hargon led the life of a hermit. His one desire was to find the people who had wakened him. Often he fancied that they passed his resting-place in the night, and then he decided that it must have been a delusion. Perhaps it had been the beasts of the forest, whose soft tread he had mistaken for the footsteps of human beings.

As soon as morning dawned he would start off, to explore the forest, which seemed endless. How much time passed in this way he himself no longer knew. His thoughts revolved round the past, which meant far more to him than the present—the past from which there was no escape.

Hargon bore all his sufferings in the consciousness that only by an act of grace had he been spared to endure them.

As a result of his close association with Nature his eyes became quicker to notice things which would otherwise have escaped him. One day he saw that the moss had been trampled down over long stretches of the forest. He followed these traces and after several hours he saw a clearing. Cautiously he crept on and presently he heard a strange singing. He stood still as though rooted to the spot. The sound drew nearer, and then again it seemed to come from a far distance, as though people were marching through the forest.

Hargon was about to move on when suddenly he heard

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the crackling of branches quite near. He hid behind a tree, and soon after a whole troop of men marched past him taking long strides. Four of them were carrying a large animal, which they had killed with a sort of wooden spear. As the hunters, who were quite naked, stepped out into the clearing, suddenly men, women and children came running up from all directions and greeted them joyfully.

Hargon estimated the number of people assembled here at several hundreds. They formed a large circle round the hunters. The animal was swiftly dismembered with strange implements, and it almost looked as if there were going to be a fight over the booty. But at length they all sat down peaceably and devoured any piece of meat they could lay their hands on. The meal lasted some time. Then one of the men stood up, looked

round in all directions and walked off. That was the signal for the rest, who followed him like a herd of animals.

Cautiously Hargon took the same direction. After walking for several hours he heard a loud hubbub of voices. Overcome with a shyness which he himself was at a loss to explain, he ventured no further. Dusk had already fallen and he looked for a place where he could pass the night.

The next morning he was roused by a curious noise of singing. He crept cautiously through the forest and was able to look down from an elevation into a deep valley in which were a number of people. While he was still hesitating whether to go on, he suddenly heard approaching footsteps. He turned round and started in dismay, for some young men were standing just behind him eyeing him suspiciously. After a little time they retreated without

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a word. Remembering his first meeting with these people, Hargon did not hurry after them; he only walked on a few paces in order to be able to observe better what the people in the valley were doing.

Gradually he was able to distinguish a number of details. Gathered in a herd to one side were a number of cattle and pigs. Suddenly the procession of animals set itself in motion, followed on either side by men who drove them forward.

Hargon wondered what it all meant. Was this some nomad tribe, which had so far escaped the ravages of the G-bacillus? The crowds in the valley bestirred themselves more and more actively, and it was evident that preparations were on foot for a general departure. These lasted a considerable time, and Hargon eagerly watched every movement. Suddenly he heard a curious rustling sound above him. He looked up and saw some boys seated amid the foliage of the trees; they were gathering the fruit and devouring it. Hargon called to them. For a moment they paused, and then paid no further attention to him. When they had eaten their fill, they clambered down from the tree with astonishing agility, resting their feet against the trunk, round which they laid a sort of rope on to which they held with their hands. On reaching the ground they hurried after the crowd which had already decamped.

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IV

HARGON followed the nomads. With amazing intuition they had taken a road which led them to a grazing-ground for the animals. Each day's march continued until a new pasture had been found. If this were sufficiently fertile, the people rested for several days. Often Hargon saw small groups of them set off in pursuit of game. From the bones of slaughtered animals they prepared missiles which they used so adroitly that they could even kill birds with them.

The life of these people was extremely primitive. They did not know the use of fire and they wore no clothing. The longer Hargon followed them the better he was able to observe their life and habits, since, if he did not approach too near, they quietly went on with whatever they were doing without heeding his presence. Gradually he began to recognise definite individuals. A comparison of the features of several of these led him to surmise that the tribe comprised members of various races, all of whom had lost their memory, but had managed to survive. Strange how they communicated with one another! They had only a limited range of sounds, by which they from time to time gave expression to their feelings. They never pronounced any words.

Hargon tried in vain to make friends with some of these people. After a time they allowed him to approach

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within a few yards of them, but if he attempted to come nearer still, they shyly drew away.

Hargon's clothing consisted only of rags. It was now autumn and often he had to stay up all night because it was too cold to sleep. His new companions were his teachers. Many of them wrapped themselves in the skins of slaughtered animals. Others gathered ferns and wove them into a sort of toga. Hargon observed with amazement that preparations were being made for the winter. Whereas hitherto the cattle had been left to find their own provender, now fodder was collected, and loaded on the backs of the animals.

These people must have undergone some change in their physical constitution, for they consumed many things which human beings had not

been able to eat formerly and which had served only as food for animals.

Again and again Hargon was awestruck and amazed at the miracle which was being accomplished before his eyes. He saw the reawakening in man of instincts which he had lost by reason of his cultural development. The most striking example of this was the manner in which these people found their way through the wilderness.

Hargon had no idea in what country he was. Hitherto the tribe of nomads had not passed a single forsaken town or even a village. It seemed as though these people were shunning their former habitations. Just as unfailingly as they accomplished their daily march did the various groups who set out to hunt rejoin the main body.

In place of memory had come what was once described as the sixth sense of animals. But these people were not at the same stage of development as animals. The longer Hargon observed the various members of the tribe, the

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more insight did he gain into their lives. With growing appreciation he noted what profound attachments existed between the different individuals. They all jointly provided for the well-being and sustenance of the whole tribe, but in addition something in the nature of family ties bound together man and wife and parents and children. The mothers tended their little ones with infinite care and patience and often carried them for hours on the marches.

The lovemaking between the sexes was conducted with much display of tenderness. If a woman were already mated another man rarely made advances to her. Or, if he did, he met with such a vigorous rebuff that he did not repeat the attempt. If a man died, the grief of his mate was indescribable. She kept aloof from the rest of the tribe and followed its marches at a considerable distance. The other women took it in turns to accompany the mourner, who did not rejoin the community for a very long time. If a woman died, her lover went out hunting almost daily as though seeking death in conflict with wild beasts.

Sometimes it happened that one of the members of the tribe was guilty of an offence against the community. In what this consisted Hargon was often unable to discover. But that something had happened was evident from the fact that this individual was avoided by all the rest. He partook of his meals separately, and, though he continued to do his work, no one paid

any attention to him. The person thus outlawed had to endure his punishment for a considerable time.

When Hargon noticed these incidents, he realised with a pang that the tribe treated him in exactly the same way.

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His mode of life had undergone a singular change since he first attached himself to the tribe. They now let him walk across their camping-ground unmolested or stroll by the side of the animals. But no one took any interest in him. When they wanted to play some amusing game, they moved away from him, as if they did not wish him to witness their enjoyment.

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V

IN the winter, which was spent in a narrow valley sheltered from the wind, Hargon thought that his end had come. He could no longer find any food. For days he had been living only on the remains of slaughtered animals which the members of the tribe had left uneaten. When he walked round their camp he felt like a wild animal driven to seek food from its deadly enemies. With amazement he noted the preparations which had been made for the winter. Like squirrels they had hoarded up in the autumn the provisions on which they were now subsisting. Every day the older animals were slaughtered, and their flesh constituted the staple nourishment. Hargon did not venture to take any of the food of these people. It was not from fear lest they should attack him. But how could he ask any favour of men, when it was through his fault that the human race had suffered such unspeakable disaster?

After he had eaten nothing for several days, he ceased visiting the tribe. Until noon he lay in the hollow which he had chosen as a place of refuge. Then he made one more desperate attempt to find some food. After wandering about for a long time he met two women. The elder of the two looked at him and then set in front of him a bowl containing some curious substance. After that both women moved away and watched Hargon's movements from a little distance. He lifted up the bowl and

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ate some of the contents, which comprised a good deal of grit, but to him tasted like the most exquisite dainty. After a few mouthfuls he stopped short. This woman, whom he had wronged beyond repair, had done him a kindness. Tears streamed from his eyes. He was weeping for the first time for many years. He would have liked to express his gratitude, would have liked to kneel at this woman's feet, but when he approached her, she retreated. She, too, his benefactress, avoided him.

The tribe rested all through the winter. Hargon was now offered food every day. But no one wanted his thanks. Children and adults kept out of his way, as though he were one of those who had committed an offence against the tribe. When the supplies were used up and the animals had consumed all the fodder the tribe moved on.

Spring had come. Hargon followed the nomad people into fresh tracts of country, but as soon as Nature once more provided food he was left to shift for himself.

As the years went by it became very evident to Hargon that the people he had met were at a stage of rapid evolution. Altered habits of life became more and more conspicuous in all the members of the tribe. The perpetual conflict with Nature steeled their bodies and rendered them capable of wellnigh incredible exertions. Sometimes such long distances were covered that Hargon only overtook the tribe after some days, when they were resting at a new pasture-ground.

To an increasing extent the members of this new race became his teachers. From them he learnt how to supply himself with nourishment and how to protect himself

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against heat and cold. But for them he would long since have starved, since often he could not find sufficient food. He was constantly amazed to note the sure instinct with which these people avoided poisonous plants and fruits which he himself would never have suspected.

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VI

THE destructive work of the G-bacillus had not resulted in a survival of the fittest. Obviously it was only by chance that these people had escaped the serious epidemics and pestilences which had developed as a result of the memory-destroying disease. Among the nomads Hargon noticed a number of frail and puny individuals who often, like himself, had the greatest difficulty in keeping up with the rest. But they were helped. The tribe had a number of leaders, whose instructions were obeyed by the rest.

If a woman or a man found the journey too long and sank down exhausted, or if a mother could not carry her children any farther, one of the leaders came to their assistance; they were taken to the animals and lifted on to the backs of cattle, who patiently bore their burden.

Occasionally it happened that two tribes met. Hours before this occurred there was an atmosphere of acute uneasiness, as though the nomads scented that others were approaching. In obedience to a mysterious command, the most stalwart of the men detached themselves from the rest and hastened on ahead of their tribe. They only returned some hours later. Then the whole procession came to a halt. The scouts took over the lead and, keeping very close together, the whole tribe began to move on again.

Soon after, the other tribe could be heard approaching.

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It, too, was led by one of the most stalwart of the men, and it, too, had its herd of cattle. The two processions passed one another without any expressions of hostility or other disturbances. They seemed intentionally to give each other a wide berth. After such a meeting the tribe often completely altered its line of march as though fearing that, where other men had been, they would find nothing left to eat.

Hargon took particular pains to get into touch with the children. He made them simple toys, and they played with these with obvious delight. All his efforts to determine whether the faculty of memory had reappeared in the new generation yielded a negative result. Like the adults, even the smallest children exhibited symptoms which plainly revealed the lack of any power of recollection. Was the curse he had brought upon the world to

last for generations? Why did God deprive these children, too, of the gift of memory which He had once bestowed on humanity?

VII

HARGON often wondered whether, after all these terrible catastrophes, everything might not in the end turn out for the best. How happily these people lived together! It was obvious that life afforded them some fresh experience every day. With what delight they greeted the spring! How close were the ties between man and man! The joy of mutual affection was kindled anew every day! Memory was denied them and so, too, was the understanding of their own actions. But instead they were endowed with an infallible instinct. They never did anything that did not serve some purpose. When winter approached they collected just as much food as they required for the season when Nature could not supply their needs. Every action they performed was to them a new discovery. In a difficult situation, when it was a case of crossing a raging torrent or they were faced with some other apparently insurmountable obstacle, they proved themselves highly resourceful. When the same difficulty recurred, they were baffled at first, but soon one of the leaders found some altogether new way of overcoming it, and the others followed his example.

These nomads also had their tools. They formed them out of the strangest materials, and often some object which had been prepared with infinite pains to serve as a weapon or a vessel was after a time thrown heedlessly away. They took no interest in guarding their possessions.

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In many ways the life of these people was like that of the beasts, and yet it was on a far higher plane. The sight of natural beauties excited in many of them an ecstatic delight. Hargon often saw men and women set off from the camp on voyages of discovery. If they found anything that pleased them especially, they would sit down and watch admiringly the motion of water gliding swiftly over rocks, or listen as though entranced by harmonies in the air which Hargon's ears were unable to detect. All these people displayed a striking readiness to help one another. Otherwise the struggle with Nature would have been impossible for the individual. Often at night savage beasts prowled round the camping-ground of the tribe and had to be driven away.

Species of animals appeared which Hargon had never seen before. The nomads lived mainly by hunting, but they no longer exterminated the dangerous animals as formerly, but only killed those which served their needs. In winter, when the beasts of prey were goaded by hunger into attacking human beings, bitter conflicts frequently ensued. The men not only defended themselves with weapons, but would spring on to the animals and dig their teeth into their necks in order to kill them.

The first time Hargon saw this, he thought the man had gone mad with fear and was trying to bite into the neck of the animal so that he could not be attacked by its paws. But the huge beast collapsed as though struck by lightning. The victor gave a loud shout of exultation and ran off to fetch his comrades.

Then Hargon realised for the first time what progress had already been made in the modification of the human frame. He perceived what had escaped his notice during

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his long sojourn with these people: that the shape of the face had undergone a remarkable change: the mouth protruded slightly, and the teeth had developed into mighty fangs. The young people who were growing up and who were gradually ousting their parents from the posts of leadership, were developing into a race of giants.

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VIII

HARGON had long since given up counting the days and years, but time had left its traces on him. He had more and more difficulty in keeping up with the people to whom he had attached himself, and this made him realise that he was ageing.

One summer day he was obliged to rest by a pond towards midday, although the tribe was already far in front. Wearily he watched the movement of some little white clouds, which held no promise of rain and looked merely like distant, snow-covered mountain-tops against the brilliant blue sky. How long was it since he himself had been able to rise to similar heights and, set free from the shackles of earth, to fly round the globe?

But when he had sped round the world in his aeroplane, had he really been free from its chains? Had he not really been more fettered than these people with whom he was now living, who woke in the morning free from care and lived from day to day untroubled by any thought of the future? Was not this new human race really happy? For them every vital process was an experience. In what a marvellous way and in what a remarkable form had Nature revealed herself—Nature who does not allow any species to perish!

In place of memory, which had formerly enabled man to utilise in his own interests the aggregate experience of himself, his forebears and his contemporaries; in place of

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books, the materialised dead memory of the world, by means of which knowledge was handed down from age to age, there had arisen a human spirit that was perpetually creating anew. This new man did not presume, as his forefathers had once done, to interfere with the divine ordering of the world and replace it by imperfect human labour. He was knit by ties of blood to the divine laws of life and decay which govern this earth. The self-preservation of humanity was ensured by instinctive actions. But, apart from that, the divine act of creation was revealed to him almost daily through intuitions born of a wonderful spirit of invention.

Man had returned to Nature after vainly attempting to escape from her into an abstract system of thought. Gruesome had been the collapse of the Old World and the awakening of humanity to a new life. But out of the streams of blood which had been shed, a magnificent new race had sprung up.

Was it really I, Hargon asked himself for the first time, who impiously tried to encroach on God's omnipotence? Was I not merely the tool of Him whose ways are hidden from men? Was this path towards man's redemption perhaps pre-ordained from the beginning, and was I merely selected to be the instrument of its consummation?

After all, the G-bacilli which he had sought and found were created by God. Were they not predestined, even without his intervention, to free humanity, after thousands of years of existence, after the measure of pain and distress was filled to overflowing, from the curse of knowledge?

No, he had not been appointed by God. He could not defend himself by pleading that this new humanity had formed itself into a wonderful community. This had not

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been the aim of his plan. He had been actuated by selfish, criminal motives in wanting to raise himself to lordship over the world.

And for this very reason, because he had sinned against God and man, he alone was excluded from this new community. They all avoided him, not because he was hideous and a cripple, but because there was no place for him in the company of the righteous.

Hargon looked at his own face reflected in the rippling surface of the pond. His hair was snow-white and his face was terribly disfigured by the marks of a burn. Hargon saw himself.

He was dead tired and yet he could not rest. Again and again he was driven on by the tormenting fever within him. Like the Wandering Jew he was vouchsafed neither rest nor forgetfulness.

Broken in body and soul, he dragged himself up and resumed his pilgrimage. Fighting against increasing weakness and exhaustion, he staggered on. His progress was very slow. His body no longer obeyed his will. It was with difficulty that he kept on his feet, but he had to go on; he dared not lose all touch with men, not because he was afraid of being

deprived of their assistance, but because it would mean the loss of his last desperate hope of finding forgiveness.

Breathing heavily, he came to a halt. Terrible doubts assailed him. Had he perhaps already lost track of the tribe? Had he taken a wrong direction? Had their ways already parted while he was making desperate efforts to overtake the tribe, which had hurried on?

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Tortured with apprehension, he tried to recover the lost trail. Suddenly he saw at no very great distance a young girl who was walking straight towards him. His sudden thrill of joy at seeing a human being again immediately gave place to the deepest consternation. She would avoid him, as everyone else had done. She would hurry back to the others, whom perhaps she had only left because she had lost her way. And he was already too weak to be able to follow her.

In this moment of supreme agitation he found for the first time the strength to pray.

“God, Who hast so punished and humbled me for my crime, pardon me for what I have done. Let me not be separated from those against whom I have sinned. Do not deprive me of the last opportunity of entreating their forgiveness.”

Had God heard Hargon’s voice? Without a moments hesitation the young girl approached him, smiling happily as though delighted at having found him after a long search. Hargon felt as if he had been snatched up out of the most profound humiliation. With streaming eyes he gazed at the girl, who had sprung forward to support him as he seemed about to fall.

And now came the greatest miracle of all. Hargon engaged in a strange and wonderful conversation with the girl. Not a word issued from her lips, and he himself had long since lost his powers of speech. But he understood her thoughts and she understood his.

“I was anxious about you, poor, unhappy man. Where have you been? Why don’t you follow us any longer?”

“I could not go any farther. Do you not see how weak I have grown?”

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“I did see, and I begged the others to set you on one of the beasts when you came, so that you need no longer wear yourself out with trudging on foot.”

“Why do you trouble about me?”

“I am attached to you. I feel your sorrows as if they were my own.”

“Have you been near me long?” he asked, deeply moved.

But the girl could not follow this thought. She shook her head to show that she had not understood him. “Long” was a notion which did not exist among the new people. For them time was the present and the present was measureless.

“Did you look for me, because you wanted me to come with you?”

“Of course, you belong to me. Come, let us go.”

“No, I must stay here. Please go on in front.”

The young girl gazed at him sadly, but she went, according to his bidding.

In the rays of the setting sun she gradually vanished from Hargon’s sight. He lingered behind, deeply touched. He had been received into the society of the new human race. Dare he obey the summons? Dare he share in the happiness of those upon whom he had brought unspeakable suffering? No. He had taken a glimpse into the new world, which had been revealed to him in so miraculous a fashion. But he did not belong to it, he, the last conscious witness of a perished humanity.

His way was the way of solitude.

THE END

