Johannes Bobrowski
I Taste Bitterness
I Taste Bitterness is a collection of short stories by Johannes Bobrowski, some of which were first published after his death in 1965. His prose is an extension of his poetry. Unorthodox in style, it reads best aloud for he writes as though talking to a friend sitting opposite him. Much is conjured up in a few lines: peasant life in Lithuania and its daily tragedies and intrigues, its superstitions and rough humor; the contradictions of Nazi Germany, its opponents, its adherents, its history of madness. There are glimpses into the lives of Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer. The reader follows the path of Boehlendorff, trying in vain to spread the revolutionary ideas of eighteenth-century Europe. And linking the past with the present a picture, a reminder of the past, a warning for the future. The reader will also find in this collection, whose title has been taken from his poem, "Ungesagt," Bobrowski’s personal sense of accountability and his hope for a time without fear...
Johannes Bobrowski
I Taste Bitterness
BY THE AUTHOR

Poetry
Sarmatian Times
Shadow Land
Weather-vane

Novels
Levin’s Mill
Lithuanian Claviers

Short Stories
Boehlendorff and The Feast of Mice
The Admonisher
I Taste Bitterness
by
Johannes Bobrowski

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Marc Linder
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Ungesagt

Schwer,
ich wachse hinab,
Wurzeln
breite ich in den Grund,
die Wasser der Erde
finden mich, steigen,
Bitternis schmeck ich — du
bist ohne Erde,
ein Vogel den Lüften, leichter
immer im Licht,
nur meine Angst noch
hält dich
im irdischen Wind.
No tree stands in front of Kant’s house. Is the street really so narrow? Why is it that one never comes past the two-storied bleak box without brushing sleeves and shoulders against the façade-wall? And taking along some more of the coating? One day, that’s for certain, the bricks that are still covered today will peep out: a bright red, which will lack the color green, for no tree stands in front of Kant’s house. Behind the house and round the side of the one gable lies a little garden. That’s too little. But stuck on to the house, there is a shack for the chickens. So we have at least these weirdly argumentative bird voices, which converse or don’t — one never knows, one listens, and when the coppersmith down there at Castle Mountain hammers about a bit and the bell from the castle tower clap-
pers out the wrong hour, or the right one, only the clattering of hurriedly rapped canes is still missing — canes with iron tips and silver pommels, black or dark brown canes — a concent, that suffices to describe the English city of London, as it lies sprawling there along the River Thames, or a conflagration in Stockholm, that stops still before Swedenborg’s house with a bow.

But now the impatient canes approach and grow too loud. These canes are a nuisance. For someone who wanted to listen to the concent. Come along, eat up, my little chickadees, says the old woman and goes back into the kitchen. There stands Kant in brown frock coat and shakes pepper from a yellow jar over the lovely food. And the canes have arrived at the house door. Sit down, each with a little bang, on the stone slab in front of the threshold, each a finishing point at the end of a hurried march — from the Junker Garden, from the Stone Street, from the Customs Street. Punctuality, Gentlemen.

Now the canes raised and into the house. Stout Scheffner says loudly up to the walls: Blessed time of day, and Lampe, the servant, says: May I, Mr. War Councillor, and relieves him of his cape. And Professor Schulz shuffles along, hangs his coat over his shoulder and pops his hat on his head, and Lampe terrified says: But of course, Mr. Royal Chap-
lain. That's the one I should have taken first, it dawns on him, while the elegant Motherby is already impatiently tapping him on the back with the little cane, gently of course: We were asked here after all! and throws his coat across the bannister where, by the way, the Royal bookseller Kanter’s things are already lying. There is general motion in the vestibule, and Borowski and Vasianski too, the one tall and thin, the other short and round, Scheffner broadest in the middle, Schulz more and more massive down towards the bottom, skeins, rhombuses, cones, the dummy Motherby comely among them. Well then up the stairs. Kanter is already standing there in the open door, has given the dinner table a quick look over — everything set right — looks thus reassured down over the stairs, discovers Hamann’s coat tails just in time in the kitchen doorway, and now the tails too have disappeared, and the door is shut, and Lampe elbows his way through the guests on the stairs and arrived at the top, composed and rigid, says: His Honor the Professor are in kitchen, will be right back. And below the door opens again, and the old woman, the cook, shouts upstairs: Yeah, be right there, and you, Mr. Lampe, come down.

So Lampe exits. The gentlemen produce the pretty chronometers all at the same time, for it strikes twelve from the castle tower,
pers out the wrong hour, or the right one, only the clattering of hurriedly rapped canes is still missing — canes with iron tips and silver pommels, black or dark brown canes — a concert, that suffices to describe the English city of London, as it lies sprawling there along the River Thames, or a conflagration in Stockholm, that stops still before Swedenborg’s house with a bow.

But now the impatient canes approach and grow too loud. These canes are a nuisance. For someone who wanted to listen to the concert. Come along, eat up, my little chickadees, says the old woman and goes back into the kitchen. There stands Kant in brown frock coat and shakes pepper from a yellow jar over the lovely food. And the canes have arrived at the house door. Sit down, each with a little bang, on the stone slab in front of the threshold, each a finishing point at the end of a hurried march — from the Junker Garden, from the Stone Street, from the Customs Street. Punctuality, Gentlemen.

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So Lampe exits. The gentlemen produce the pretty chronometers all at the same time, for it strikes twelve from the castle tower,
and now because it's quiet one hears not only the strokes but also in between the rattling and wheezing of the works.

Below in the kitchen, where it's a little steamy, stand Kant and Hamann. Pinnau, did you say?

Yeah, but I know 'em too, good people, says the cook.

No, we mean the son, says Kant.

Good-looking bloke with black hair, says the woman.

Bookkeeper Pinnau, says Hamann, he is dead, this morning, I heard a shot, in the adjoining chamber, I ran there, and Pinnau was lying there, shot in the face, was dead immediately.

What was the matter with him, asks Kant, he worked at the Customs office didn't he?

He thought — Hamann puts his hat on again, which he had passed from one hand to the other, always shifting cane and cape. He wrote, poems — he desired that which is not possible, he says. And Kant replies quickly and tonelessly: Don't you too?

Above, the gentlemen walk about upon the bare planks, up to the window, into the room again, round the table. But what's keeping the host? And now Lampe comes with the tureen, and close behind, small and light, just as though the stairs had carried him from below, Kant and next to him — overly long
coat tails, cloak over the arm, hat on head, like a raven with shaggy wings caught up in the river wind, and with black cane — Customs and Warehouse Administrator Hamann.

He didn’t attend my lectures, says Kant, did he attend any at all?

With that he steps into the room, a bit astonished because he hears Hamann behind him answering: Yes, mine.

Schulz looks at Borowski, the Neurosgärten Parson, significantly, both shake their heads, and that means: Hamann? That fellow is surely neither licentiate nor master of arts, but the head shaking fits neatly in with the motion of the cones and rhombuses, skeins and whatnot, which now begins again.

Kanter with arms extended, which he brings together backwards, as if wanting to embrace the air behind him, as it were, the world, at least the town, or better, the three towns which indeed until recently it still was, together with its seven hills, surround it, offer it up to the Great One, Wise One, nay the World Wisdom itself. At the same time taking three, four baby-steps. And Scheffner! A short, fiery bow. So it is when out of admiration one tears away an amorous poet’s crown of honor from one’s own brow. That’s the way that looks! And Schulz, as mathematicus, knows best of all what the illustrious colleague signifies: a star. Of first
magnitude, of course. And the others also round about, circles and elliptical orbits, and again a little dance, charming, for the twelve strokes are past, and the town-musicians, down from the tower, blow their gay midday chorale over the roofs and into the houses as if their job were to cool the soup for rich and poor.

Turning slightly from one to the other, Kant warmly greets them all, and so everyone quickly comes to his place at table. A small sigh from bottom-heavy Schulz. But the first question is again directed towards Hamann. Kant says: What were you getting at before?

We were speaking of Pinnau, answers Hamann and sits down across from Kant.

Gentlemen — now that’s Kant again — Bookkeeper Pinnau of the local Tariff Bureau shot himself dead this morning. Gentlemenlike, as he lived. Mr. Hamann can give you the details.

Vasianski startled: Pinnau? And so now: Pinnau, upright, that is, son of poor people, of oft proved diligence, who started the bathing in the Pregel river, some more things and poems too — but what could become of him anyway, where did he come from anyhow? no place for him here; perhaps Kanter (but no one says so because Kanter is present) could have helped him or Korff or Hippel;
that sort of thing is always possible; but in the end he did find a place; so Pinnau had held a pistol to his face, he lay in the middle of the empty clerks' chamber, beneath a blackish cloud, which was reluctant to settle down over him.

Why does a person like Pinnau shoot himself, says Scheffner, and for Motherby it remains a question, he doesn't know. Who does anyhow? He was doing quite well, bookkeeper at the Tariff Bureau, he wanted to marry, six trees from Stockmar's garden had been promised him. Nothing to do with his work, was it, Mr. Hamann?

A lively conversation. Which brings the skeins, cones, rhombuses, even the pyramid Schulz into rollicking motion again. Although everybody still remains seated. One should be hard of hearing: then one could enjoy it completely as at a masquerade.

Kant raises his smooth little face towards ill mannered Hamann who as usual has again laid his left leg with its dirty shoe on the empty armchair next to him, and calls over: Do you know? And Hamann says: Yes, and it's about time Schulz got on with the grace.

So Kant says: Gentlemen, let us begin the meal. Be so kind, Mr. Royal Chaplain! and Schulz: — gatherst us daily about thy gift, gather us, Lord, about thy throne.
Adieu world, I am weary of thee.
One is not supposed to say that here.
The sentence will soon be two hundred years old. It was written down in Leipzig, probably in Tobias Michael’s house. The writer of these words, Tobias Michael, was chased out of the town not much later, fellow colleagues and school children joining in. Later, to be sure, he whirled the baton in Italy and elsewhere, and for the last ten years in Wolfenbüttel.

Adieu world. One is not supposed to say that here, not here and not now, when every sentence turns into a lie before it comes to an end.

Why should I talk at all with you people, who pick my sentences apart, with assigned roles, instead of singing, in five or six parts?
Only because I cannot live without you, without your hands and your voices? Without the blood upon them, without the rust?

There the gable emerges. That is the left loft. It emerges from the fog. Because the fog tears asunder, but not on account of this land wind, which is trying to get up to the bay. And could easily run over and away from the fog, up above over the fog, which has gobbled up the town’s midday vapors and now wants to swallow the fumes of the potato field fires which the wind carries along.

That is the left loft. This is the room from whose window one looks at the gable, past the slanting roofs. I shall not remain here. But so long as I shall be here, this will be my window. There is the gable.

I ran up the narrow stairs. To look at the bay. From the gable. Or to hear the bell behind the ponds. When the peal comes over here to the loft the weather breaks. Ran up. Stood still. There the light falls in an oblique strip from the dormer onto the planks. And to the side, where the shadow cuts off the strip of light, the man is hanging. A hanged man. Who hanged himself. Now ask me how the senator was clothed!

Father was clothed in black. White shirt front, white cuffs, watch chain with trinkets. Without shoes.
I have said all that. To the ladies. Who were running through the house and who are now occupied with trying not to understand. That he sneaked up in socks. That he didn’t mention anything before. That he however closed the ledger, with full signature. That he left behind no testament. Only this widow, née Trosiener, and houses and properties and the gifted daughter, who at the age of eight is snipping a design out of black paper, for the lay-out of the burial ground. Border of little flowers and a solemn tree, a broken-off column with a wreath.

There the gable has emerged. Which one sees from this window. It is my window so long as I am still here.

When I look down on to the courtyard, where the carters manoeuvre themselves beneath the rope winches in front of the storehouse doors, where bookkeeper Bendix is standing, darkly dressed, and shakes his head, as always, drops the name Pitt, with the addition Junior, as an expensive tip which he can make a present of: means in other words the new coalition, of English and European import absolutely, that is to say, also in these parts of consequence, directed against this Mr. Parvenu, who has just clapped on another crown in Milan, when I look down, as though I wanted to represent more than this young Mr. Arthur
who I am, now when the scandal has blown around the town: she, née Trosiener, was not that guiltless in this incident, the suicide, one doesn’t know whether to call it a tragedy or an embarrassment. They still have her never-ending chatter in their ears, chatter about conflit, conventions and these passions, these Trosienerian ones. Which in other words were at variance with the conventions — that was probably how she expressed it, when I look down and do not move away from the window, which remains shut, and do not even touch the curtains, when I look down, as though I were waiting: for someone to come, to walk across the yard, the right hand lifts up the skirt a little, the person turns slightly, the white silk ribbon in her hair by which one recognizes her as née Trosiener even in the dark, now replaced by a black one, what else am I waiting for? That the gable should bend forward, slowly, over the courtyard, cast its shadow, dispatch it, quickly, to capture the person down there, with one clutch, she stands still in the middle of a lively, graceful turn, lets her skirt fall over her shoes, her forefinger rests on her lower lip, a perplexed face, surely, but still very pleasing, even as a silhouette, now trembling, as in Adele’s fingers, as if the scissors were just at work, on the dress and on the little hair ribbon — why don’t I hear
the wood crashing, the beams crunching, grinding into one another, pegs cracking, sills and posts being wrenched out and bars and stays outsting the principal post and the storm beams sidewards? Doesn't the gable bend forward? Am I waiting for that? Am I wait­ing for it to plunge, plunge down over that small picture down there?

I see the gable. No fog now. Beyond the slanting roofs the gable. Nothing has stirred, no one has gone across the courtyard, no one with lifted-up skirt.

And you will have to go, not across the courtyard, ladies, but down the stoop, you have become the talk of the town, I shall take you out, evict you, dispatch you, there the carriage is waiting, it will be easy for me. The née Trosiener woman and the smart child who will take her silhouette along.

Then you are gone. Then the chatter comes once again, from the tall houses in the Jopen Alley, and is a howl close behind me, I who cannot remain here, cannot fulfil ex­pectations, cannot be this young gentleman, cannot open the ledger again, write the new name beneath the old one.

Only go away, follow after you, leave my sentences to you for picking apart, lend an ear to your idle chatter with assigned parts, not expecting you to sing them. Only because I cannot live without your voices? Because

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I cannot live without your hands? Sooner without this gable, which has not tumbled? Above which the fog will again come.
In this uncommon way.
   As a result of my economic condition.
   That can be read in the *Mitau Intelligencer*, year 1809, number twenty-four, it concerns a certain Boehlendorff, Kasimir Anton Ulrich Boehlendorff, native of Mitau, who requests the Baltic commercial firms to raise a letter of credit for one hundred thalers payable at Bremen.

Boehlendorff. What does one know about Boehlendorff?

In Rodenpois parsonage they say: Young person of flighty ways, the hair on the nape of his neck would suffice for half a sheep; but that was six years ago, and backbiting goes on only so long. And Hofmeister Bendig in Little Wenden says that Boehlendorff had written a small book of poetry, published in
Berlin, in general was taken up with the Muses, in Jena, and, as one heard, in Homburg, among poets, who roved about the court there, around a landgravine or princess, but Bendig is a sansculotte. And even that was some time ago. But Boehlendorffian poems do exist. For General Rosenberg's wife's eightieth birthday and also this one, published in the *Intelligencer*:

Shall I ever onwards wander,  
Seldom pause, never repose.

Author unnamed.

No, it's not by Petersen, confirms Editor Hensler. Therefore, as we said, by Boehlendorff. And the request now? But no one will answer that. Behrens, Hartknoch, Ströhm, good Lord, no.

Boehlendorff says, *Geheime Rat Woltmann* has offered him a professorship. Where then, in Bremen, whereabouts there? But is he in Mitau now anyway, this Boehlendorff?

Now he'll probably offer his writings to our publishers, says Editor Hensler. And who then is going to reply to him? Good Lord, literature.

*Ugolino Gherardeska*, Tragedy, printed Dresden, 1801.

*Fernando* or *The Consecration of Art*, Dramatic Idyll, printed Bremen, 1802.

“History of the Helvetic Revolution,” in
four volumes, in Woltmann’s *History and Politics*, parts ten and eleven.

It’s possible that he was something in Germany. But now he’s here and he’s no use to us.

It’s been going on like that for quite a while, the young people with the most brilliant talents as one hears again and again, fly away, they are a sensation and finally they come back to us, unjustly dissatisfied, and for that we let them study. *Primarius* Heintze said so, and so does Parson Giese’s wife from Rodenpois.

And there she is riding to Podekay with the Baron von Campenhausen in the Campenhausen coach, they have just left Henselshof behind them when the Baron says: Well, my dear.

In this uncommon way.
As a result of my economic condition.

Rain. There is the rain. The rain rains. Behind the rain the void. Which is white. White hair, of a creature without eyes, which lifts up its white face over the edge. Over the edge. Which edge?

The earth used to be a disk, then a sphere, now it’s a disk again. And where I tread, it sinks in beneath my feet, the black earth yields more than the white, it sinks in wherever I walk — Galtern, Strasden, Rittels-
dorf, Walgalen, Birsch — and I tread down a whole wide valley, on this disk.

And now the rain has come. That is the rain. The rain rains. But one day or one evening the sea comes over the sand, over the dunes, comes and falls into the valley, everything drowns — Galtern, Strasden, Rittelsdorf, Walgalen, Birsch.

Herr Baron cries Kaschmich the gypsy stableman and comes running, but who’s fallen over now, Herr Baron.

Right, right, says the one addressed, yet he doesn’t rise, but crawls towards the fence, towards a decorticated, bleached stake, and feels his way up with his hands.

Everything recorded, he says, and feels beneath his fingertips the flat paths which the bark beetles have made. Everything recorded. The valley, and how the flood waters plunge down over the valley, towards evening.

But, Herr Baron, but her gracious mistress, the Baroness, did say.

Right, right.

So they go back, in the rain, the little gypsy and the tall barefooted one with the ill-fitting trousers, to the estate, across the sheep pasture.

Let him go, Kaschmich. That’s what the Baroness had said. But no, says Kaschmich, that’s not for Kaschmich. Kaschmich brings
Boehlendorff back to the entrance gate and into the house, and not through the servants’ entrance, but up the front drive.

Boehlendorff, you shall instruct my sons, you have studied such things, Boehlendorff, so go and get your clothes.

He showed up in the district for St. John’s Day and as one heard tell stayed, if one could call it staying, in the parsonage and on the estate of Baron Klingbeil’s wife, here and there, ragged, without papers; but still it was Boehlendorff, with his talk about the sea, the Unger newspaper appearing somewhere in Prussia, the Geheime Rat Woltmann, the Messieurs Herbart and Fichte, a sailor named Sinclair, presumably either an able seaman or an officer, to judge by what he said.

He has already spent weeks here, on estates, in the Galtern parsonage, this Boehlendorff, but as from today and as long as he is dressed as a person of respectable descent, in other words as a person: Herr Hofmeister, a gentleman, that is to say, Herr Hofmeister Boehlendorff. Kaschmich, the Baroness calls.

Yes, I know, answers the servant Kaschmich.

What does a bishop do, Herr Hofmeister? There they come, or there comes the revolution and it is already here, and he sits in the church, gaily attired.
Henri, says Boehlendorff, they are Calvinists in Switzerland.

Well then a dean or a clergyman.

Henri is the youngest of the three Messieurs Klingbeil; he asks questions. The sixteen-year-old doesn’t ask questions, the seventeen-year-old doesn’t either.

In Riga, says Henri.

In Riga there were bishops, yes. One of them drank until blue in the face, another, a balmy mice catcher, the others put on coats of armor and hunted the people in Latgale down towards Lithuania or up beyond the Narva. We won’t talk about that.

In Lausanne, says Boehlendorff, in the year ’ninety-seven the revolution stood at the house gates and came out onto the streets and into the cantons of Vaud, Lower Valais and into the city of Geneva. We were standing on the other side of the lake, the lake is big, the visibility was good, the opposite shore appeared close enough to touch. We called over to the opposite shore, they must have heard it over there, in Evian, in Thonon, in all of Chablais; it seemed to us as if the whole world went about with arms outstretched.

_Herr Hofmeister_, Madame Mama sets great value upon our _avancement_ in French. That’s the two eldest again.

La Harpe, says Boehlendorff, called upon
the French, but before they came, the cantons, the councils and the leading families already had their people ready and sent them into Vaud to the incendiary centers and into the protectorates and the common lands.

And so the revolution went astray, say the young Messieurs Klingbeil.

But in 'ninety-eight the French came with Peter Ochs' new constitution.

And you immediately ran off to Hesse, Herr Hofmeister.

I have written about that, says Boehlendorff.

He takes up position at the window. Early afternoon. It looks autumnal this year, already in August. We'll carry on tomorrow. French.

Boehlendorff stands at the window. His gaze passes over the meadows. Outside it grows barer and barer. The rye has gone. The birds fly up from the pea patch, motionless in the air as though far behind fences had been erected, high up in the air, but not for the birds, who alight upon them before they fly away beyond them. These fences, which Boehlendorff sees, are high and bleached, but not enough against the sea when it rises, wall high, piles up wall upon wall, and strikes downward over the paling, plunges, fills the valley which has been trampled down, travels gurgling over Galtern, Strasden, Rittels-
dorf, Walgalen, Birsch, swirling a crest of foam around the church tower and a smaller one around Pastor Riechert's black-tarred clogs, which are swimming about there.

Everything recorded. In the book of history on the barn doors, to be read in the woods, on the chopped off trunks, and on the earth before it rains.

Herr Baron, says Kaschmich.
Right, dinner, right.

That night, Boehlendorff was out again. Will someone see him as he runs across the heath? Above him clouds chase, cover the moon, set the moon free again, its light darts about like a pack of dogs on the heath, as if avoiding one another or lunging hither and thither, suddenly it flings itself far out in front as if on a scent.

Boehlendorff runs along in front of the light, with arms flapping. Talks like a mute. Nobody's on the Courland road this night, who is there to hear him? The fog has the taste of extinguished fires.

In a nice little tutor's frock coat, a bit of embroidery at the top, sleeves much too short.

There comes the Behrse, clear and even over the stones and here on the washed up deposits above the sand, a rivulet, past the woods and the ruins of the left bank. Across the way lies Doblen, houses and a sandy
road. And broad daylight now, and Boehlendorff stands on this sandy road, wearing shoes, and his tutor’s frock coat.

People come by and show him into the parsonage. And he sleeps away a day. In the evening they take him with them, combed, there is a festivity at Counsel Meyers’.

Herr Boehlendorff, says Meyers, who is a man of letters, and has been writing a history of the Duchy for some time.

But he’s said to have composed an ode to Catherine, some time ago, which was taken amiss, because he called the Empress Aspasia, and people took it that he saw himself as Pericles, the cheek of it!

Meyers, white-haired, with closed shirt collar, Meyers says: Unfortunately never had the honor, the pleasure’s all the greater now, have heard a lot nevertheless.

And then straight away a question, after two little glasses: We have this Napoleon behind us, we have abolished serfdom in the provinces and kept our nobility, gotten a university, my question: the young people with their fire — one recalls — what are they doing, where are they directing their fire? We see before our eyes, everything falls back into place, the Alliance.

Yes, it all falls back into place, says Boehlendorff, it all cools down, isn’t that true?
Boehlendorff, says Pastor Beer, you are a poet, aren’t you.

But that’s just what I was driving at, says Meyers. The fire of youth in other words, immortalizes itself in poetry, what a flowering of the arts is at hand.

Boehlendorff helps himself to a drink and lets it spill over.

But one has heard, my dear Boehlendorff, and of course read, you went around with a whole swarm of poets in Germany.

Taciturn, Boehlendorff, put out?

With a whole swarm. Try to remember: Neuffer, Schmidt, Wilman, Zwilling, Sekendorff, Magenau, a certain Hölderlin, Sinclair.

But surely not all at the same time? What was it like? Master Hölderlin went to live at glazier Wagner’s, in Homburg the air is good, Herr von Sinclair went to court, Zwilling set his heart on a uniform.

Well, Boehlendorff, says Pastor Beer.

It wasn’t like that, says Boehlendorff slowly, and now the sentence Boehlendorff brings forth wherever he goes, here in the provinces, whose answer Boehlendorff reads on the wood, the wood of the fences and the wood of the barn doors, and on the earth during the rain, the sentence families object to and Herr von Campenhausen and Pastor Giese’s wife, the sentence with which Boeh-
lendorff steps out of this drawing room as he stepped out of the folding doors of the estate houses and the french windows of the personages: How must a world be created worthy of a moral being?

Moral being, oh for God's sake. Everyone is that, or thinks he is, wherever he goes, this Boehlendorff. Moral being.

And a world?
The valley of shadow imposed upon us as an ordeal?
But which one day will happen.
And be created?
And must?
We all had ideas one time or another, says Pastor Beer. And, as they say, water subsides.

And the people, what do they say? When he tells of the revolution of the Franks and of the Helvetians? Around a lake and unimaginably high mountains. What do the people say?

Sit and cover their faces with their hands, sigh through their fingers: horrible. With eyes closed.

When Boehlendorff has gone out they say: Good person, the Hofmeister, that fellow.
And the others, when Boehlendorff has also gone out, through the drawing-room door?
Meyers says: The tax reform, as I see, is
that the ordinances and directives are henceforth complete at hand, fifth volume of the laws of the Reich, Ustav on imposts, Titularrat Murchgraf in Mitau is submitting the translation.

In other words, as has been, says tax collector Bergmann, the communal courts shall determine the local rates to be paid according to the number of souls in the audit, Article 205.

Indeed, in pursuance of the Ordinance of August 25, Paragraphs 23, 188, 189, Article 12 will be widened insofar as, in addition to the usual police measures, in case of dereliction of payment the prospect of military action is expressly held out.

But not with us, says Bergmann, who doesn’t have these ordinances in the new, complete form and probably doesn’t need them either. The tenants pay and that’s that.

Certainly, but Paragraphs 188, 189 expressly fix payments on the part of the estate owners which will be claimed for the crown imposts in the event the tenant is sentenced to work off a debt to the landlord.

Don’t be ridiculous, says Bergmann, in the first place they will pay, it will keep on going like that, and secondly the ordinances governing the details to be given, allow as much freedom as the winter has in Great Russia,
one leaps into a sleigh, and it’s off amidst the ringing of bells, across a marsh, a lake, a snowed-in village, and who knows what else, but who does know anyway, accountancy accounts for everything.

One of the cute sayings of the Honorable District Receiver of Revenues, isn’t it, which has already reached my ears, says Meyers, but of course: Courland and Livonia as before, 2 rubles 58 copecks, excepting those well-known lists, concerning scholars and such like. Which Murchgraf by the way will go into in detail.

Is everything falling back into place or is everybody cooling off? Who’s cooling off? What is that actually? And moral being? And be created? And must? Accounting accounts for everything.

And for a time the restless one disappears. He’s seen on the dry bank of the Livonian As, and on the left one too, the one with the many small tributaries, and he crosses over the Dvina, there where the green Ogre river discharges itself into the murky current, quickly as if by bounds, he goes upstream. Green water glass-like. And now from both banks the trees come down to meet the scanty reeds, and the river bottom is of red rock, hoisting itself up out of the current and pushing the sandbanks back into the woods, it
stands washed smooth and red, as a wall, and even autumn is red here in these woods, the leaves are flying over the river.

Boehlendorff, Boehlendorff, cry the birds and turn away from him.

Boehlendorff walks along the stone bank. He stands still and follows them with his eyes. And finds the writing again, beneath his feet the signs, carved into the stone. Upon which people have walked, tracks, foot tracks. That’s what he has to talk about, in Adsenau and in Laubern, where he leaves the woods and ends up finally on the plain on the northern bank and now lives in the wood villages, for a time.

And in the spring Baron Fircks meets him outside the little town of Kandau. He’s kneeling on the town wall and scraping the earth from a stone slab, but the slab is bare. So he scratches the signs, as he’s read them again and again, with his nail upon the decayed surface and then follows behind Fircks into the winding streets.

Summer heralds itself prematurely with thunderstorms. The storm hurls a few old trees over the wall. Then the nights become clear, the moon is white and seems to stand still. The rats come out of the gateways and storehouses above the market place and march in a great host, filling up the breadth of the street, up to the edge of the town and
beyond, past the wooden shacks, out along the moat, up to the brook.

Past Boehlendorff, who's walking around up on the wall, over the filled-in vaults, above the hollow clang beneath the stone slabs, which follows his steps. From the remains of the corner turret the musty odor rises up and mixes with the reeking of the black alders.

Not another word. Up over the silence every day from the valley meadows rises the morning, gray and white light, as if cut in pieces by the noise of the peewits.

The mad Boehlendorff is in Kandau. As is known. Better than him coming here, says Fircks to his Baroness. In the autumn we'll ask him to join the hunt, then we'll have something to laugh about when he runs away frightened by the cries of the beaters.

Only, autumn doesn't come that quickly. The un-German villages, as they are called, lie on the road to Zabeln. Here Boehlendorff was seen walking along behind a team of oxen. Again the signs. On the ropes, on the implements. The traces of the hands.

Here, someway after Walgalen, Kaschmich, who's on his way with the horses to Strasden, finds him and addresses him, but Boehlendorff waves him off with the same motion as the Baroness Klingbeil, which she
then repeated that evening when Kaschmich
told her about the encounter.

Rain. That’s the rain. The rain rains. The
earth sinks in beneath my feet. I tread this
valley down, the black earth yields more
than the white. And thence then comes the
sea, everything drowns, Galtern, Strasden,
Rittelsdorf, Walgalen, Birsch.
And everything recorded.
The birds fly up from the pea patch, away
beyond the fences, which Boehlendorff sees,
in the air, high and bleached, but not enough
against the sea when it rises and plunges over
them and first filling up the valley that’s been
trampled down and then the land, which will
rise up once again, but then fall back.
There’ll be nothing there. I can go away.

I come but to others yonder,
but ne’er kindred spirits have won,
know of none.

Thus continues the poem, the one men­tioned in the Mitau Intelligencer, it’s still
remembered.
The reflective Marienfeld, who walks
about behind the dunes, a familiar figure to
children and grown-ups, forgotten by his
church board in Riga, but who is satisfied, or
has become so, to be forgotten, near the Gulf
of Riga, in a village behind the sand, behind
the Angern lake, he gazes down upon himself and confirms the sameness of the times by his coat, always the same one for the past decade.

He came here, went up to the castle, hid himself away in Angels’ Cloister, as the parsonage is called here, from where he emerges every afternoon, to walk around behind the dunes — always in the same coat — the familiar figure Marienfeld, preacher at Markgrafen.

He didn’t once go abroad, not to St. Petersburg, not to Prussia, always remained here. Hedges and lilacs, nothing to be seen there, not the fences, not the signs on the wood.

Now all that stirs in him like the wind from Syrve or Abro which comes running from the southern spurs of the island of Ösel, over the water of the bay, but probably from even farther away only bypassing Syrve and Abro, farther away, from the open sea.

The ships move past Markgrafen so tranquilly, towards Dvinamünde, with still sails of frosted glass. To think that they came over the sea, and one or the other, which used to move past, come no more because the sea has taken them away, shattered and smashed with storms and great waves, higher than the coastal woods.

Marienfeld has a picture at home which
was given to him, it depicts the sinking of a ship, a heaven of fire and blue smoke. *Non mergimur undis*, says preacher Marienfeld when he stands in front of it, and gazes down upon his decade-old coat, casts his gaze down upon his long, jutting-out pointed shoes, before he goes out through the french window.

Now all that stirs in him like the Syrve or Abro wind.

What is such a person looking for here, says Marienfeld. Always talking of such things. But then he should go, to Helvetia or Jena.

Or Bremen.

Go, Herr von Boehlendorff, says Marienfeld, and goes his customary way in his customary manner, behind the dunes. And is frightened at his own words: There he sees Boehlendorff incarnate in front of him, not five paces away, the arms firmly to his side, as though he were holding himself together, drawn up, bent slightly forward.

A short walk, Reverend?

Herr Tutor, says Marienfeld, avoiding the condescending designation *Hofmeister*, is Herr Tutor likewise taking a look at God's nature?

Not really, says Boehlendorff, I've been following you, I'd like to know.

Herr Tutor, you ought never to follow anyone around, ought not to be so much out
and about. That’s what his Lord the Baron says.

I beg your pardon, says Boehlendorff, and Marienfeld answers and talks and doesn’t notice: Boehlendorff starts at this word, or that expression, or an intonation: You go into the people’s houses as one come from far off, with the standards of a foreign world, you disturb the peace, with things which are beyond the people’s comprehension, there are refusals to pay imposts, animosity has even reached the church door.

Marienfeld, who was looking down at himself while talking, takes a step back, aghast, stretches his hands out towards Boehlendorff, raises the right hand as if to make the sign of the cross, as if against the devil: Herr von Boehlendorff.

Bastard, hisses Boehlendorff, between his teeth, you’re the one, you talk the people into it: that they scrape along on heavenly rewards, in their sweat and in the rain...

Herr von Boehlendorff.

Bastard, says Boehlendorff, I’ll be sitting there in your church and will read you off the signs from your church benches, accounting accounts for everything.

Marienfeld stays where he’s standing.

Boehlendorff turns away, towards the dunes. The evening comes lightly in pale colors. Up from the water the stillness treads
across the sand. From the top of the dune one looks out over the bay and south across the long stretched-out lake, which accompanies the clear open water with its own dark color, between sand and fields and patches of wood, far away down there, towards Angern, to the pointed church tower and a shining roof in front.

For this Boehlendorff, whom Marienfeld caught sight of on the dune on April 24, 1825, before he made his way off with cold hands inland, for this Herr Tutor, Marienfeld, on the third day following, delivers the funeral oration.

And he didn’t have to do it.

Owing to a sudden illness of Mme. Baroness, Herr von Eller did not appear. He didn’t have to. Could have done so though. The children, the two girls were brought to Dorotheenhof to Aunt Gawehl yesterday.

But who is there anyway?
Old Fräulein von Zandikov. So, there is someone from the estate after all.

And the local teacher Schiemann.
And the locals.

Preacher Marienfeld gazes down at his slightly grayed robe and doesn’t recognize himself. Boehlendorff?

He would have to talk about Boehlendorff’s parents and about his kinsfolk, recount the merits of the deceased, sketch in the
course his life had taken. What does one know of Boehlendorff?

He shot himself dead. After he had lived here a year almost. Tutor Boehlendorff, gray, long and thin, in the fiftieth year of his life. What kind of death is that?

Hard to talk about. Marienfeld isn’t likely to learn how, nor are others, if anyone, then Marienfeld. He can recite a few lines from a slip of paper the gray estate Fräulein gave him. From the window-sill in Boehlendorff’s chamber.

Cast my wreath to torrents flowing,
alas! my last most precious Good
faded by the with’ring glowing!

He can say the unhappily departed one had clung to his high ideals in the midst of the contrarieties of this world, the deceased’s writings bear witness to this, and the praise of the fatherland shall not be denied them in the years to come.

Does he say that?

He says something about the storms of desperation and about a security that is concealed and alone. Marienfeld has a picture at home that was given to him, in front of it he says: Non mergimur.

But he speaks too long, this Marienfeld. The wind can do it better anyway. It rushes over the graves, every day, over the cemetery
south of the village of Markgrafen. Scatters the light, white sand wherever it goes and blows.

Local teacher Schiemann throws the three handfuls of earth over the coffin. All that didn’t have to be.

One will also forget it quickly.

What will then be left of Boehlendorff?

There is the now famous letter from Master Hölderlin, 1802, addressed to Boehlendorff: ...as ascribed to the heroes...touched by Apollo I ...

Someone compiles a book of Baltic poets, in it he sets Boehlendorff alongside the notoriously unhappy Lenz, we could have done that too. Editor Hensler says you see, times have changed: Boehlendorff, spelling usually differing... Shattered in soul and body, the lamentable one evoked Goethe-like harmonies from his lyre.

But how hard the sky is on that day. Harder than the waters of the bay. Darker than the waters of the Angern. A light behind the sky which it still holds firm, forcing it back.

There is something in the air like crunching.

Will they erect a stone for him?
And who should do it?
Questions.
And what will be said about him in Livonia?
What does local teacher Schiemann say? Or Fräulein von Zandikov? Who go back to the estate on foot.
And what are we going to do? Do we erect a monument? A column? Have that sentence hammered into the stone: moral being and be created and must?
Good person, that Herr Hofmeister.
That's what the people who are standing round the grave say. They all look upwards.
The gleam of light has hurled itself up over the gloomy sky, it stands high aloft, and begins to plunge, now to sink, and to spread out from above over the whole gloominess, over the hard sky, where the storm springs up and guides the crunching along from the bay inland, over Galtern, Strasden, Rittelsdorf, Walgalen, Birsch, over the valley, dropping deeper around the gorse, but then out to the bay again, a white road stretching itself far out over the water.
And the people scurry back to the village.
Good person. What else?
Surely that is something already and surely it is unnecessary to know more about Boehlendorff.
Oh dear, my wee God, Marie calls, as if something is getting under her feet.

Let that guy alone, he’s got to sleep now, says Krönert. And turns over in the cow shed and says: Seeing as he’s kept an eye on me the whole night. And Schipporeit stands in the door, very much in a boozer’s contentment, and sings: Put Satan’s fierce assaults to flight.

A morning conversation, Schipporeit recounts further. Oh my goodness, Marie calls, now just listen. Krönert says: Let him sleep now, man, that guy can’t find any peace and quiet at all, first keeping an eye on me the whole night, and not even any peace now.

I comes by Nausseden, everything quiet, I turns on to the highway, in a flash two men are on the road, one up front to the horses,
the other with me. Why waste words, I got the wagon stanchion lying there, I bashes him one on the head with it. Already wanted to jump up, then he falls back, you can just picture it: as dark as up your ass hole, right and left, woods. Then I whistles — Schipporeit whistles, that piercing gypsy whistle with the slur back and front — the horses are off, dunno where the guy's got to. And at Vieberneit's barn, as I comes by there, sits the old woman Varszus, clasping a gravestone. I says: Hey you, now — the night? She shouts: I'm just resting. Sits there, clings to the stone.

Oh that one, says Marie, the red one.

And then up comes the thunderstorm, says Schipporeit, I sees it coming over the Jura, not straight over, it goes towards the bridge, thins out real fine and comes over the bridge, nose high, as is fittin', now it's on our side, thickens up again. But it's still doing a pretty good job of holding the rain in.

Now that's enough, says Krönert, so much bull so early in the morning.

But Krönert old man, the red stone, you know?

Oh yeah, says Krönert, she's schlepped it up again. That old woman creepin' roun', at night, with the stone.

I'll drive by afterwards and bring it back, says Schipporeit. Yes, do that, says Marie.
And what's gonna happen to the cows, asks Krönert.

What's going to happen to the cows?

The stone is lying in front of Lina Varszus' house, red, a red stone, a cross, but yet more a block because the arms are just hinted at and the head piece too. They protrude only two fingers broad, too little's been hewn away, on the right and on the left and above and below. This red cross, this stone for seven children, died of diphtheria in one week, in the same year the father drowned, Skaliks, that was the family's name, no one there anymore. The floods came once and burrowed about till it was underneath the stone. But nothing there anymore.

Krönert shoveled in the hole, with sand. It was none of his business. And old woman Varszus fetched the stone again for the fourth time.

Schipporeit — to resume — says: Whoa, the horses stop short. There's the stone lying in front of the door. Where is Lina?

Come on out, says Schipporeit.

Hermann deary, says Lina Varszus, the old girl is sitting in her parlor, in front of her earthen pot full of spirits. Hermann deary.

But Hermann Schipporeit doesn't hear that, outside on the wagon. Hermann deary.
So get down, towards the door, the stone is heavy, a left heave, set it upright, there it’s standing, the chunk. Like the Gustabalde, says Schipporeit, there comes Lina Varszus out of the house.

Leave that thing here, Hermann deary, says Lina Varszus.

Buzz off, says Schipporeit.

And what’s going to happen to the cows?

The cows are lying in Mahnke’s shed, ten head of cattle, the water drips off their hides. Along the top of their butter-soft backs. The milk-blue eyes, good heavens, hard and black as pitch. In Mahnke’s shed, at Vieberneit’s where else?

Hermann deary, but you know! says Lina Varszus.

Old hag, says Schipporeit, the stone belongs in the cemetery.

And what’s going to happen to the cows?

It’s one of those days. Gray and dull-yellow. Like brittle ice. When it cracks the floes become white because the water emerges now and is all black. One of those days. And everything wet from the thunderstorm, which came from the bridge unscathed as far as the village, but then cracked open after all, in this direction and that, a couple of bolts into the river, then it was a heavy rain, till about five.

There the sky was flinging water and
I didn’t stop at all, and still didn’t wash itself shiny, not itself and not the day, not even the edge of the woods along the village, not even Staschull’s garden, not even the blackberries along the river.

I don’t want to see that, says Schipporeit.

Ah come on in, I’ll show you.

In the parlor Schipporeit says: You could open the shutters. But the old woman draws him to the spirits pot. It’s full almost to the brim, and bands are stretched over it, cross-wise, in which the snakes are bound, right behind their heads, they stand out above the brim of the pot.

Poison vipers, you can see the markings.

Another four days, says Lina Varszus.

That much Schipporeit knows himself: Then the snakes have turned quite light. For six weeks they’ve been hanging in the spirits and sweating out all their poison. Then they’re buried. And the spirits are sprinkled in the sheds, and a couple of cows kick the bucket, and a couple get up again, and the epidemic is over. Some time or other it’ll come again. So that’s the business with the cows. And what about the stone?

Then the spirits are carried over there. Even held a while above it.

But the stone is a cross, isn’t it?

Yeah, just barely a cross, if not a very distinct one. They sure didn’t take much pain
with this stone. And the color, where are there red stones here?

The Gustabalde is also red. It stands on the road to Sommerau, a thick, flattened-off stone, which a couple of rills have been driven into, nose and mouth, the navel and over the whole body a circular line. A heathen stone. That one's from a long time ago, Schipporeit knows.

And this stone, this cross?
Well we know after all where it's from. From the cemetery.
And I'm taking it back, says Hermann Schipporeit. You people and your nonsense! Another four days, says Lina Varszus.
Schipporeit rushes off in the wagon, home, there the cows are sick. Well for all I care, four more days.
Are you givin' it now or aren't you, says Vieberneit. Just another four days, says Lina Varszus.
Dammit I'm not going to have my cattle croak on me, says Vieberneit. At least just another three days, says Lina Varszus. I mean you've gotta wait.
Like hell I will, says Vieberneit quietly and in a flash is at the pot and rips off the bands. Vieberneit!
Old hag, shouts Vieberneit and shakes off the woman and thrusts her against the oven. And there she lies.
Vieberneit, don’t! Just another three days.
Lina Varszus raises herself. The dirty dog.
And stays crouched where she had lain. And
Vieberneit’s gone out, with the pot. Who
knows, the stone is after all still lying in front
of the door. But it shan’t work, it shan’t, let
them croak, if that’s what he wants. The
dog, the dirty dog.
The old woman sits there till nearly eve-
ning. Her hair over her forehead, in her eyes.
Sings to herself, talks, babbles something half
out loud. And now she rolls to the side, gets
up on to her knees, steadies herself with her
arms, stands up. And knows: They’re walk-
ing into the shed now, the Vieberneiterians,
first up to the back wall, stand still, turn to
each other, now they turn completely around
and make their way back, the dog with the
pot, the damned dog, sprinkle with the pine
brush, from left to right, from right to left,
always nice and slow, one more, one more.
But the special words, my goodness, those
people don’t know them, you can’t do it
without the special words.
Who knows, maybe they fetched Auk-
thun’s grandma, but what does she know!
A few spells for St. Anthony’s fire or warts,
not these special words though.
Here Lina says them to herself, the special
words. In her parlor. Where it is somber. She
takes the steps, up to the other wall and back
again, swings her arms, speaks. Now it's over. She fastens her headscarf and goes out of the house. And stands on the stone. And comes back again and sits down in the chair. I'm through, I'm through. And shakes her head, not at all quickly, not at all concerned, shakes her head and falls into singing. Who are these like stars appearing, these, before God's throne who stand? Each a golden crown is wearing: who are all this glorious band? I'm through. The sin, the sin. Which will be held against me before the heavenly Father.

The stone is still lying in front of the door. That night the sky becomes absolutely clear. Above the clearing behind Lina Varszus' little house a couple of stars keep aloft a long time, they don't move on at all. The heavenly Father can look down there if he has a mind to, or listen down to the screech owlet, which hoots behind the first spruces, at the end of the clearing.

The old woman toils away with the stone diagonally across the clearing, past the birch stumps, across the sand, drags it on, bit by bit, moaning again leans over it. I'll just rest.

That night it doesn't grow dark at all. Although the moon keeps aloft behind the woods. Later it will come down the river and help the fish-eating fish with its light, light up everything, up into the bushes on
the shore. Beat it will you, you shiny fishies, don’t dream around there.

Let it lie there, the stone, the heavenly Father might say at this point, who can look down if he has a mind to. What’re you tormenting yourself so much for, at your age.

But Lina doesn’t hear. She lies there, her face on the stone. Lina is dead.
Burn me, burn me, burn me, the old woman sings and turns while singing, nice and slowly and circumspectly, and now she flings the wooden clogs from her feet, there they fly in an arc up to the fence, and she turns now even faster beneath the little apple tree. Burn me, dear sun, she sings as accompaniment. She’s pushed up the sleeves of her blouse and swings her bare arms, and small, thin shadows fall from the boughs of the little tree, it is high noon, and the woman turns with small steps. Burn me, burn me, burn me.

In the house a letter is lying on the table. From America. There you can read:

My dear Mother. Inform you that we will not be traveling to you. It’s only a couple of days, I say to my wife, then we’re there, and it’s a couple of days, I say, Alice, then
we’re back again. And don’t they say: Honor mother and father, and even if father has died, the grave is there, and mother is old, I say, and if we don’t go now we’ll never go. And my wife says: Listen to me, John, she says John to me, it’s beautiful there, you’ve told me that, but that was before. Man is young or old, she says, and the young person doesn’t know what it’ll be like when he’s old, and the old person doesn’t know what it was like in his youth. You’ve become something here, and you’re not there anymore. That’s what my wife says. She’s right. You know, her father transferred the business to us, things are going well. You can have your mother come here, she says. But of course you’ve written, Mother, that you can’t come because at least one has to stay there because all of us are gone.

The letter is even longer. It comes from America. And where it comes to a close reads: Your loving son Jons.

It is high noon, and it is beautiful. The house is white. A barn stands at the side. The barn too is white. And here is the garden. A little way down the mountain stands the next farm, and then comes the village, alongside the river, and the highway turns up towards here and goes past, once more towards the river and back again and into the woods. It is beautiful. And it is high
noon. The old woman turns about beneath
the little apple tree. She swings her bare
arms. Dear sun, burn me, burn me.

In the parlor it is cool. A cluster of artemisia dangles from the ceiling and buzzes
with flies. The old woman takes the letter
from the table, folds it up and carries it in to
the kitchen to the stove. She walks back
again into the parlor. The mirror is hanging
between the two windows, tucked in there in
the lower corner left, between frame and
glass, a picture. A photograph from America.
The old woman takes the picture out, she
sits down at the table and writes on the
reverse side: That's my son Jons. And that's
my daughter Alice. And underneath she
writes: Erdmuthe Gauptate née Attalle. She
tugs her blouse sleeve down and smooths it
out. A pretty white material with small blue
dots. From America. She stands up, and
while walking to the stove waves the picture
a bit through the air. When Annus came
from Tauroggen, way back, and stayed here,
way back: It's because of the arms, he said,
there weren't any such white arms, up there,
where he came from, and not here where he
then stayed. And he talked about that for
thirty years. Annus.

Man is young or old. What does the old
person need then anyway? The daylight
becomes darker, the shadows become
brighter, the night is no longer made for sleeping, the roads shorten. Only two, three roads more, at last one.

She places the picture on the stove, next to the folded-up letter. Then she fetches the matches from the chest and places them alongside. We’ll boil up the milk, she says and goes out, for some wood.
Lobelia in other words.
    No, not at all Lobelia.
    But yes it is.
    But no it isn't.

Here you've got to explain that Lobelia is a village, somewhat stretched out, along a much traveled highway, and Lobelian Grove a public house, a beer garden, an establishment and as befits, sufficiently removed from Lobelia. Whoever has a horse in Lobelia, rides to Lobelian Grove in a carriage. And does not take the others along, the other Lobelianers, who have no horse. At the outside Mr. Tesche, the customs functionary, frontier guard, customs official, customs squadron sergeant major or whatever it's called. As is customary here. You also buy him beer and for Lene, that's
Tesche’s wife, a lemonade, in Lobelian Grove.

That’s certainly enough then, and it’s beautiful here on a Sunday. Innkeeper Ambrassat lays the table cloths outside and has to shout Marie six times in a row before his wife joins him and straightens out the garden chairs.

There are in fact already people there, plumber Borbe with his wife, the midwife, and Kakschies from the ferry and farmer Bussat with his brother, called Mr. Bussat, and not without the woman of the family, as usual.

It’s lovely here in the woods. Ambrassat gets out the gramophone and winds it up and sticks the crank back in his pocket. Now the music roars into action, Lützow’s Wild, Daring Hunt, performed by the Berlin Teachers’ Glee Club in disquieting fashion. The deep voices, that gurgle around way down there and all of a sudden become velvet smooth because it’s going up higher, you can keep up with them all right, but those tenors, how do those guys do it, so far up there, well I just don’t know.

And altogether this gramophone.

Ambrassat’s father-in-law, the late teacher Fett, brought it along with him in the year ’ninety-three from the Chicago World Fair. He went over there you see, across the
Atlantic, and actually came back. Then he had something to talk about for the remaining thirty years.

Ambrassat keeps it in good shape with oil, everyone except him mucks himself up when he touches it, Ambrassat services it all by himself too. Promised the ol’ father-in-law with a handshake as he was drawing up his testament. But it certainly pays, doesn’t it?

It would be even better if the records played longer, but the machine is not so particularly big, maybe it wouldn’t manage it. But anyhow, a good strong case of wood, glasspanes are fitted into the sides, there you see the flappisms, as Ambrassat says. It goes nice and steady and slow, the speed comes through the transmission, says Ambrassat. On one of the records the well-known Caruso sings some African piece or other by Meyerbeer. And the tone comes out of the green tin horn, which rises magnificently above the case. You could watch for hours at a time how all that works.

And when you’ve gone some way down the clearing in the woods and can see the river, the Szeszupe, which as is well known doesn’t join with the Memel until after Lenkeningken and certainly not at Lobelia, you have the music very pleasantly at your back: The Linden Tree or O Valleys far, O heights.
And there you think this country here is a country like music. The clearing opens up more and more broadly, the woods end with a young growth of birch, another couple of bushes, then the meadows begin and dip slowly, catlike softly down on to the sand bank. Even without the music, which you don’t properly hear anymore, and which probably has also stopped.

Not even the shouting with which the Krauledat kids start up the swing reaches down to here, the big box, hung up with poles on two pines, in which four grown-ups can just as easily sit down. Or six kids.

There’s plenty to tell about, and little to talk about, down here by the water. The perch leap a bit after the flies and the green gnats, the other fish too ascend from the dusk below, but hardly move, motionless, letting the sun shine upon their dark backs.

Sunday is called Sunday because the sun shines. It’s so good here that nothing more reasonable occurs to you. So you can go again. Take your place by the horses, flick away the black flies from their eyes and the metal-hard strident horseflies from their flanks. A pursuit that has its reward in heaven, here on earth it’s useless, there’s too much of the stuff.

Music and the swing and big coffee pots, white and enameled, and griddle cakes, and
slowly but surely Sunday evening is coming up. And the Tesches aren’t there today, there’s a christening at the Tesches’.

And the Ambrassats didn’t know that. You don’t say, Mr. Bussat!

Heinrich, who’s actually named Franz Kirschnick, is standing by the horses. Gonna throw your money about again today, farmer Bussat queries.

Heinrich trades in cattle, he’s stupid and has money, so he can afford to lose a bit, he lives mighty fine as a bachelor.

Are you kidding, your nags, says Heinrich, you can keep ’em.

That’s something different about Heinrich, he doesn’t always think right away about buying. Where there’s cattle he just steps up, like all Kirschnicks, everyone knows that, they’ve got it from their grandfather Heinrich, that’s why they’re all named after him.

So you don’t want to?

We can talk it over, says Heinrich.

And now the first people are leaving, the Bussats and the Borbes. Old man Kakschies sticks around. Dentist Willmann’s wife wants to go home, but her spouse doesn’t, no, not he. Mr. Bussat is still talking with forester Krauledat, who’s already packed wife and kids into his car. So Mr. Bussat is staying, and Krauledat leaves.
And Tesche comes, now, in the evening and by bike, on official business, today on Sunday. Is the christening perhaps over? No, not that, rather: Duty is duty.

That’s what people say. But they also say right afterwards: And schnapps is schnapps. And that’s true. The last word is then: When he’s right he’s right.

So it’s schnapps, but a special kind. Some say alcohol, meaning all kinds of schnapps, but we’d do better to call it meths. You usually buy a quart bottle in the week, and fill up with water. But here it’s served to you. And the something special consists in the fact that the schnapps iridesces in seven colors. That means you’ve got to count, and you can easily miscount, and you’ve got to sharpen up your old wits, and so moisten them, from inside. And whoever manages that and can also tell you the colors, he’s well oiled and the evening will be a long one; the Ambrassat woman should have gone to bed long ago.

Just beat it, says Kakschies, and to Ambrassat: Your old woman is a low-down fleecer. He shoves the glass over, and Ambrassat makes up for it by filling up past the measuring line.

And dentist Willmann has departed, singing. His wife sings with him so it won’t sound so boozy.
And Heinrich has to keep going behind the house. Weak bladder.

The Emperor, says Bussat, didn’t have to at all. He sat and sat, the Honorable District President said so. The gentlemen of the Uhlan Guards provided suitable pots under the table. Couldn’t get up as long as the Emperor sat and sat there.

Bussat pours down his glass elegantly making a right angle of his arm.

Popular anecdotes.

Tesche gets up and goes back of the house.

Wait a minute, he says to Heinrich, whom he meets at the corner of the house, and Heinrich stops and buttons himself up clumsily and waits. There goes the moonlight over the woods, all yellow.

And Tesche comes along the wall and says, behind Heinrich’s back: You’re gonna pay me.

Heinrich says: Then it’ll leak out.
Nothing’ll leak out, says Tesche, you pay all at once.

How much?
Eight hundred.
Are you nuts? And where from?
You’ve come from Wallenthal, you’ve got cash.

And because Heinrich remains silent: Come on, then half. For a starter.
Let’s go in now, says Heinrich.
We'll talk later, says Tesche.
They sit there for a while in the tap room.
Then Kakschies says: Let's pack up and go.
So there they go.
Six men walking through the woods.
And four go home. Three to Lobelia to the village. Kakschies down to the little ferry-house. Before Lobelia the road turns off towards the Szeszupe. And two stay in the woods. Tesche has got his quart portion and that will be tipped back. And not while standing either.
And amid a hodge-podge of talk, a wearisome back-and-forth about money, eight hundred and in two halves, and: Come on, fork it over, you've got it.
Certainly, he's got. Heinrich has money, and the kid at Tesche's is also his.
Tired I am, says Tesche.
Want to sleep, adds Heinrich.
Sinks back and is already asleep.
And Tesche sits a while. The moon has taken off.
Now the bottle is empty and flies into the bushes.
Well good.
Short nights, in the summer.
Heinrich wakes up. Something moist moves over his face at short intervals. How come? The thoughts don't make the connections, in all the schnapps, swim around
there. And he’s not afraid either, not even startled, being way down deep in the schnapps, like in a blanket, in the seven-colored schnapps.

Methinks there’s somebody licking me.
Now he’s got his eyes open.
And there stands a stag astride him, and it still keeps on passing its rough tongue over Heinrich’s face.
That’s not so unpleasant, just that it tickles, and Heinrich’s got to laugh, and then it’s the stag that takes fright and flight, not very hot-footed, into the bushes.
In the half-light Heinrich recognizes, while he’s straightening up, that it is a white stag.
Tesche lies beside him and grunts as Heinrich nudges him.
Yeah sure, says Tesche, there’s always one like that.
Heinrich told him that somebody licked him.
But you’ve no idea who it was, says Heinrich, and now he’s almost worked up about it.

Go shovel it somewhere else. White stag.
At the same time Tesche himself knows: These white stags do exist, over in the Trappön Forest, they’re gray, somewhat darker than Iceland moss.
That brings, who knows, luck? Heinrich can’t calm himself down at all. He gets up
and stretches and begins to whistle, but that hurts his head a bit, so he stops right away.
And Tesche’s understood one word, that’s luck.
So how’d it be with four hundred, he says.
O.K., says Heinrich and sits down beside him. But receipt.
Naturally, among us men, says Tesche. Heinrich counts off four bills and puts back the rest in his wallet.
At least another ten rags, goes through Tesche’s head. The thought alone hurts, after so much schnapps you don’t even have to whistle.
And I’ve left my bike standing, in Lobelian Grove, says Tesche.
It won’t walk off, says Heinrich.
And now the story can easily be ended.
Tesche’s kid grows up as Tesche’s kid, no talk of Heinrich. It’s called Martha and has, as a child, blond hair, later it turns dark.
Heinrich wasn’t seen again. Yeah we were all there together, says Bussat, in Lobelian Grove. He just wanted to pop over towards Kloken, says Tesche. He probably drowned in the drink, says Kakschies. Well who knows, says Ambrassat, there’s all sorts of riffraff knocking about, here on the border.
You can’t say what last thoughts are like. Quite different from case to case.
Last words — that’s a different story, they’re sometimes bandied about, something’s heard, they make the rounds, sometimes, for a long time afterwards.

Not these.

Now what could he have said?

You know: real funny, it stands there over you, and such a tongue, I tell you, a white stag, downright hysterical.

Yeah sure, says Tesche.

And Heinrich wants to sit up: Tesche, leave off, cut it out, Tesche.

And that’s all there is to tell. You ride to Lobelian Grove, talk about this and that. Ambrassat’s gramophone. Ambrassat’s swing. Ambrassat’s seven-colored schnapps. Here it’s so lovely in the woods. You guys drink like sewers, says the Bussat woman.

I tell you, says Mr. Bussat, the Emperor — that guy sat and sat.
So — house christening, Devischeit had said, and there won’t be any inviting either. So Reverend Parson had been fetched, the midwife had come. Devischeit and old man Saborovski had stood godfather. Put the bowl here, the Parson had said, then everything was over quickly, Lene Devischeit’s boy had a name.

Not good enough for him, just yeast scones. A tear came to Saborovski’s eyes, he stared at the screaming baby, whom Lene carried out. Thus the happenings fade away, but is that really a happening? Bit of wood chopping and stacking up, and then methylated spirit, whole bottle, it’s better, yes.

Anyhow, there was coffee. They sat down round the table, beneath the petroleum lamp, which hung from the ceiling on bronzed
chains. Woman, stop running about, help yourself, Reverend, said Devischeit when the scones appeared. He himself didn’t feel like food. The midwife settled herself in the chair, eyed Mother Devischeit. Do you want a cushion, asked Trude Devischeit, who sat there small and gray, near to the door, her head with its thinned out hair raised, her arm around Lene, who was balanced on the front of the chair, a little white-blonde heap of affliction. But the Vildermuth woman was not to be stopped, now she had settled herself, another gulp and the sad flat scone in her hand. Devischeit made a hopeless gesture, laid his hands on the table, and then on his knees, at which the midwife burst out with clear voice: The honored father of the child isn’t likely to come, eh?

Couldn’t the Parson say something! Confirmed the kid after all, knows all about it. But old woman Vildermuth talked of honor and conscience, at last the scone has reached her mouth.

Now Lenny, my child, said the Parson, fingered a crumb out of his beard, they sometimes turn out to be the best people. He began to talk about Ernst Kalveit, who had served in the horse-drawn artillery, now he was treasurer on the estate and he too started off a miserable worm. But a good child, ask my wife, Mr. Devischeit, even now, every
Whitsuntide, he brings the birches to the church.

He turned to Saborovski, who was sniffing away to himself and was just raising his finger because it itched up inside his nose. Startled, the old man bent his head to the side, his finger stood still, goodness, he said, and Devischeit had already heard it too, a wagon turned in to the yard, so some folks were coming and uninvited.

Perhaps it was turning into a happening after all. Saborovski wasn’t for groundless expectations, but you could at least go to the window. Wilhelm Devischeit had to hold on to the table while getting up, but now he was in a hurry to get outside. Oh, Emil, he said and: Hello, Manthey, and Emil Aschmoneit, who was already taking care of the horses, growled back: Well, so what’s his name?

Tall man Manthey first helped Mrs. Aschmoneit from the wagon, then turned slowly to Devischeit, straightened up and said: Congratulations. And now Mrs. Aschmoneit, crying loudly, as is proper, fell upon Mother Devischeit’s neck, who was standing at the door with her untied apron in her hand.

Happening. Guests had come. The christened child was sleeping, Lene bustled about at the stove, Mrs. Devischeit buzzed back and forth between parlor and kitchen. See
the child? Yes, afterwards. But Manthey wasn’t so easily pacified as the two Aschmoneits. Finally something occurred to him about the pigs, and with that he was able to get Mother Devischeit out into the yard.

What about the powder, he asked hoarsely.

I don’t have, said Trude Devischeit.

You have.

No.

You have.

No I haven’t, said Mrs. Devischeit.

You gave some to that Bartschat guy.

Just a little bit.

What d’you mean, a little bit?

I’ve got to go in now, said Mother Devischeit, and Manthey strode behind her, red with rage, and let loose while entering the parlor: Well you see, Wilhelm, gettin’ old — Granpa! Keep it up.

Who’s keeping it up? Devischeit kept control of himself. What’d been the matter with that guy outside. Because of the pigs, I don’t believe that. And Aschmoneit too was funny, he kept pulling his watch out and comparing it with the regulator above the sofa. Nice piece of work, he said.

The Emperor Wilhelm is on the pendulum, said Devischeit, and that was true all right. It was just with Aschmoneit that things weren’t all right. Now he’s got up and gone
to the door. And Saborovski behind after him. There is something up after all.

Wilhelm became uneasy.

Mr. Devischeit! Now even the Parson wanted something. Yes, Reverend, said Wilhelm. Here I am, he would have loved to say.

I'm going now, said the Parson, shook hands with the Vildermuth woman, with whom he had been occupied the whole time talking about her son, the chimney-sweep, who had a motorcycle. Mr. Devischeit, come outside please. As if I wouldn't have come anyway! Wilhelm followed the Parson, who had no time for long farewells, into the kitchen. He stopped at the table. Devischeit counted out the money, there it lay, one hand was quickly placed over it, a voice, melted tallow, said: But that really isn't necessary, you know. The hand stuffed the bills away. Good-bye, said Trude Devischeit.

Adieu, answered the Parson, in other words: God be with you. And His blessing for mother and child. Then he was gone.

And Aschmoneit?

Wilhelm walked slowly to the barn, there he saw him.

Emil Aschmoneit was standing at the fence. That scheeyit still ain't burnin'! he heard him say, and at the same moment he knew what was what. Set fire. On account
of the insurance. And then comes to us. To celebrate.

Not burning, said Wilhelm and stepped up to Aschmoneit.

What do you know, said Aschmoneit. Nuttin, said Wilhelm.

But that wasn't the end, now it was burning. The hayloft over the barn probably.

Emil, fire, said Devischeit. Lene came across the barn yard with the water bucket. There's a fire at your place, Mr. Aschmoneit, don't you see? And Wilhelm Devischeit was already going to the wagon to hitch up the horses.

Aschmoneit stood at the fence and looked out across to his farm. Then he turned around, wanted to go in the house again. You've gotta drive over, said Devischeit. Everyone was standing in the yard.

So Aschmoneit sets off now. Slowly, for it's already getting dark. Slowly, so that the horses suffer no harm. Slowly, so the barn, which lies in the direction of the wind, can catch fire. When he's five hundred yards outside the farm there'll be nothing more to save. Then he can beat the horses and begin to scream. So that everyone sees and hears it.

Saborovski has gone to Brenneisen. For spirits. Advance payment for stacking up wood. Because it still could have turned into
a happening. And Manthey got his powder. Old Squatters' Powder as it’s called. They can ruin a farmstead, those old people. What do you do if they take a mind to live another ten years. Every day fifteen eggs, three pounds of butter, and hitching up the wagon always just when the horses are needed. But it’s in the contract after all; else, deary, we’ll have to file a suit, we’ll go to district court.

And now the Vildermuth woman has gone too.

Just like something out of the almanac, says Devischeit.

Mother Devischeit sits in the kitchen and thinks that was the last time with the powder, that’s for sure — Till before my Father’s throne I shall know as I am known.

Lene pours the last bucket of water into the barrel. Devischeit comes into the kitchen. Oh well, he says.

In the next room the baby was woken up. He walks in, it’s lying there swaddled and rolled and crying. Jus’ you go ahead and cry, he says, it’ll soon pass, and sits down. Tomorrow’ll come Mr. Meyer. Have a look at his child.

What’s a kid gonna look like anyhow? Better ’n that guy Meyer anytime.
Klapschies is hungry. Why actually? He has nothing to do, he is old, the oldest man on the estate. He has his maintenance, which doesn’t stretch very far, but nevertheless as far as eating yourself full, and he has employment too at the hay harvest, guiding the large rake or at the covering business — not horses any more, just the oxen now; there is many a thing to attend to with the cattle, time of day and day of the week, mustn’t be any thunderstorm in the area either; the fencing wire round the steed garden is more reliable than a barometer. But that’s certainly not everything, and whatever he turns his hands to he makes a good job of. Klapschies knows that. When he talks about that people listen to him all right.

Klapschies gets up every morning at five.
Else I can’t eat five times, can I? Man is set limits.

And now Klapschies is hungry. That is a feeling. You could literally describe it, how it comes up. Just that the wife isn’t there. Gone to get berries. Blueberries. Evening time a little bowlful with milk and sugar.

Of course you can fetch yourself something from the pantry. But the husband takes his nourishment from the hand of the wife, that’s the way it is, and so Klapschies now goes around with his feeling. And herding feelings, out or in, when it’s dusk, in — that means into the parlor, when it’s light, out — that means past the smithy, along the street, turn off down at Mill Mountain, to the subfarm. Quite a pretty road. Over there sand and towards Lasvehlen clay, and here not too sandy and not too clayey. After the rain the water stands almost an hour and afterwards the road is firm and dry. Like the alphast on the highway, maybe even better, at least not so black. And on the one side elder bushes and on the other the ditch, a pretty road. For vehicles and for cycling. Like on the highway. Last autumn they were steam-rolling, stank all right.

This is how you can talk to yourself, stepwise, and every once in a while stand still, look at the feeding-turnips, behind them there’s nothing more, only rye. But because
Klapschies is on the *alphast* again for the second time, the rolls dawn on him and whether the wife will remember to bring some along. Alphast, that's namely the baker's name in Laswehlen, for those who aren't aware of it. Klapschies is aware, and having gotten on to the idea from the black highway coating, which has the same name, but not quite, Klapschies is aware of this and his hunger even more so. Klapschies will have to get a move on. You know the way horses go when the oats are calling!

The sub-farm is called a nursery, but it isn't except that there are a lot of flowers there. Looks good and brings in nothing. Frau von Parbandt runs it, Frieda, Ferdinand von Parbandt's wife, and this Ferdinand is treasurer on the sub-farm, which is called a nursery and isn't. Just a lot of flowers and it brings in nothing. Looks good though, Klapschies thinks so too. And Frieda is in the garden, even if more among the parsley than among parma violets, Aaron's rods, columbine, mignonette.

Klapschies doesn't linger by the fence. Well Frieda, and: 'Ready at the flowers again huh? That's all, and even that just flung over the fence; and on the way to the gate back over his shoulder: Is the old man at home? Frieda straightens up. She props herself up with her left hand, draws her right knee for-
ward and then the other, and when she’s standing she rubs her hands off on a hunk of weed, smooths out her apron, stoops once more and lifts up her headscarf. Herr von Parbandt is at home, she says, busy writing. She takes the hoe, and sets herself in motion.

Von Parbandt. A story, long time back. A Fräulein von Parbandt lost her pants there at the harvest festivities and didn’t know where and didn’t say anything. That’s where Ferdinand came from, always been better than other people, but then again not so very much better. Grew up in the Rotstein orphanage or whatever you want to call that, where otherwise only the extramarital progenies of the Rotstein Count — the acknowledged, recallable — were accommodated, instructed by a tutor, cooked for by the former castle stewardess, sewed for and patched up by two old women, all under the eyes of Parson Tiresomeness and his sister. The Count is dead, the institute doesn’t exist any more, but this Herr von Parbandt does, and that he’s busy writing won’t matter to Klapschies, writin’ is more something for teachers — grown man, this here Parbandt. So Klapschies goes into the house, all the same he leaves the clods outside the door, unbuttons the jacket though before he sits down on the window-seat, places his cap next to him. Day, Ferdinand.
Ferdinand stays seated. He raises his head, squints a bit towards the window, as usual stretches his lower jaw forward, and since Klapschies doesn't say anything, just sits there like usual, it dawns on him again that he's busy writing. The settling of the first hay to Ragnit, to the military, ready cash so to speak. But Klapschies is sitting there now, so he pushes the slips of paper together, picks up the broad carpenter's pencil and sticks it into the dried-out inkwell, lifts the pencil out of the little bottle, and there hangs the fly.

I'm hungry, you know. Klapschies means business. The sentence sounds almost dangerous.

I'll tell her. With that Parbandt rises. Klapschies also rises. And hears while he's getting up how Frieda grumbles about in the kitchen: What'm I goin' to make anyway — couple a eggs. But that's not right, so Klapschies marches to the kitchen door and expounds there his view concerning the alimentation of man, in particular of the male, by means of eggs, more or less to the effect that eggs choke. In other words something else. Something salted down and Frieda's own homemade beer, that's better, also quicker, and outside under the maple.

The round table the men are sitting at is one of the many round tables in the area,
which all descend from one and the same tree. Three years ago the oak behind the estate granary was chopped down and then simply one slice after the other sawed off, each a table top. Such German oaks, hearty and enduring like the plague. The Parson had given a sermon about it, the congregation should be guided by this miracle of faith and constancy, they should saw off a spiritual slice, when the proper ones had already been distributed and the tree all gone.

As soon as the first hunger is chased off they'll talk of this and that. Things is all right, O.K.! says Klapschies. Parbandt always asks something of the sort, a melancholic to a certain extent. Gets up and goes to the cemetery without any reason and sometimes in the evening gets on Frieda's nerves with exact particulars about how he fancies his grave. Bit of hedge, sixteen inches high, bearberry and the mound with border, at the head a small tree, red maple for all I care. No especially outlandish wishes, but you've got to check yourself once he's started on about it. First die, says Frieda, the rest'll take care of itself. She goes away quickly, finds what to do.

But now Klapschies has to go home, the wife is probably back. Blueberries. A little dish. And the rolls too that she'll have brought along from Alphast.
That guy has got a car, Ferdinand says and stands at the gate, landlord Cheeseworm's old Studebaker. Crazy guy, that Alphast. And what the hell for! Klapschies has heard about it too. The old man is like a shadow, leaps over the fence and he's on the other side.

Thus ends a conversation among men. They know life from early morning till late evening and have seen the world from Ragnit to Darkehmen, in between training camp Arys, anno 'seventeen Flanders, Wytschaete-Bend, anno 'twenty-eight Insterburg, horse tournaments.

So the visit began with hunger and ends now with an appetite for blueberries and Laswehlen rolls and is a pause in man's endless soliloquy; about feelings when the world is bright and man is satisfied without knowing why.

For all I care, Klapschies says, every dog does his own mess, meaning Alphast's stupidity, but then after all, more the Laswehlen rolls the wife'll have certainly brought back. And with these thoughts he reaches the village and the smithy. There's Allisat shouting inside, and lanky Hermann Siebert comes out and says: Just keep your trap shut. So Allisat knows something and straightway Klapschies gets to hear it. The Spirit of Truth has sold his heifer.
Cows don’t wear any shoes, least not till now, and the few cow chains, not much for a smith. Hermann sends him packing and goes in again. Disappointing for Allisat, who lives someway out of the village, and who has to spend quite a bit to keep up with the latest on time and footwear, but also on schnapps and beer, in other words a pretty penny, which the wife doesn’t know about, or so you imagine as a man.

What man stands talking on the street, in front of the door anyway? Sit down comfortably, then the thoughts come, but even then not right away. So — the heifer.

I knows, said Klapschies. That’ll be worth two beers, while walking Allisat considers what this guy knows, and in front of Findeisen’s Red Jug — Groceries, Inn, Hotel, Banquet Halls, Gartenetablissement — he says: Well whaddaya say. One on me.

In broad daylight, says Klapschies reprouingly and goes in at once in front of Allisat. So the Spirit of Truth’s heifer. I knows, Klapschies says for the second time now loudly, for now they’re sitting there in the yellow room next to the tap room, where the pocket billiards is. Prince Heinrich in Admiral’s uniform is hanging on the wall above it, blue and gold, and on the frame below Findeisen has tacked up a cardboard sign saying: Use 10 pfennigs.
That the heifer is good for nothing, nothing at all, is the first thing Allisat learns, and that such wheelchair cattle should be slaughtered and not be fed long in the first place. Didn’t use to be like that. And because Allisat, shoving his beer up and down the table seemed to doubt this, he once more says firmly and candidly: No, it didn’t.

Now it’s not just a matter of any heifer. Just you keep quiet, says Allisat, and in that same moment a thin hoary voice is heard from the tap room, not strong, but piercing, and a wizened old man, white goatee, white hair parted in the middle, steps into the room with short paces.

Allisat immediately stands up. Good day, Reverend, did you sell the heifer? Yes, says the Pastor, I’ve got rid of my cow for a good price.

With God’s help, says Allisat and knows too what the heifer brought, for the Pastor as well as for dealer Fröhlich, because the animal was already sold again within an hour.

O come thou Spirit of Truth, descend to us. The Parson’s favorite hymn, he has it sung every Sunday, the children have to learn it, and so that’s where he’s got his name from, and now he himself is here, in broad daylight in Findeisen’s yellow guest room, that’s almost the limit definitely, the end to
all Klapschies’ talk and his trying to bewilder a pious person such as Allisat.

In this manner the Spirit of Truth descends, even for Klapschies: Klapschies rises likewise and says likewise: Good day, Reverend. But the devil still has him in its clutches, because Klapschies also says: Did you at least chisel him?

Old people are without respect towards others, they know life, and Klapschies still has his merits, even if not with the horses anymore, at least still with the cows, but he never had anything to do with heifers like the one the Spirit of Truth has just sold, at that point the spirits really do part.

But why quarrel? Klapschies scratches his neck and sits down again. And then in his customary tone the Spirit of Truth says: I may invite you gentlemen to a little glass, mayn’t I?

Schnapps in broad daylight. So he really did chisel Fröhlich, no other explanation, even for Findeisen who carries the glasses in himself on the round tray. And to crown it all Fröhlich comes in and doesn’t look at all chiseled and straightway calls out for the next round, fine man, this Fröhlich. But Satan still has Klapschies by the scruff of the neck, he’s got to scratch himself anew. None the less he just managed to keep back what was on the tip of his tongue, because Allisat
looked him in the eyes like a cornflower without water. Without waiting Klapschies just says cheers and knocks back his schnapps, he's got to do something, and it doesn't disturb him that Herr Fröhlich is a bit astonished. Still the jaunty artillerist, says Fröhlich, always up and at 'em.

Why doesn't the old twister shut up, thinks Klapschies and suddenly notices, first in the ears, but then all the way down into his stomach too, that it must be dinner time. Suddenly it all dawns on him: the Laswehlen rolls and that the wife'll be home and then the blueberries. He says: Great Caesar's Ghost, draws himself up on the table so that the glasses tumble topsy-turvy and notices that something's wrong with his legs, with both of them at any rate with the backs of his knees, but because the Parson says: But Herr Klapschies! and Fröhlich is talking about Firing Position and Keep a steady eye, he straightens out his leg, steers clear of the table over to the door, where he lunges out with his left arm and manages to grab his cap from the hook, and because nothing crosses his mind he goes out without a word.

Got his slips full, says Allisat afterwards, but because that's not quite what is expected of Allisat the Parson says: Never you mind, Herr Allisat. And Fröhlich just calls over to Findeisen: D'ya see'm, Eddie?
But now, home. And where’s the dignity, Klapschies? Gone a good fifty yards and knees still rickety. Isn’t going to get any better either. Up top yes, but not in the legs. Careful, Klapschies.

That’s the encouragement of a man and it helps. As Klapschies comes by the District Overseer’s, sitting now, as every day, on his veranda having coffee, that is as a civilian, and on the point of speaking to Klapschies, Klapschies feels strong. Just you be quiet, you infernal three-toed baboon, he says hinting therewith at the District Overseer’s short leg, and because he’s actually past the veranda he stands still, turns around and shouts back: Spiwok’s gonna get you!

Just let this gentleman sit with his coffee, pondering why people like Klapschies are so gross. He can sit there a hundred years and still not understand them.

And then Klapschies is home. Opens up the door, sees the wife standing in the kitchen, hears her greeting, which runs: About time, too.

That on top of it all. Now, at home, where the husband can hang his dignity on the door hook because he doesn’t need it at all, and just when he’s not feeling good, when his hunger, with all its stowed-up might, had descended upon him afresh right in front of the house.
Klapschies flings his cap on the table. He sags down onto a chair and says bitterly: That’s a fine way to greet me. Husband comes home sick...

A vile coughing stops him from going on. Klapschies lays his head down on the table, notices that there’s a hole in the oil cloth, points to it with his thumb and deeply moved falls asleep.

Matters of importance, hunger after rolls and blueberries, trade in bad cattle, the life people carry on with one another. You talk a lot when the day is long, it all has a place, the years, morning, evening, summer, winter. When death comes it takes off its cap and says: Now don’t turn over to the wall. And cabinetmaker Thetmeyer comes afterwards and takes the measurements.

It’s better to have your own coffin in the attic, as is proper, and the linen ready in the press and the rue in the pot on the window.
That was done very well in the preceding century: voyages of discovery and the reports about them. I'm thinking now about Torell, De Long, Nordenskiöld and above all about the older, but well-known Krusenstern, who traveled around a lot in the North and wrote about the oceans: such wonderful works with volumes of text, atlases, picture portfolios. And I place this picture, which must have come from such a portfolio, in front of me on the table.

A lithograph, colored, a large print in broadsheet. You see a bay, shallow waters with small reefs, boulder formations and piles of stones — gray, reddish, brimstony, green — which lift themselves up out of the water. Behind all this a shore rounded by the effects of the rain, or whole brooks, or a high-
tide; there torn asunder by a ravine, there crashing down, steep, on to a flat sand, but the slopes still high, maybe safe enough, and up there above the slopes and coming close up to them, a village.

You can count sixteen houses in this picture, though there are probably a couple more, and a church is there, all made of wood, and beginning near the church and towards the right, up to the promontory, a kind of cape, behind which the shore then withdraws itself and the open sea becomes visible: crosses, wooden crosses. First a whole group, fourteen or more, then a single one, particularly tall, with a roofing extending from the top to the ends of the arms, lastly once more at greater intervals, farther out towards the sea, four such crosses, these last protected by braces from the force of the wind.

Out on the sea a three-mast bark, perhaps lying there at anchor. In front of it a small sailboat, a fore-and-aft schooner, from its appearance.

Pyatitsa on the south coast of Russian Lapland.

That’s what it says underneath the picture, which is framed by four lines, in a so-called contour face print, that is, in letters which are formed only by thin outer lines.

Pyatitsa, a village, sixteen wood houses, a church, many crosses, on the Terskiy coast,
or maybe even past the Varzuga, in Kandaksha, I don’t know. But on the White Sea at any rate, on the Kola peninsula. There are harbors there, ice-free the whole year.

Wood houses. Whoever has lived in such a house can never forget it. You awake, stretch, let your breath go in and out, slowly, still with closed eyes, and sense: the house breathes likewise and stretches, it’s as though it wanted to begin to talk and you were waiting for that. And in the winter it seems to close itself around you more tightly, the walls come closer, the roof sinks a bit, tighter around the warmth, nearer about your sleep. And the beautiful walls made of round trunks joined together, on the outside blackened by the tempests and by the sun, smooth, but also already cracked here and there.

Not too close to one another, the houses, but not too widely distant either, here a house, another one, another one, sixteen houses, maybe even more, and the church with a polygonal wooden steeple and rounded tin roof. Then the crosses begin.

The man there very small. He walks past a house and disappears behind it. And now he becomes visible again in the gap up to the next house.

There he goes. He meets a couple of children and stands still. He’s called Shöri;
at least that's what the children say. They ask what he’s going to do now. Where he’s come from, none of them asks.

What sort of man is that?

He erected the crosses, all the crosses we counted before. The fourteen near the church, the one big one standing alone and the others in the direction of the cape. What is that, a cross?

A sign. A remembrance. A recollection. Something which recalls to mind something earlier, something past. Which however is supposed to keep awake the remembrance of this past something — right? In other words, a warning sign too, and not only against forgetting, also against heedlessness. So it must be tall and visible from afar.

We glance over the whole bay and recognize it from here, the single one, and the others too, we can count them.

The man has gone on with the children, past the next house. Shôri, say the children, when are you going to build a cross again? And the man says: Now I’m collecting wood for the fire, help me a little.

Build crosses and kindle fires — so that’s what the man does. And why?

We let him go. The children scatter about the houses and behind the wooden fences, and up to the underbrush, which begins near the last houses.
A clear day. It is bright here for months, even at night. The clouds are big and solid, but today very high, the wind has lots of room. And it goes along slowly and heavily under the sky like a large current, without a sound. Not until evening breaks does it get a voice — you don’t know from where.

So it’s fires this man kindles. Towards evening. And sustains them overnight. Crosses for the day and fires for the night, signs which are visible from afar, warning signs. Only that, or memorial signs too?

A man, who lives alone, but talks with the children and the people, though he doesn’t know much in the language they have here — that is to say, he’s a stranger. Who however remains here because of the crosses and because of the fires, who has something to do and does it. How long has it been? Ten years or fifteen?

I really think it’s been that long.

I mean the shipwreck back then, in the nook, west of the entrance to the bay, which you don’t see on the picture. A Swedish or Danish ship it was, a three-master, just like in the picture. On a stormy night, which isn’t remembered, in a forgotten year.

Month after month ships pass here, along the reefs stretched out in front and the clear water above the shallow places, past this not undangerous shore.
So the man stayed here, when he saved himself and reached the shore, he alone. And had hunted the dead bodies of the others, on the beach, and buried them, up on the headland and placed the first crosses. Memorial signs.

And then he placed, as near the water as possible, a tall cross, a warning sign, and now more and more crosses are added, along the whole shore, from the cape up to the village. And he has to secure them against the storm. And the ones thrown over he has to set upright. And the wood for this he has to drag here from afar. And on summer nights, when the crosses are only indistinctly recognizable, in the haze, from the direction of the sea, and in the early dusk and the gloomy nights, after the bright months, he lays the fires and lets them blaze until the morning and in the winter all day long, as well.

The crosses I see in this picture, many people then have seen them: the travelers, and then the readers of the Krusensternian and other travel books I’m not familiar with. But I don’t know whether these fires are mentioned anywhere, in any report, whether the seamen who come past here, tell about them and are warned by them. As by the crosses.

An act of merit was to be shown here. No mean one, to be sure. It was achieved by a
stranger, who wound up here and didn’t go away, because there was something to do here: with fires and crosses.

With which so much else has been done, but who thinks about that.

Take the picture from the table and hang it in front of you on your wall. So that you see it. Memorial sign, warning sign. Both.
As we came out of the woods it became still. Behind us in the woods the birds kept on singing, doubtless, but here, in the open field, it was still.

The woods held its songs together, so that they didn't fly out into the field. The trees hung their foliage out in front, like a cloak plaited of a thousand times a thousand leaves and there the songs were concealed, for safe keeping like something precious. Here in the field it was still.

Now there are of course birds here too. The woodland birds — oriole, woodpecker, finch, jay, wood warbler, cuckoo — don't always remain in the woods, they also fly over the field. But now they were sitting in the woods, in the trees and in the under-
growth. And the field birds—quail and lark—who were out here, kept still.

For it was very hot here, after the coolness in the woods.

We came driving along the road, which led a piece through the woods. Beautiful woods with very tall trees. And the trees so close together that they were only just able to spread out enough and yet give room for the undergrowth in between.

There the road lay wholly in the shade of the trees. You rode there in a deep ravine.

And the birds had sung.

We lay on the hay wagon, which was loaded up high, beside the decorticated, smooth tree trunk, the hay-pole, which bound at both ends of the wagon with rope, held the wagon load together. Lay right and left of the tree, sinking into the quickly dried hay, which smelled of meadow weeds and flowers and pungent sharp-leaved grass.

Then the cuckoo started to call, in the distance, but distinctly and quite evenly, and was already far ahead before it occurred to us to count the calls as they came. So we simply started with seventeen and went on from there: eighteen, nineteen, twenty, twenty-one.

That went on until sixty-seven. What were we supposed to wait sixty-seven years for? That's just what people say. Perhaps
until we were grown up? The grandfather, who was sitting up front and managing the horses, laughed and slapped his trouser pocket, though there was certainly no purse there. But that’s also one of those customs: the money won’t get all used up.

And to the right and left in the woods the other birds had sung. The wood warbler and the jay. And how did the oriole sing?

There we listened attentively. Already it was his farewell song. Now he would soon migrate, this yellow thrush, this cherry bird, Schulz von Bülow or Beer Donkey. As he’s called in different districts.

But now the road led through open field, past oat fields and tall rye. The horses went slowly, the gelding Dimling snorted once and flapped his ears, you heard the wagon wheels turning.

The last wagon load. Now the meadow, where we had raked the hay together and loaded it up, now the meadow was empty. Now back to the village, where the coffee would be waiting at home.

But it was still hot over the fields. And so still that you heard the stillness: as a faint uninterrupted humming. But nevertheless inaudible.

And if you don’t hear anything anymore, you still hear something. It’s just that you can’t say how it sounds. Only hear it.
I held a stalk of quaking grass in front of my face. Below the wheels rolled.

And now there was a voice, a pretty and graceful, not at all faint voice. But still as if having grown forth out of the buzzing of the stillness, as if having popped up like a seal’s head out of the water, you’re not astonished that it’s suddenly there, unawares. Because it’s part and parcel of the water. Like the quail’s call is part and parcel of the stillness of the warm, end-of-June afternoon.

Pick Prick or Book the Rook, that’s the way it sounds, over from the cornfield. A short call, which repeats itself.

I’m taking wing — it can mean that. But luckily the quail doesn’t go traveling until autumn, we don’t have to say to it: Stay here a while.

Its call, by the way, could also mean the same.

But perhaps even better: Many thanks. And best of all: Praise Be to God. Its table is set, it lives in the corn, it has yellow strokes underneath its eyes, and when it runs away it goes very quickly: it beats its long pointed wings, as if it were rowing, and the little ones like fat, round, tiny featherballs deftly after it, always one behind the other, in the narrow lanes between the stalks, which the mother — with head stretched far forward — has cleared and with industrious feet has trodden
down and widened with her whole weight. All the time running.

But don’t run away now, nobody’s coming, sing a little while longer, quail, sing: Praise Be to God.
There are localities which decorate themselves — like some people — with famous relatives. They assign them to themselves on the basis of information from Oberlehrers, at the same time they also name themselves accordingly and wish to be so regarded and so addressed: Florence on the Elbe, Athens on the Spree, Little Paris, and Great Britain, the last being a village between Heinrichswalde and Linkuhnen.

This city here wouldn’t be in such need of it, but Rome is built on seven hills, so it too, for it is in possession of a university, an art academy, several scholarly societies, among them an archeological society.

Of the seven hills here only one lies in the southern third of the city, that is, south of the great river which divides the city: a sand-
hill, formerly occupied by pines, later cultivated with oats, now completely covered up by a church, a cemetery closed long ago, yet worth seeing; and large tenements, tightly pressed against one another, set up at regular intervals. The remaining six hills are found on the northern bank. And because the elevations and flat ground are rather uniformly blocked up, with small houses on the peaks and taller ones in the valleys or low ground, the differences actually cancel each other out: you don’t think that there could actually be so many hills, seven, only the roads between them — called Roll Mountain, Oldtown Mountain Road, Bent Ditch, Leaning Mountain — run up and down and are narrow and hardly recognizable, even from one of the church towers, concealed in the shadow of the gables which lean towards one another.

Those are the gabled roofs. Down there, in the semi-darkness, run the streets. If one were just, one would mention a few more pretty places, one even laid out on a slanting slope.

Nevertheless, the hills, the much cried about seven, you can easily count from one of the church towers. You see them, but only six, because you’re on one of them yourself — you forget that one. So from up there you recognize them, because a church rises on each one: the Löbenichtsche, which is actually
called St. Barbara on the Mount, the Castle Church, the Neurossgärtsche, the Old-town Church and so forth. Only the cathedral in the lower town has no hill — instead it takes up almost half of an entire island.

The highest thing to be sure is the Upper Pond, higher than all these seven hills, way up, and it begins just where the ground elevation has attained its full altitude and now goes on farther, northwards, as a kind of elevated plain, but then on second thought not that high either.

In any case the name Upper Pond is to the point, it is up and is a real pond, namely round and not too small. Two baths — one civilian, the other military — gardens on the bank with shrubs and clumps of trees, then however bastions, ramparts, so-called cavaliers, detached forts, dry moats, rampart walks, glacis — such things formerly belonging to the city fortification and now more for adornment, just like history, and at any rate for the amusement of the citizens, changing in character and use from time to time, like the amusement itself.

So the Upper Pond broadens itself at the top and lower down, towards the south, the Castle Pond. But this one narrows itself rather and in fact also gets its water from above, from the Upper Pond, and it comes hopping or plunging, according to how the
sluice above has been regulated, down over a many-stepped cascade, first out of a little house, out of the round basin in front of it, and then down over increasingly broader steps, and lastly it goes through an iron grating and into a short canal; finally, accompanied by bank paths, it has arrived at the Castle Pond — it stinks somewhat.

In spite of that a lot of people, brightly clad, ride about in skiffs on the black, marshy water, for after all there are gardens laid out everywhere on the bank, beer gardens, café terraces — in the evening they take boat rides. At the south end of the Castle Pond rises the Castle with an octagonal corner tower and a complicated gate complex next to it.

This castle has two more towers which aren’t especially high either, but round, the highest being the Castle church tower. You can, as was said, climb up, but we’re not going to; we place ourselves in front of the tower on the southwest corner, with the view towards the south, but still up on the slope, we lean ourselves — say — on the tower wall. There are already two standing there.

One of them says: Observe God’s Commandments. He’s small. The other one is big — he doesn’t say anything. But then again he is the Emperor and of bronze and stands on a stone base which he can’t get
down from. The other one can go off to where he's needed to recite his saying. Up here maybe he just says it into the wind. But he does say it up above the cars, wagons, motorcycles, bicycles, streetcars and vegetable carts; down there the main road runs past, and all that down there needs his admonishing.

Now the man goes off, down the steps, on to the square and is gone. And we won't follow him, I think, because after all we know him. Down there he meets the old superintendent-general, they greet each other and say good-bye. The man goes on, a simple man, native Lithuanian.

Once before there was someone who came from Lithuania and said something quite similar — three hundred years ago. But he used big words, called himself Adelgreiff and Schmalkilimundis or Schmalkallaedis and straight out Son of the Supreme — although he in fact really was that, a child of God like everyone — a Latin Bible in his hand. For this, to be sure, they executed him at that time, after — as the story goes — Her Electoral Grace her very own self — in vain — hath admonished him — here in the town, to extinguish the spectacle of his appearance with the spectacle of his death.

Here there is no such spectacle, not with this Lithuanian. Only the cries of the children
resound after him, and behind his back heads wag and a racy anecdote is tacked on for good measure. And this last only because the man is mistaken for another — quite readily, by the way, because otherwise you’d be stuck with this anecdote about a boozer, whom it really refers to; then it wouldn’t be such a good one.

For this anecdote you need to know a few things. That privy counselor Quint holds his seamen’s services early mornings, even before the real services, in the cathedral down on the island; the little old geezer, he does it for the owners of onion, cabbage and fish skiffs who have slept over in the town after the Saturday market, and after the service paddle back early, upstream, then through the river fork to the Baltic coast lagoon villages; because they live there. Further: that Motz, the Stone Street Church parson, holds his service an hour earlier than usual; then he can talk in great detail, the way his parishioners, who live in the prostitute quarter around Wagner Street which was named after a doctor, like it; then you can still get to Reverend von Bahr in Tragheim just in time. From there it’s just a short walk to the old town — since Herr von Bahr speaks his precise twelve minutes, after all, the people can’t and won’t follow any longer; Councilor of the Consistory Claudin however fin-
ishes off an elegant twenty-five minutes. Reverend Schreitberger in Löbenicht invari-
ably runs to a good forty. Longest of all speaks the cathedral minister Kässlau — one
hour. That’s then what you have to know.

The man, the one we mean, goes Sunday
for Sunday from church to church and gets
everywhere in the nick of time for communi-
ton. He’s arranged it so and can slug it down
with the best of ’em. And if the cathedral
minister, now in the large services — for
that’s how the circle closes, this exactly cal-
culated circuit — wants perhaps to pull the
chalice away, at least that’s how the anecdote
goes, our man, the other one it is to be noted,
makes a grab, says out loud: “I’ll not let my
Jesus go,” and takes another nice nip.

But we know of course that it doesn’t refer
to our quiet Lithuanian. We’re not telling
this story behind his back. Maybe we’ll meet
him again now that we know him.

Perhaps we’ve given the impression we
want to populate our town with slanders —
that’s the thing these days. But it’s a big city
that’s being talked about here, with many
regular people, with industrial works, dock
and carriage construction, an extended har-
bor, a goods redistribution center of impor-
tance. So what are a few slanders there —
they just disappear.

But on second thoughts we did want to
follow after the man, unfortunately much too late; we’d already lost sight of him, just sort of went down the steps and across the square, past a department store, over a bridge, looked over at the warehouses near which ships were lying at anchor, across still another bridge — to the suburb. And there in the steady traffic a disturbance became noticeable, you knew it right away, there was something of a jumble, a few cars turned into the side streets, motor vehicles stopped and a piercing music was heard, behind that a racket, commands, then came mounted police and right behind them the Nazis, a whole parade, brown on brown, all but the eyes, which were blue — or at least should be. But we can’t get around the slanders, or whatever you want to call them.

The street flutist Preuss runs alongside the column of the Brownies, screams his opinion across at them: Lazy bums, lousy good-for-nothings, dirty slobs and threatens with his flute.

And actually means the Communists, because he says: Sure the Emperor hadda throw away the war, with you oxes. He doesn’t differentiate, demonstration is demonstration, it’s the year ’thirty-two, there’s nobody around to explain it to him. Who should do it?

Preuss would laugh his head off at our
quiet Lithuanian. Maybe that wouldn’t be so bad, worse that he wouldn’t even listen to him — such a dumbhead. Oh, Preuss. Yeah, but who should do it then? The drunken jerk of the anecdote?

He just says contemptuously, and means the Brownies: The leader don’t drink.

Or the cathedral minister. But he’s too learned to be able to talk with Preuss; or maybe on the other hand not learned enough.

Possibly he goes to Reverend Motz at Stone Street. Who’d like to load up all his parish children and carry them straight off to heaven. But what in the world would he do that for, Preuss. Although he belongs there, at least in Stone Street Church, just because he lives there.

With that, the time has long since come for everyone. In half a year it’ll be the Hitler people’s turn. Then not only the Communists will be hunted, because of whom the Emperor lost the war, according to Preuss, them first of all, but they’ll seize Preuss too, in his dwelling place in Wagner Street, which is now renamed Richard Wagner Street but otherwise stays the same, as an enemy of the state or the people, as they say; in other words for the same reason as the Communists, and not much later it’ll be the turn of the cathedral minister. And they’ll take the Sunday boozer along too, as an asocial ele-
ment, and soon after that our quiet man, as mentally inferior.

Observe God's Commandments, he calls across to them as they come. But that they don't do.
You come home then, so it's Christmas. What's happened? Merry Christmas or blessed; and to church, come what may.

Klapat, says the wife, you talk and talk. But you know we've always gone, Good Friday, Christmas, All Souls' Day.

Cut out that All Souls' Day stuff, says Klapat. Did my brother have to fall in sixteen so that that guy can crawl up into the pulpit and kvetch? The memorial tablet's got to go. Didn't we learn: Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends? And because that's written on the tablet it's got to go. Because it ain't so about your father and my brother, and if our kid — but he did write that he's alive, but if he too — then you don't have anything at all, just the crap from that guy.
Klapat, says the wife and unties her apron, first eat, you’re always working yourself up. Karl-Heinz will be thinking we’ve decorated the tree and that we’ll go to church afterwards.

Well we did it, the tree I mean, says Klapat. Like the old Teutons.

Eating’s always good, says Klapat, so for all I care let’s go to church, I’ll put my uniform on and if he starts up again with that sort of thing, we’ll leave.

A bit more, says the wife and hacks at the roast. A good invention this dead sow, you must say. Klapat says so too and holds out his plate. And now it occurs to him that the whole morning they were talking about Christmas in the office. Prellwitz always talks about the mystical ash and the like. So a guy’s supposed to hang the tree on the ceiling and down underneath an apple, on a string, that’s the earth.

Not so funny, says Klapat reprovingly, when Lina says baloney and gives him the sign to cut it out.

But who would hang a tree on the ceiling, better none at all. Klapat lays down his knife and fork criss-cross on the plate, and starts telling what Horstigall said.

So these people had a revolving base they always stuck the tree into. It played Christmas carols. While revolving.
That’s funny, says the wife.
Not at all, says Klapat, not in the least. It’s just a painted tin box. The key was hidden during the year so no one would wind it up. Only at Christmas. And don’t keep butting in on me, and one Christmas, well, they probably overwound it or something, at any rate, first it rotates just right and they’re sitting there and singing along and his father, he says, is already munching Christmas cookies, and then things started really hopping, the box rotates faster and faster, the balls are already flying, smack against the wall, smack, smack, the tomcat cuts out, the children bringing up the rear. Messy Christmas. Klapat laughs so much that his eyes water. Well, whaddaya think, Merry Christmas.

And now it occurs to him what Neumann said: Last Christmas was nice, the kids were home, he’s got three in the service, one’s a sergeant, boy they boozed it up, was real cosy.

Would you like to do that, Klapat, says Lina reproachfully. Well, Neumann’s wife is dead, this year none of them get a vacation, the old man sits there alone. Let him go to church. But Neumann probably is a dissenter, as we used to call it, they don’t believe in a Higher Being, just in those who can promote you, a civil service faith.
And so now the Klapats are sitting in church, Klapat in SA uniform, Lina in black silk, Lina is thinking, how’s it going with my boy?

Mr. Eschenbach is playing the organ up there, first fast and then slowly, and it always rings a bit in between.

Must have slipped in the *Zimbelstern*, says Klapat, sounds good. And then Klapat cranes his neck because The Reverend is clambering up the pulpit steps.

And what’s he saying up there, The Reverend? To begin with that the congregation should sing Silent Night at home, not in church.

He just wants to give everybody a pain in the ass. But not me. Not today. Here I sit, Klapat, in uniform, civil servant, front-line soldier, Iron Cross Second Class, and my son in the field. Just let him start in again with soldiers and war, just let him start in again, that guy, he’ll soon see what’s what.

What is what then, Klapat?

Then I’ll get up and get the hell out. And Lina here along with me. But The Reverend doesn’t talk about war, but about peace; the longer Klapat listens, the more suspicious it sounds. How come peace when we’ve got war now? But is he supposed to talk about war? So he should talk about peace? Should he or shouldn’t he? In any case what he’s say-
ing up there is very probably not what you can listen seriously to, now in war, and in uniform: That the peacable people are the peacemakers and not the types who can and do make pieces of it.

And not Silent Night either. Can understand their not daring to demand the mystical ash. But at least Silent Night.

*The book of the generation of Jesus Christ,* thus begins the New Testament, says The Reverend, and then it goes on: *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise.* Was *on this wise* my friends, that is, God does something with this birth to his world.

Now Klapat knows what’s coming next. But this *on this wise* and that the whole New Testament from the very beginning talks about Christmas — well, I don’t know, and very probably there’ll come even more, the Three Magi, Good Friday, Easter, May Day, no not that one, Ascension, Pentecost. And Reformation Day and Repentance Day. The old Teutons had already invented all that anyway, says Prellwitz. Maybe it’s really true, that after all the Infant Jesus had to be born first, but that’s probably not what he means, in any case not so simple: born and the rest we know.

And Lina sits there, long hair, short brains, but for all that she can turn the tears on. Let
her. Better now than afterwards under the Xmas tree, after all you’re human too.

The whole Testament. No, Klapat couldn’t bring himself to it. But there wasn’t really a direct reason for getting up except perhaps when he talked about peace, now in war, but after all you do go to church Christmas because it’s Christmas and old habit, something old, something familiar, you only need to think of it and it’s before your eyes the way it used to be at home and how we always used to go swiping the tree from the tree nursery, and one year the forester Kiuppel had marked all the trees and then came on a visit, the second day of Christmas, but didn’t say a word, just pulled our ears afterwards, us kids. And today: That is the book of the generation of Jesus Christ. There something is done, peace, where there’s now war. Doesn’t fit, neither back nor front, thinks Klapat.

There he’s lying in bed at night, and it’s all over.

No, they didn’t get up. Only afterwards, as is proper, when church was over. Then they sang at home, both the Klapats, and it struck them that they were old. And he brought out the violin, that much he can still manage. And they wrote a letter to their boy. And Klapat once more began to talk about Horstigall’s revolving base, which played
songs, but he soon stopped, then a little radio, and at twelve the chimes.

Not another word about all that. But are such holidays there for a guy to get mixed up? To lie there and not sleep? That I don't know.
What there is to tell about the dancer Malige is a story that begins in August 'thirty-nine, in the last days of the month, in a small country town — scarcely describable for sheer inability to survey it at a glance.

In the center, as everywhere in such small towns, there's a rather large market place, completely empty. Now not only during the day, in this hot month, when you'd rather slink along close to the low gabled houses than cross the square — than, losing your breath, squeeze yourself through this soft yet massive block of glowing air, which, as though trimmed and fitted, fills up the rectangular square right up to the façades of the rows of houses enclosing it.

Even in the evenings, when it comes over a bit cool from somewhere, from the lake
situated in the northwest or the moist meadows in the direction of Paradise village and farther down towards Venedien, you prefer to keep close to the houses, which you can enter if you like and rest; evening is a tired time, and you’d be alone in the spacious square. And then too the moonlight soon comes and makes the cobblestones shine so strangely.

What reasons don’t you find not to have to cross the market place, alone, in this year of ’thirty-nine.

In late summer. Which is very warm. When what there is to tell about the dancer Malige begins.

He’s stuck in the barracks on the edge of town, dressed up as a soldier, sitting at the table with others; they’re playing cards, a usual sight around the usual barracks table, it’s almost a bore how the cards arrange themselves over and over again in his hand into a curious fortune telling, a bold numerical magic, of course it’s a trick, easy to explain and can be learnt and yet it is unreal. It could be that it promotes a good mood, it could be, but certainly not in a game, where it’s a matter of less than a penny despite Blömke’s offer for one penny skat.

That’s Malige and now to Blömke and besides, Kretschmann and Naujoks. The others in front of the lockers, busy with boot
polishing, for a walk in town. Blömke flings down the cards. Can’t play with you, he says. And Kretschmann and Naujoks nod their agreement. So when the others are out, they will shift over to the canteen and drink beer awhile and talk, until Blömke has gotten into a rage and, instead of the cards he leafs the fifty mark bills on to the table and lets whoever wants to, get boozed up. Then Reservist Blömke, with the rank of Private, is advanced in a flash, to Mr. Blömke who everyone knows runs a coal business.

That’s the fifth day it’s gone that way. Barracks duty: Exercising, right about, left about, rifle cleaning, boot inspection. Half the barracks is crammed full of reservists. Innkeeper Zelt draws himself up with both hands on the railing because of a wretched charley horse; Kretschmann is a longshoreman, porter in the provincial capital, he’s not bothered by handling the rifle or the wooden stool; Naujoks has an even temper, when the officer at inspection points to a spot on the rifle barrel with indignant disgust, he says: Man, don’t you know rust when you see it, Lieutenant Sir?

They’re older people, reservists, as was said, called up and brought together here in this provincial town. They talk a lot about war too, but more about manly virtues, German virtues, they don’t believe very much
in a new war, there are towns down towards the East Prussian lake district which still carry traces of the last one. So you think: a military exercise, like the ones you’ve had. After all, there’s this non-aggression pact, that should be able to reassure you. But Blömke is a businessman, he takes Malige aside. If a guy eats up cigar butts like a pig, he says, and the dancer finishes it off, then he pukes. Yeah okay, says Blömke, but if again and again . . .? To which the information of an experienced man goes: Then they’ll think you’ve got stomach ulcers. And that’s really all Blömke needs to know.

A couple of days later the top sergeant and young officers are dashing around all worked up, the new units, the companies divided and filled up with reservists are being loaded, partly on to trucks, partly on to trains, again there’s a big mess while distributing and trying out the gasmasks “30,” as the thing is called. That can’t mean anything good, says Kretschmann, at the very most to drive people nuts.

Ach, Malige, what’s all that? You’ve had your work, the last one in Lunapark, before that in Bremerhaven, before that in Copenhagen in Tivoli, that’s why you fill out still another slip: last stay abroad, your work, called strong-man show: one-armed handstands on a green bottleneck, at any rate in
the last years, before that, bottom man in a human pillar in a variety show, but really a dancer; one believes it when one sees you, slim, with a gait of the most natural conspicuousness, the tips of the toes turned a little too far out. Tell us the truth, Malige, instead of horsing around.

Just shut your trap. That’s Lieutenant Anflug’s boyish voice, to be heard on the street in Mlawa, they are over the Polish border and Private Malige wanted to throw in a word or two, that would stick like sand in the teeth, in answer to Anflug’s he-man speech about Polish riff-raff and kikification, a chaser as it were, to non-commissioned reserve officer Benedikt’s barracks lecture: The Reich as a Power for Order in Europe. But what did he actually say, this dancer? He goes into a Polish house and plays the piano. Is that all?

And Kretschmann, potted, runs around a wooden stall brandishing his bayonet and nails a hen to the ground. And non-commissioned officer Markschies buys it from him, for cigarettes. And Naujoks has a conversation with Poles. And Zelt traffics in bread. And what if the older people don’t know anything? Wiechert says: You certainly don’t believe that the war’ll be over tomorrow, do you?

That, here, is a little town on a little river,
the one bank flat, the one lying opposite with moderate slopes of shifting height, a scattered village, or many villages, municipal buildings simply in between, hospital, school, something like that, a Catholic church, a synagogue. The people here aren’t used to much good, it seems, and aren’t so ingenuous as they make out: sidling around the soldiers, using their hands and a few scraps of German.

Lieutenant Anflug resides on the high bank. There his signal corps vehicles are set up, switchboard and cable vehicles, and first aid Lance Corporal Maschke is on the way in that direction, and Malige, whom he meets on the wooden bridge, joins up with him, on account of Blömke’s sick call, about which Maschke tells him: Stomach ache, but with fever.

Maschke, on short legs, knows, as a druggist, how to interpret symptoms. Malige, too, thinks: Stomach ulcers. Didn’t he always hog half of my pack — oh well: charcoal tablets. And then they went up the slope diagonally.

Up here a little breeze is blowing. Beginning of September. You can pivot around and look back at the town. Maschke does that for a moment, maybe would do it longer, but turns around immediately, Malige had said: Hey look — not louder than normally,
but still in such a peculiar tone that it simply makes you turn on your heels.

Down on the bank a bunch of Jews, black caftans, beards, black hats, around a cable drum which they’re trying to load up on themselves and yet set down again for a renewed attempt, old men, and now three or four of them drag the drum up the slope, reach about halfway up, and Anflug climbs down towards them and kicks the thing out of their hands. Probably supposed to be carried. It rolls down there. Stop it, shouts Anflug. Well it’s not supposed to sink in the river, is it.

That’s a good one. Anflug hauled over the Jews from the synagogue where they had assembled, the whole lot. Now what’s the point of this: letting it roll down, carrying it up again, letting it roll down again? Learn to work, opines Anflug. Maschke finds it strange.

Probably Malige too. Because he jumps forward, has now brought his legs into a ballet position, like some sort of a procession, skips, Charlie Chaplin steps, suddenly standing still, bends forward, two steps back. Past Anflug, who should have seen it, but had something else to do, forward to the edge of the slope. And now — now this is really true art — with the same sequence of steps down the incline, not a bit faster, slow motion as
it were. The guy's gone nuts, Anflug shouts. He can't overlook that — this funny farm show.

Maschke lets his Blömke be Blömke, namely sick. He runs to the slope, stands, sees: Malige has arrived down below, spreads his arms, moves them like wings, a green bird in a swarm of jackdaws, apparently calls upon his audience, the old gents down there, to take their seats, he, Malige, will present himself in a gratis performance, but he actually says "produce" as they do in the trade. He has already taken hold of the cable drum, lifted it up like a magic box from where doves will fly out and afterwards a parasol, opening by itself, anyway just as light — and is still in his dance step, his head thrown back. And now, carrying the drum in front of him, as if he had to hold on to it or else it would fly off, he advances up the incline, not a bit slower or faster.

At the top Anflug flounders, he puts one foot forward, grabs for his field cap, for his belt, has begun to scream, scream, screams like an animal — orders or something — a meaningless jumble. And Malige, he sees, dances up to him, closer and closer, a couple of yards more, with head thrown back and mouth open.

Over from the vehicles the whole platoon comes running — Kretschmann, Zelt, Wie-
chert, Markschies, Naujoks — stand, look across to the approaching dancer, step over to the side as he pops up over the incline, before the edge again takes another step back, lets the four tiny steps follow, and now, arrived on top, the cable drum in his arm, the skip for good measure. To Anflug’s cries, who has whipped out the pistol, loses the magazine while cocking, lets it suddenly drop, wheels about, runs off, still screaming.

That’s actually the whole story. At the beginning of a war. On a Polish river bank. Above a town which soon will go up in smoke. At the beginning of a war which goes on for a long time. In which Blömke gets his discharge notice because of stomach ulcers, and two years later is called up once more. In which Naujoks dies, as a result of a bullet, and Kretschmann dies a hero’s death in the basement of a brewery, where he drowns a fortnight later. In which innkeeper Zelt procures himself a dog, a terrier by the name of Lady, but that’s already in the year following, in France.

Lieutenant Anflug is removed. Transferred to another unit. Impossible conduct. And the story with Malige is for the moment forgotten at the beginning of the war. Maybe he’ll live a long life. Then he would most likely be in a cabaret at the front, with his ability, probable, or at any rate possible,
although they prefer to take ladies. I don’t know. I only know what I’ve related.

At very most there remains: that it becomes evening, after this story. That on the high bank, a little bit behind the motor vehicles, stacks of straw stand and gleam strangely, as the moonlight dips down on to them. While the mist comes up over the river. And that nothing would stop you from going over the bridge and through the town, now in darkness — were it not that you would meet yourself, here of all places, in this Polish town, without even finding a reason for it.
Somesortofshitsomesort.

Neumann is sitting in the office armchair. The coffee is on the right, cold, on the left the telephone. In the middle the calendar for the week is lying on the desk.

Somesort. Breeding enthusiast. You know the sort. Standing outside in the anteroom talking away at Miss Kunze. And Kunze leans on the desk with the upper part of her thigh and dreamily lays one hand on the filing cabinet. A bit tall, Kunze. Now she turns her head on her thin neck and checks whether her hand up there is in the right pose. It’s right, says Neumann, she certainly isn’t going to forget it up there.

In the meantime this breeding enthusiast has pulled a bundle of papers out of his jacket, at long last, waves it to and fro a
couple of times before he bangs it on to the table and once again digs down into the inside pockets of the jacket, and there he’s found what he was looking for; he’s holding a brown envelope in his hand, and now Miss Kunze says something, and the shit, the gentleman, exposes his full set of teeth and looks around for a chair.

Neumann can see all of this through the sheet of glass near the door. From the outside the sheet of glass is a mirror, five feet tall, eighteen inches wide, but here from the inside you can look through like through real glass — there really are such things. And now Kunze comes towards the door. Neumann leans back and folds his arms across his stomach.

Miss Kunze, he puts on a friendly tone, let the gentleman enter. Actually Kunze isn’t even in the room yet — has only just opened the door.

Kunze is a good observer, she would tell what the man was like by what he has on — in the mirror that’s perhaps not so clear — so let’s see what the man has on, presumable age and then the symptoms which indicate the animal-love of the person concerned: No hat, hairs on the trousers, nibbled-at shoes, trousers with cuffs. It’d be better to forgo the pleasure. So show the gentlemen in please. There he comes. Filbert, he says, with that
movement of the arm which can replace any kind of bow, my name is Filbert. On February 26, 1942 I lost my heart to the German boxer. Your magazine *The Dog* despite several proposals which I made —

Okay sit down first, says Neumann.

Neumann’s my name.

There is the bundle of papers and Mr. Filbert lays the brown envelope on top. Here I’ve written down —

Yes, says Neumann, approximately hundred pages. The photos are in the envelope. Miss Kunze will write out a receipt for you.

With a rubber stamp please, says Filbert.

Without, says Neumann. Letterhead.

The animal did extraordinarily..., says Filbert.

Yeah sure, Neumann interrupts. But first, you said you lost your heart. How did that happen, go ahead and tell us.

I went to Meier, I had met him, like you meet someone when you haven’t seen him for twenty years, on the street of course; I say Meier, you old son of a gun, and he says Filbert. We were schoolmates. And three days later was his birthday. So I went there with cognac and flowers and there stands the boxer bitch Ada von der Karolinenhöhe.

How did you know the name?

Meier’d told me of course.
Oh yeah of course, says Neumann, and how was that with your heart? Interests me.

Okay, my heart, says Filbert. Let me think. He puts his hand to his breast, shifts it around a bit, lets it lie above his stomach and makes a face as if he were strenuously communing with himself.

More towards the left, says Neumann. How was that now?

My heart, says Filbert, trembled like a flower in the wind. You know, in autumn —

Yeah I know, says Neumann. But you said February before. 'Forty-two. You were exempted, weren’t you.

I had — I mean I was indispensable. In the Warta Gau*.

Aha, says Neumann. But with dogs up until then, you hadn’t —

Well not directly. A few from the ranks were specially trained with dogs. But, as you remarked, with those I had nothing —

And in Berlin, asks Neumann.

At headquarters, says Filbert and interrupts himself. But listen, I think you wanted to know —

Exactly, says Neumann, your heart. You lost it in other words.

He takes the brown envelope, opens the flap, takes out a picture. Filbert has drawn

* in occupied Poland
himself up, one hand on his breast, the other on his knee, and tries again to concentrate. And that’s the way it was, he says.

And Neumann has the picture in front of him: A man in uniform with a German shepherd dog, the hair slanting across the forehead, insipid look, hands laid together on his genitals. Beautiful animal, the dog, well-known photo in those days.

You’ve brought the wrong envelope, says Neumann and lays the picture back on the table. You lost your heart, Mr. Filbert, that’s the way it was, huh? ’Forty-two, in February, to the dog.
When the first news of the mass murders of the Jews reached the town and everybody was of the opinion it was exaggerated, it surely couldn’t be that bad, nevertheless, everyone knew very well that in fact that was the way things stood, that neither the vast numbers, nor the methods and refined techniques which one heard about, no matter how horrifying, were exaggerated, that everything had to be that way because it wasn’t possible for it to be any other way at all, and that it was no longer the time to talk about whether in fact there were other milder, more humane procedures, of course no longer expulsions, now in wartime, but still approved ghettos, with self-administration and so on, and when it became the turn of complete silence, when one’s own self had been silenced away, one no longer knew
what or where and no longer felt opposition to anything, just dropped a casual word between a nonchalant joke and the solemn sentimental feeling of being caught up into a fatal battle of mythical importance, admittedly against one's will, when this point had been reached by those who ran around free in Germany and lived well, admittedly under the difficult conditions of war, when this point had been reached — which does not mean anything, for they had long since reached that point, if it only comes off as well now, so, when it was as it had always been, when that's the way it was, the bells tolled — for nothing really special: the wedding of a brain injury victim — whose wish in consideration of his military distinctions could not be denied — a Seabees first lieutenant registered fit for garrison use, but for the next few years at any rate on leave, with a nurse named Erika, who had cut him down with her own hands from the window crossbar on which he had strung himself up in the sanatorium, and whom he strangled to death on the very evening of the wedding, in what was even conjectured to be a fit of mental derangement, which also does not mean anything, since being mentally deranged had been his official state up until then anyway, that is for two years, since his injury.

One for two years, the other for how long?
I can look into a side street through a former boulevard which, treeless, widens out towards an empty square, more and more resolutely the farther it moves away from the corner I live on. An old street, a goodish ninety years, old houses with broad cornices, pillars, lintels supported by half-columns, balconies which are propped up by Atlantes, and round portals which would perhaps fall in were caryatids of rough grace not to gently bend fleshy-powerful backs under the curvature.

For some time indeed, I have noticed from my window that a bustling has been spreading in this street, that something has started there which generally comes under the term Regulation of the City Core and doesn’t mean anything else except that the houses
on this street have been marked for demolition.

Old houses. From below dry-rot has worked on them and from above, from the roof framework, the wood-worm. About half-way they met; without making a fuss about it, but, as you see, not unnoticed.

The occupants of the first house, it is assumed, aren’t waiting for notification, maybe even, it was given years ago. With sack and pack they move over into the house standing nearest by, without asking and un­greeted by its occupants, then hang out of all the windows, from the cellar to the loft, and shout their wrath and contempt in the faces of the workers outside, who are carrying out the demolition with apparatus and machines.

So there they’ve found a place to stay. But come next week it’s the turn of this house too. The steam shovels advance, the occupants and guests move over jointly into the next house. And a week afterwards it’s the same thing again, boxes, household stuff, pieces of clothing are schlepped into the next house, whose doors open reluctantly. Now six or eight heads look out of every window. There’s certainly shouting going on and you know approximately what, but over here there’s nothing to be heard, you only recognize the opened mouths, and fists, frozen now in a threatening motion, because the
steam shovels manoeuver and move, after a half-rotation, on to the next house that’s still standing. So it goes on, one house and another house.

We’ll have to go over there now, before evening, they don’t light the lamps in this street anymore, or at least inquire about the length of the street, or still better, take a quick look at the street, towards its end, as long as it still exists. We ought perhaps to know how many weeks it can keep going on like this.

By the way, the houses towards the end of the street become lower and squeezed in. Narrow doors, fewer and fewer windows. At first still eighteen or sixteen in the façade that’s quite unadorned anyway, finally only four. How are all the people going to be able to look out?

There’s still of course one more house, maybe one with two windows, that’s at least something. Because the last one, I think, doesn’t have any more.

Of course new houses can be put in the place of the old ones; everything new, a new name for the street, new occupants, there are precise, sufficiently detailed notions when it’s a matter of the future. But when it comes to the old, former times, the past, one is stuck with conjectures. That has been, and has passed, time, and time lost. Like idle talk.
Actually
It Was All Over

In the morning, in September, in the morning, when I used to walk to the station, across the square with the taxis wet from the dew in their first sleep, as the thin fog drew across the green surfaces and around the shrubbery and Orpheus—who had become old—in wide, baggy trousers sidled up again to occupy his spot at the comfort station, to read inscriptions, to add his piece, hopeless, as the boy on his way to school came from the street car, every morning, mobile and tense, but already with a boozer’s face and eyes, the small wrinkle at the root of the nose, cheerful and right above the forehead the tuft of hair, wet and turned up like a water elf’s coronet, then I used always to stand in front of the station door, turn round once more, in order to look across the square as far as
the point where the asphalt street started its incline towards the vault of the bridge and the cupola church behind it, before I pushed against the swinging door leaf with my foot and rushed up to the counter.

I no longer see that any more. I’ve moved away, to another part of town. No longer the basement pubs either, in the side streets off the station, one after the other, seven or eight, teamsters’ cellars for morning coffee, for cumin or gin, two short ones first and then the three doubles.

None of that any longer. Because I’ve begun another life, in a profession that doesn’t permit that, that commits me to tailored suits, to morning oats, to tea, cigars and a bottle of red wine in the evening. That’s how people talk, but it’s really true. And it surely wouldn’t be true at all if I said I long to return to that time with the station, the fog and the taxis, the boy and the third pub, where the bartender was called Erich and where they took me for a trick shooter.

That was Otto Klemmer, building plumber, 10 Bridge Street. Do you know my dog? A polar bear, I can tell you. And then the dog came in and it was an old Pomeranian, coming apart at the seams with the years and sent out to look for its master and to bring him home. So this fellow had seen
me in Copenhagen, in Wilhelmshaven and somewhere else.

And you're not in the biz anymore? But if you build up a number again — you can count on me, I’ll come, bottom man in the human pillar act or something.

And the barkeep had thought I must work for a newspaper.

And then Helene had popped up there, one evening, with long hair, in pants and two boys in her train, art students, and had made friends with the barkeep’s tomcat and had drunk a lot of schnapps and had talked, in nothing but half-sentences, and the boys had listened and counted up their money in the toilet to see how far it would still go, and they had kept on coming, the three. And when Erich had wound up the musical clock on the stove and everyone became quiet and leaned on the table, at that point we’d smile at each other, touched, sort of moved by the schnapps, and like in school behind the teacher’s back.

And then sometimes we switched over to another pub, a whole bunch of people, and the two boys always with us. And Helene had sung in an extremely shabby voice, and not even screwed up her mouth when we laughed.

And now I have no idea when all that stopped. It was simply over. First the sculp-
tors, who had patched up an historic building somewhere thereabouts stayed away. Then Otto Klemmer didn’t come anymore. The barkeep had to go into hospital. His nephew, a butcher, carried on the pub and did better than Erich, that is, sales rose, and actually it was all over.

Helene — yeah, I once heard she’s still supposed to be making the haunts, only with other boys, now with three. I don’t want to see all that again. Just perhaps the square in front of the station. And now it occurs to me that there was always a dog there, pretty big and black, I’d forgotten all about that, and every morning when I came by he acted as if he wanted to start barking, sort of a short, hoarse little start in that direction, but then he’d just look at me gravely and viciously, and I’d grab him by the snout while going by, and he’d wag his tail a bit, two or three times.

The bartender is said to have died. Helene — I really don’t know anything about her. And should I still want to inquire, it would be too late.
Albert Erich Knolle.
That's a name.
This man doesn't exist. Until we produce him.

We say: He has arms and legs, a torso, and the required organs. In the same way we put a head on him with everything that goes along with it. And now we clothe him in a gray suit and black shoes, and put a hat in his hand. Now he's supposed to walk as if he were already finished.

There he goes. What else can you say about him?

He has an irregular walk.
Not that he limps, it's just that some of his strides are longer than others. Maybe because he's thinking.

This man leaves his family one day in
order to write a play, and returns home without having written it.

What sort of play was it supposed to be and why didn’t he write it?

The play was supposed to be called “The Break-down.” It was supposed to take place in a factory. It was supposed to be critical.

And the man Knolle let himself be convinced that critique has a disintegrating effect.

Now then: Knolle, without a play and sunk in thought. Under trees we have put there expressly for him, just now, so-called theatrical set trees, of a deep green shade.

We’ll have a talk with him, and the first thing we’ll say is: Hello Mr. Knolle. And after that we’ll say: And how are you Mr. Knolle? And finally: But now you say something.

Now Knolle speaks. My play, he says.

So with that we learn what we already know.

Knolle continues. I’m a lonely person, I’d like you to know.

We don’t think so. Knolle has a profession in a publishing house. He has a family with whom he makes music, eats and sleeps with, and friends he drinks with. So he’s got to explain himself more closely.

So he comes to speak of his play again. He says: I have come to see that critique has a
disintegrating character. Well, what do I do with this awareness?

Nothing at all.

What should I do then?

Write the play anyway.

Against my awareness?

At least try.

Knolle says: Yes, leaves his family again, writes, gets as far as the third act, goes to a theatrical agent, delivers his manuscript there.

After two weeks a drama critic by the name of Dr. Overabove tells him that the play has been approached in an extraordinarily interesting manner, that's the way he expresses himself, but while reading it some misgivings arose in him.

Like bubbles.

Now we are as far as we were, but actually even further — namely the third act. And we induce Knolle to keep writing.

Now the play is done, and is called "The Prevented Break-down." Knolle has undergone development and given a constructive turn to his criticism.

The sequence of events or object that was criticized, as it turned out, only seemed to be worthy of critique. The leading character was subject to an error. That resolved itself, insight triumphed broadly.

Such plays are being offered. The actors
last the longest at it. And Knolle is still sitting in the theater, his family didn’t come along.

So now Knolle is finished as a figure. Now he himself has got to see how he can get along.
Communism— that's where nobody's got nothin', nobody knows nothin' and where everything is held in common.”

That was a standing phrase I remember from my youth. It was attributed to an old high school teacher at the tradition-bound school I attended. It was repeated with an amused doubt about the correctness of the statement, but surely it was quite as the teacher himself—an original known throughout the whole town—had pronounced it.

It remained to ask: Was there anything to it? But there wasn't much asking in middle-class circles, in Germany, where I grew up.

All the same: “Where nobody knows nothin’…” but that wasn't the way it was. In the commercial and harbor town the
seclusion we were used to in our childhood — of peasant society with its patriarchal idyll (there was no landed proprietor in our village) — could not be maintained. There were demonstrations, strikes; in those days we lived in a working-class district; and had meetings, talks, and got to know young workers. It turned out that there were young people of my age who had firm and enlightened opinions about things I had never thought about: “Surplus value”, “growth rate”. You were able to talk precisely about such things, with paper and pencil, there was something solid there. “Opium for the people” — that was meat for an argument, but not just in one direction: against the atheists and against your own church. The latter was a ticklish problem. Because there were the big hospitals in the town and provinces, the church institutions devotedly tended, social works. That means you must know your history, the primitive Christian community, the Sermon on the Mount; in the pocket edition of the New Testament Christ’s words referring to the poor were underlined in green, Christianity turned out to be an “ideology of the poor.” The atheist partners in the discussion had it easy of course: by pointing to the historical role of the church they were able to talk about romanticism. Nevertheless, there were Chris-
tian social theories, heretical movements, *pauperes Christi*, social utopias, finally you got to Kaiserswerth, Rauhes Haus, Bethel, Angerburg, Carlshof.* Having come to terms with this, you got the following picture:

A mountain road, narrow, and curvy, one side a steep precipice. So the Christians build a railing on top. And at the bottom, a rescue station for the victims. Admittedly, that is a lot. But the right thing would be to chop a tunnel through the mountain.

So that amounts to a transformation of (social) conditions.

“... Where nobody’s got nothin’ ...” — it doesn’t have to stay that way under changed conditions. Besides, there is the Soviet Union, a large state which, of course, works under enormous difficulties or so one hears. A couple of years later, 1941, you learned about its stability on your own back.

“... And where everything is held in common ...” — that was an ideal, look at the primitive communities, which made Mrs. Kovalevski’s opinion that “there’d be the same clothing for everyone,” meaningless. “Just think, everybody going around with the same hat.” No, that was irrelevant. People all have different heads, hair style

* Various Christian charitable organizations for the upkeep of hospitals and mental homes.
... goes according to the hair, which also differs from person to person — so what does that mean: the same hats?

Conclusions, reflections. Then experiences in the struggle within the church. Then the war. Years rich in work during captivity, a miner in the Donets basin.

And today?

Since then a number of Socialist states has arisen. I live in such a state, that is to say with Communists, that is to say with atheists. I share their apprehensions: I see anti-Communism in its most varied forms. And I don’t become so absorbed in aspects which could perhaps be disposed of as hysterical that I forget about the mortal dangers which it keeps alive and which it awakens. Take hysteria — that can’t be shrugged off. He’s hysterical, so they say. And then he is suddenly dead, died — without having been sick, as they say. Just of hysteria.
Epitaph for Pinnau

Kant, Immanuel (1724–1804): German philosopher
Borowski; Vasianski: Biographers of Kant
Hamann, Johann Georg (1730–1788): Author of philosophical studies

Young Gentleman at the Window

Schopenhauer, Arthur (1788–1860): German philosopher
Schopenhauer, Heinrich Floris (Father): Banker, committed suicide
Michael, Tobias: Choir master at St. Thomas Church, Leipzig, from 1631 to 1657

Boehlendorff

Boehlendorff, Kasimir Anton Ulrich (1775–1825): German revolutionary poet
Fichte, Johann Gottlieb (1762–1814): German philosopher
Herbart, Johann Friedrich (1776–1841): German philosopher
Hölderlin, Johann Christian Friedrich (1770–1843): German revolutionary poet
Lenz, Jakob Michael Reinhold (1751–1792): Dramatist
Woltmann, Karl Ludwig von (1770–1817): Historian
Lausanne 1797: Swiss uprising following the French Revolution
La Harpe, Frédéric César (1754–1838): Swiss revolutionary who instigated French aid for the uprising
Ochs, Peter (1752–1821): Swiss statesman directed by Napoleon to work out the constitution for the newly founded Helvetian Republic
Briefly,
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Johannes Bobrowski was born in 1917 and grew up in Königsberg, East Prussia, now part of the Soviet Union. The traditions of the town always fascinated him — its literature, theology and philosophy and later he was to include some of these in his writings. In 1938, Bobrowski went to Berlin to study the history of art at the university but within less than a year he was back in East Prussia, drafted as a soldier in the Nazi Wehrmacht. ... Having grown up in the Baltic lands he was keenly aware of the history-old oppression of the Baltic peoples and the Jews by the Germans and as a soldier he was to see that this oppression had not changed. Taken prisoner in the Soviet Union in 1945, he returned to Berlin in 1949 where he began work as an editor in a publishing house. His first collection of poems, "Sarmatian Times," was published in 1961. His verses recall life in East Prussia, the landscape, past mingling with present and underlying all the guilt of the Germans. In only a few years he gained an international reputation and has been published in twelve languages. Holder of many literary prizes — 1962: Alma Johanna Koenig (Austria); "Group 47" (Federal Republic of Germany); 1965: Heinrich Mann (German Democratic Republic) and Charles Veillon (Switzerland) — Bobrowski died at forty-eight, on the threshold of a career with a bright future.
Most of the stories in this collection are published in English for the first time. They were written by a modern German poet who produced three volumes of poetry, two novels and more than thirty stories in six years and died at the outset of his creativeness at forty-eight. Unorthodox in both style and language, they represent something new and exciting in the world of literature. Seven Seas Books is pleased to present this latest volume in its series of translated works by authors of the German Democratic Republic.