

However, in consequence of all these excitements my wife fell ill, and our doctor could not guarantee her recovery so long as she stayed in our noisy flat, so I sent her to a nursing home. In the peaceful atmosphere of the nursing home my wife was able to take stock of the situation, and as a good mother she came to the conclusion that, deprived of her company and influence, the children would get out of hand. Accordingly, she wrote me a letter instructing me to send Fritz until her recovery (which seemed to lie in the distant future) to her aunt, Rosalinde, place Franz in a boarding school, and if possible, marry off the six-year-old Liselotte. I telephoned the nursing home doctor, who advised me to comply with my wife's wishes in everything, as this was necessary according to the psycho-analytical method by which she was being treated.

So I sent Fritz to Aunt Rosalinde, but she would only agree to have him if he was accompanied by the governess. As Franz now remained without supervision I converted the chamber-maid into a governess. Liselotte I sent to the country. But now the cook, deprived of the chambermaid's assistance, threatened to resign, to which I could not possibly agree because then we should have had no one to cook for the brother-in-law of my wife's uncle, who had in the meantime moved into our

flat and who, owing to his diabetes, insisted on our Maria's cooking.

I will not bore the reader with the further complications that arose, particularly as I have already found a final solution to all my problems.

I left the brother-in-law of my wife's uncle in the flat with the cook, sent the chambermaid to a nice boarding house at an Italian seaside resort, placed Franz in a boarding school, and rented a bachelor flat for myself in a residential suburb.

And that is where I am now doing penance for my selfishness in getting married.



### *Conversation with a Good Man*

" . . . . and thirdly, the Supreme Court decrees that you be handed over to the Executioner. Executioner, do your duty ! "

The Executioner raised his arms, so that the wide sleeves of his black gown slid back towards his elbows, his eyes flashing behind his mask. Then, walking backwards, we disappeared into the vaulted cellar. The iron door slammed shut, and we were alone.

The Executioner, a hefty fellow with a frank face and somewhat thoughtful eyes, doffed his doublet. It was pleasant to see his fine tanned skin and his mighty paws after so many black gowns which left nothing but the eyes exposed. After so many dogmas, laws and mysteries, here, at last, was a little truth in the shape of flesh and blood. I sat down on the flagged floor and watched his preparations.

He examined the winches and ropes to see whether they were strong enough. Then he collected the wooden parts of the ingeniously devised Spanish boot, tested the rollers under the

adjustable rack, stirred the charcoal, and finally repaired the crank of the wheel, so that it should not squeak. He has a sensitive ear, I thought.

The preparations took a long time, and the grey walls were beginning to oppress me. I was afraid I might fall asleep, for I had not spoken with a human being for such a long time. Perhaps that was why, when he happened to look at me, I gave him an involuntary smile. I also made a courteous gesture, as if to inquire whether he was ready for me. But his glance passed over me. He was completely absorbed in his work of laying out the various instruments of torture.

Later, when, at a sign from him, I lay down on the rack, which was studded with sharp nails, and he strapped down my wrists and ankles, I nevertheless tried to make him speak. The thought that we might go through the whole procedure, which was scheduled to take from two to three hours, without exchanging a word, seemed intolerable to me. After all, we were there alone, engaged in intimate intercourse with each other. No, it was simply impossible that I should spend two or three hours with a human being without talking to him, without getting to know him.

I watched his face. He contracted his eyes and tried to look under my thigh, to see whether the



nails had penetrated sufficiently. Then he began carefully to manipulate the rollers.

"It works very well," I observed politely.

He nodded.

"You have to be careful not to let the blood drip into the ball bearings, because if they get wet the wheel won't turn."

His voice was harsh, but not unpleasant. "He comes from Tuscany," I thought to myself. Aloud I said :

"Of course you have to be careful."



"That's why I keep wiping it off with this rag."

After that we were silent for a time. The Executioner busied himself about me, unstrapping me, placing a stool under me, fastening my hips and

neck. Then he picked up a pair of complicated gadgets with wooden screws.

"Thumb-screws?" I asked with assumed curiosity.

"Guessed it the first time."

With a dexterous movement he fixed the gadgets over my crossed thumbs, and after four turns of the screw he bent over me and nodded with satisfaction for he saw that the upper portion of my thumbs had burst. I had a painful feeling that he was more interested in the instrument than in my conversation. Or was he sick and tired of his profession and thinking of the world outside?

"Must be a fine day outside," I observed inanely.

"Very. In our country they're already harvesting the grape."

"Are you married?" I inquired.

"I have two children."

I brooded for a moment, then :

"I, too," I said, "had a family."

He removed the wooden frame, lowered the pulley, and lightly wheeled the Spanish boot in front of me.

"You know," he said, "I could've afforded to stay at home, as a vintager. . . . But city life and a government job's a bit better, after all. They liked me in the Army, and the Chief Magistrate was



pleased on account of my piety. . . . Do you mind stretching this leg a bit more. . . . So. After all, I'm a true son of the Church. . . ."

"Of course, of course. . . ."

"Anyhow, I always make enough to afford a glass or two. Besides, it's an honour. People look up to you and the tax collectors daren't bully you. Next year, St. Anthony helping, I can bring my boy over."

He turned the iron about in the fire with emotion. I was going to ask a question, but he motioned to me indicating that he must now gag me. Then he tried out the white hot iron on my back.

"It makes an unpleasant smell," he said, smiling at me from the corner of his eye. "Some people can't bear it."

I gave him an inquiring look.

"There was Blasius, my colleague," he said. "He was a huge fellow, and it was a pleasure to see the way he could turn the wheel. He could dislocate the arm of a convicted person with a single twist. But the first time he had to work with the hot iron he got sick and dropped the iron. They had to transfer him back to the Army. It's all a matter of inclination, you see."

I nodded, and he continued:

"He was a jolly good fellow mind you. We

worked together for six months and we got on very well. But . . . his heart wasn't strong enough for the work."

He removed the gag from my mouth, loosened the pulley and let the rope down. The iron ball fell to the floor with a thud as he fastened it to my ankle. He wound the rope round my wrists, threw it over the cross beam, and began slowly to pull at it. Both my arms became dislocated, I rose on my toes, then left the floor. As if I were flying. . . .

"He was a fine fellow, was Blasius," said the Executioner.

"Did you like him?"

"Oh, well. . . . As I said, we got on very well."

"That's probably because you, too, are a good man."

"Think so? Well, perhaps. I've never said an unkind word to anybody, or cursed anybody, or even reproached anybody."

"Excellent, my friend. . . . Well, good-bye. . . . I think I'm going to faint."

"I think so, too. It's customary. Well, good-bye, sir, and don't forget to include me in your prayers."

I cannot remember what happened afterwards.



### *X-Rayland*

The word sounds semi-scientific and dry-as-dust, but on the spur of the moment I cannot find a more apt name for the wonderful country I visited the other day in a dream.

My dream journey was an exact replica of a similar journey in real life; I arrived by train, with a valid and properly visaed passport. I received the first shock during the customs examination, when a stark naked man with a uniform cap on his head entered my compartment. I looked round with amazement, but my fellow travellers seemed to take no notice of the nude customs officer who, after bowing lightly to everybody in general, and running his eyes swiftly over each of us in turn, finally came up to me and said :

"That cigarette case is dutiable, sir."

"What cigarette case?" I asked with surprise.

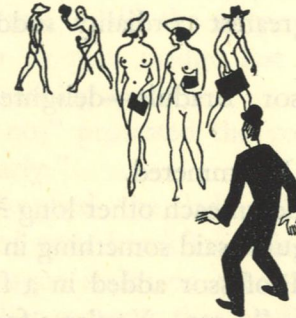
"The one in your right hand waistcoat pocket," was the instantaneous reply.

My hand with a startled gesture shot to my waistcoat pocket and I looked round suspiciously, wondering who could have given me away.

"You must also let me have the revolver from

your hip pocket, sir," went on the customs officer. "I'm afraid I must confiscate it—firearms must not be imported into the country."

I obeyed, feeling flabbergasted and humiliated. One of my fellow travellers, observing by embarrassment, offered to act as my guide in the capital. He said I must be a novice, whereas he had been to



X-Rayland several times and was quite at home in the country.

It was fortunate I had someone to lean upon, otherwise I should certainly have been shocked into insensibility by what I saw. The people in the streets, both men and women, were stark naked, except for a very few old people, who were wearing light bournouses. At first I kept jerking my head this way and that, but realising that my presence did not embarrass anyone, I decided in my own mind



that the inhabitants of the country must be savages, like, for instance, the bushmen of Australia, and that my blushes were, therefore, misplaced. Nudity was just as natural in primitive civilisations as proper clothes in my country.

However, my self-possession did not last long. My guide met a friend, a gentleman with a beard and a kindly look, who after saluting the other man with the greatest cordiality suddenly turned to me:

"I'm Professor Bradula—delighted to meet you."

"Delighted," I stammered.

"Have you known each other long?" asked the Professor. My guide said something in a low voice, whereupon the Professor added in a friendly conversational tone: "I see. You're a foreigner . . . I hope you'll like our country. We've a splendid climate and I'm sure it'll do your left lung a great deal of good—you know, of course, that there's a slight depression in it. Not that you're in actual need of a mild climate like ours, for anyone with such perfect kidneys could afford to live anywhere, even in Greenland. Of course, you mustn't drink too much water here. You see, our water is radioactive and it would be a pity if that nice, big liver of yours got inflamed. Who removed your appen-

dix, may I ask? A splendid piece of work, splendid!" The world began to spin round and round with me.

"Professor Hultl," I stammered.

At this moment a tall, fair-haired young man with pince-nez on his nose passed us, waving a greeting at a pretty young woman on the opposite side of the street.

"Hello, Frank," said the lady. "Why didn't you come up to play bridge last night? I see you've been drinking again."

"Oh dear, no," protested the young man. "I went to bed early."

"Liar!" laughed the lady. "Why, you've almost digested your breakfast rolls, yet I can still see the champagne stains on them."

It was this last sentence that kindled the light of realisation in my mind. I suddenly understood what my guide had perhaps considered unnecessary to explain. Nudity in this country was not due to a low level of civilisation, but simply to the fact that clothes were superfluous, since the people could see through each other, as through glass, or rather as through a fine bottle filled with a red liquid, in which were floating objects of varying degrees of transparency—bones, hearts, livers, intestines, and all the rest.



Almost simultaneously with this realisation came a sensation of infinite pleasure. "X-Rayland!" I thought. "Why, this is the land of truth, the land of pure wisdom, where the hypocrisy of appearances has ceased to exist, where one man sees the other exactly as he is, the land of Pure Reason, of the Kantian categorical imperative, which has cast off the cheap veneer with which the hand of nonsensical illusion has disguised our miserable existence. Here, in this world, no man can mislead the other with forced smiles, artificialities, deceptive appearances. Here there is no need for lies of any kind to embellish things, since no external beauty can compare with the source and purpose of all beauty—truth!"

These people knew the truth. At last I could learn that which had been tormenting me ever since I first began to think, I could learn the aim and object of existence! And I must learn it at once, I had waited long enough!

The library! The library of X-Rayland must be the source of all wisdom. Yes, I must go there at once.

With the guidance of my friend I reached the library in a few minutes. I opened the catalogue with feverish haste. It did not matter whose book I read or what its subject was, I could not fail to benefit from it. I chose at random the greatest work of a poet named Abrakadabra. According to

the catalogue he was the pride of X-Rayland, whom both his contemporaries and posterity had placed above Goethe and Dante.

It was a magnificently produced volume of poems. So much the better, I thought. I was going to partake of that divine revelation that we ordinary mortals expected of the poet—the poet who refused to follow the dictum of the great Hungarian that "poets must lie," and preferred the substance to the shadow.

On the first page my eye was caught by a neat little poem. It was addressed to a lady named Leila, whom the poet was imploring, as it turned out at the end, for a kiss. And to support his prayer, the poet described the lady, together with the particular charms that had "confounded and enchanted" him. "For thy liver is lovelier than the rose," wrote the poet, "and I'd sell the world for the pale yellow curl of thy large intestine. . . . Oh, if I could wear the turquoise of thy gall bladder—oh, if I could touch the pinkness of thy tonsils—oh, if I could rest my head on thy diaphragm—for thou art the one, of all women, the moist shimmer of whose pancreas illumines the night of my desire, like Alcyone in the heavens at moonrise."

I threw the book on the floor with disgust and woke up.



### *Make-Up*

She corrected the scarlet outline of her lips, applied the eyebrow pencil and patted her permanent-waved hair, then she pirouetted round me in her diaphanous gown. Fluttering ribbons, dazzling diamonds, heady perfumes.

"Am I pretty?" asked the two lines of lipstick.

"Very," I said with a puzzled laugh, because I remembered that she had already asked me the identical question in similar circumstances on another occasion and that, at that time, she had really been pretty and desirable. Strangely enough, although I could recall quite clearly her movements as she had rouged her lips and pencilled her brows, I did not know what had happened in the meantime, or who I was and where I knew her from. Perhaps I had only read about a scene like this in a book, or seen it at a picture gallery, but I rather doubted it, because my memory included the taste of her kisses and the warmth of her body.

As I reached the bottom of the stairs my mood was already impregnated with the fragrance of

that vague dream. My eyes burned and my temples throbbed.

"Where shall we go?" breathed Coty-Lorigan.

In the taxi she nestled against me, and then, in a flash, I knew. There was a spring day on a river bank, with wild flowers and trees and sunshine and there was a young girl with frightened eyes. . . . Good heavens, how could I forget! My heart sang with joy to have remembered after all, to have remembered that which gave a meaning to the sunshine, the flowers, and everything.

"It's you?" I mumbled ecstatically. "It's you. . . ."

The perfume of the gown and the powder whispered into my ear.

"Madame Luttenberger. . . . You saw her? . . . but it isn't a real diamond . . . easy for her . . . not from her husband . . . Katie told me . . . the fair girl in the crêpe muslin dress . . . a good figure . . . but awful feet. . . ."

And so she went on. For a moment I was taken aback. Was it really she? Bah! I couldn't have been listening, or perhaps I didn't grasp what she was saying. . . . It'd be different up at my flat.

The taxi slowed down. A searchlight swept over the river bank. It was here, here. I could smell the wild flowers.



I carried her up in my arms, panting, with tensed muscles. A door slammed, I heard the caretaker's steps dying away in the court-yard. Then all was quiet. Doors and windows were closed, and I was alone with my prey. She was lying on the settee with closed eyes, silent.

I lit the small lamp, then I cautiously approached. I wanted to kiss her tenderly, softly. But the two scarlet lines repelled me. I returned to the dressing table and fetched a rag to rub them off.

The make-up came off easily. But underneath I found, not the soft, living flesh, but another, harder layer of make-up, traces of earlier beauty treatment. I recollected that that was what she looked like when I first saw her many months ago.

I fetched a larger piece of chamois leather and started to rub off the whole of the make-up from her face. I used a little alcohol, and the mask dissolved easily. Underneath there was another mask, also of make-up, a picture that betrayed the master hand.

I now set to work in earnest and began to rub off the second mask. The lamp flickered and gave hardly any light, so I trusted to my sensitive fingers in the semi-darkness. A third mask was revealed. I gave an angry cry and emptied the whole bottle of alcohol over it. Then I started to

rub and knead and scratch, in order to reach the flesh at last. The mask loosened, dissolved in my fingers, which were covered with a mass of coloured substances. The liquid dripped down on both sides of the settee, forming rivulets on the floor. Then, suddenly, I realised that I was kneading the upholstery of the settee . . . I was horrified. Seizing the lamp, I held it close. . . . The body still lay on the settee, but the face and head had vanished. There was only a dirty, wet stain which the plush covering was absorbing with a sizzling sound.

My throat went dry.

"I don't care," I panted. "Her face doesn't matter. I want her body."

I fell upon her hungrily, and with a single movement ripped off her gown. But underneath it was not her chemise, or her flesh. It was another gown. I recognised it. It was the same in which she passed me that day on the arm of another man. . . I ripped it off . . . I came upon a costume . . . the one she received from the banker. Under the costume a simple flowered frock—a gift from her mother when she was engaged. I ripped it down the middle. Surely, this must be her body? But no. Reaching into the tear, my hand came upon a soft, silky substance. I dragged it out. It was a



baby's dress, with lace and ribbons; she wore it after she was born. But she herself was nowhere to be seen. And the settee was littered with torn rags.



### *A Poet on Mars*

The poet drove to the airfield, where the Professor was putting the finishing touches to his new inter-stellar rocket. The Poet was deeply interested in the machine, and as he looked sufficiently awed to flatter the Professor, the latter permitted him to enter the rocket, and even to try on the special leather suit and the oxygen apparatus. As the cabin of the rocket was too small to accommodate two people, the Professor remained outside while he explained the intricate devices that occupied most of the interior, calling particular attention to a certain lever.

"Don't touch that lever on the right," he said, "whatever you do."

"This one?" said the poet, placing his hand on the lever.

At that moment the door of the cabin slammed shut, there was a terrific explosion, and the Poet lost consciousness. When he recovered—it might have been a minute or a week later—he raised himself on his elbow and looked out of the window. He had a glimpse of a tiny ball revolving in the



distance, which he realised must be the earth. The rocket was now hurtling along in pitch darkness, illuminated only by thin streaks of silver light. Then the Poet discerned the sun and the planets, recognising Venus, Mercury, and Mars, which latter looked like a ball of red fire. The Poet remembered what he had heard about the canals and the possible existence of intelligent beings on Mars, and he also recalled what the Professor had taught him concerning the steering gear of the rocket, so he directed the machine towards Mars.

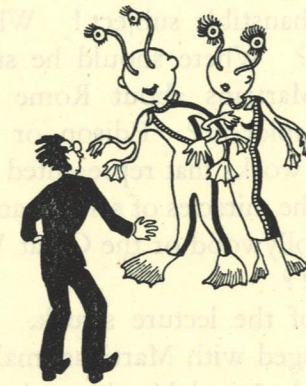
The red disc began to grow larger and larger. The Poet was able to see the canals, then he discerned a sea and some vast red-green fields. Mountains and valleys sprang into relief before his eyes. There was also a square plain, the edges of which were lined with buildings.

A few minutes later the rocket came smoothly to rest in front of a marble building, and the Poet jumped out on to soft, rust-coloured grass, shaded by lute-shaped trees.

A crowd of strange creatures came running from the building, waving to the Poet with evident enthusiasm. They all had round heads, a pair of bright eyes at the end of feelers projecting from sockets in their faces, two pairs of hands, the fingers of one of which were connected by a cutaneous

membrane, and legs with membranes for swimming. They all wore gold-coloured flexible metal suits.

The Poet raised his oxygen helmet politely and stammered an introduction, for he realised that these creatures were Martians. Greatly embarrassed, he started to talk to them. The Martians replied, but the Poet could not understand what they were saying. After a few minutes, however, he



realised that they understood him. They listened attentively and nodded or shook their heads. Finally they conducted him to a large red hall, where they offered him a seat, after which they held a consultation among themselves.

Then a distinguished Martian came up to the Poet and without saying a word placed his hand on



the Poet's head. And lo and behold! the Poet instantly understood what was required of him. He was being asked to lecture that evening on the inhabitants of the Earth. The Martians were deeply interested in their visitor and wanted him to tell them what he knew about his home-planet.

The Poet had six hours in which to prepare his lecture. His head was full of ideas, so full that they made his temples throb. What a magnificent, gigantic, inexhaustible subject! What should be lecture about? Where should he start? Should he tell the Martians about Rome and Greece? Cæsar and Napoleon? Edison or Shakespeare? The immortal works that represented and explained humanity, or the miracles of science and technology, the stars of Hollywood or the Great War? Where should he start?

The hour of the lecture struck. The vast red hall was thronged with Martians, male and female, Forty thousand excited Martians who had come to listen to the Poet's words.

When the Poet appeared on the platform there was dead silence in the hall. Slowly, with his head slightly bent, he approached the table, upon which stood a device that looked like a microphone. He was still undecided as to what he was going to say. Then he sat down and looked round the hall. The

front row of seats was occupied mainly by female Martians. The Poet cleared his throat, took a sip from the glass that stood on the table, gave a cough, pulled a lock of hair over his forehead, assumed a wistful smile—and in his soft, ingratiating voice he began to recite his poem, "My Spirit."



### *Criminal Investigation*

He wore a chequered overcoat and a bright-coloured tie, and carried a walking stick with a horn handle, so that but for the fact that I had sat with him at the café from three till five every day for four years, and therefore knew that he was a plain clothes policeman, he would certainly have succeeded in taking me in, for to the superficial observer he seemed to be a man who was pretending to be a simple countryman. As he entered my room he greeted me gloomily :

"Good morning, cousin."

"Good morning, Mr. Pawelka," I replied. "But why do you call me cousin? You always say, 'Hello, old man' at the café. Anyhow, how are you? And how are the children? Any prospect of a rise?"

The detective gave me a troubled look.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "I'm not a detective but an old gentleman from the country and I just happened to drop in."

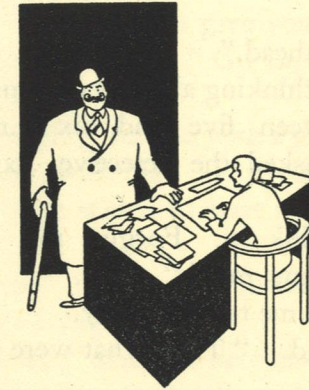
"All right, Mr. Pawelka," I laughed. "Take a seat. Well, what do I owe the pleasure to?"

"Are you quite sure," said the detective hesi-

tantly, "that I'm Detective-Sergeant Pawelka? I mean have you no doubt as to my identity?"

"Not the slightest! Why, you've got a pack of cards in your pocket that you borrowed half an hour ago from the waiter."

He reached into his pocket, then :



"You're right," he said solemnly. "Well, then I admit I'm Detective-Sergeant Pawelka, of the Hungarian State Police."

"Is that so? . . . Well, what brings you here?"

"I'm carrying on investigations," he said, gazing at me darkly, "in the matter of the Kurbiss Street murder."

"Very interesting," I said. "But what do you want from me?"



"From you? Nothing. I only came for a chat. A little talk, you know. A nice, friendly talk."

"Really? And what do you want to talk about?"

"Well . . . let's say . . ." began the detective slyly, "let's say about the condition of Viennese crossing sweepers. I decided on that before I came up."

"Well, fire ahead."

"Were you thinking about the Viennese crossing sweepers between five and six p.m. yesterday afternoon?" asked the detective, fixing me with a keen look.

"I don't think so. Forgive me, I'm afraid it never entered my mind."

He looked at me triumphantly.

"So," he said. "Then what were you thinking about?"

"Don't remember."

"Tut-tut," said the detective. "Try to recall it. Weren't you thinking about an old lady?"

"Humph. . . . What makes you ask that?"

"Very simple," said the detective ironically. "Were you not, between five and six p.m. yesterday afternoon, were you not thinking about an old lady who was alone in her flat, and on whom you might call under some pretext or another?"

"Listen, Pawelka," I said reproachfully, "why can't you be frank with an old friend?"

"What do you mean?"

"Why don't you say straight out that you suspect me of the murder of the old lady in Kurbiss Street?"

"Can't be done," said the detective severely. "If I did that you'd be on your guard, but so long's you don't know it you might give yourself away."

"All right," I said. "Go on with your cross-examination."

"You're right," he said with a grateful look. "I nearly forgot about that. Do you happen to know a question with which to start a cross-examination cleverly?"

"Of course I do. For instance, you ask me whether I'm a vegetarian."

"Very good," said the detective.

"Of course it's good. But why do you take all this trouble? I can tell you straight away that I deny having murdered the old lady in Kurbiss Street."

The detective reflected.

"I don't like that," he said at length. "The fact that you deny the murder makes you all the more suspect. You see, the question is, why do you deny the murder? And the answer: because you've committed it, and you're afraid of the conse-



quences. If you hadn't committed the murder, you've have no reason to deny it."

"Listen, Pawelka," I said somewhat irritably "why did you come to me? Did you have a clue?"

"A very interesting clue. There was a red handkerchief tied round the old lady's throat. That was what she was strangled with. Well, I saw you—or rather I made the observation at the café that you were using a white handkerchief. I asked myself why? And I said to myself, because he left the red one at the old lady's flat, so now he only has a white one. Well? What've you got to say to that? Can you prove that you have a red handkerchief?"

"No," I admitted.

"Then you're the murderer. You've no red handkerchief because it's round the old lady's throat."

"Listen, Pawelka," I said, because I was badly in need of a nap, "have you got a red handkerchief?"

"No," he said with a start.

"Then," I said, "we've got another clue, and I call your attention to it. Maybe you're the murderer."

Pawelka thanked me for the idea, promised to follow up the fresh clue, and went away.

### *Loyalty*

Paul glanced at his watch, switched on the small lamp, switched off the large one, placed the flowers on the table, then he went to the telephone and dialled a number.

"That you, Geza? . . . Paul speaking. . . . Come up at once. You must be here within five minutes."

He sat down, tried to smile and was somewhat surprised that he could not. Geza arrived within five minutes.

"Hello."

"Hello."

Paul coughed, then he gazed warmly, sympathetically into his friend's eyes and placed a hand on his shoulder.

"You remember," he said, "the time we were talking about loyalty, the sort of loyalty that was proof against any temptation. You were sceptical. Well, perhaps you won't be after to-night. Listen, and pull yourself together, old man—your wife'll be here in a few minutes."

He waited until Geza recovered from the shock, then he went on :



"I've been telling you for a long time that she's not the right wife for you. I also knew that, sooner or later, you'll realise it yourself. Well, I wanted to save you being brought to this realisation by some regrettable scandal or perhaps a catastrophe, so I decided to perform the inevitable operation myself, to make a clean job of it, like a surgeon, with antiseptics, bandages, and all. I didn't have to make love to her long. I only started last week and—she promised to come up to-night. What's the matter? Are you ill?"

"No," said Geza hoarsely, "no, thanks. Only . . . What do you want me to do?"

"Go into the next room and wait. And if you wish, you can come out at a signal from me. You can trust me. I'll stay loyal to you—in any circumstances. Come along. Sit here, near the door."

He carefully closed the door upon his friend. By the time he reached the middle of the room the bell rang. And everything went off beautifully.

"Paul, darling. . . ."

"Hello, Olga. Let me help you off with your coat."

"Have I been punctual?"

"Yes. So've I."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, nothing. Won't you sit down."

"What a sweet place you've got. Do you love me?"

"Yes!"

"Don't shout, darling. You shouldn't say it aloud at all. You should whisper it . . . close to my ear . . . close to my lips."

"Yes!!!"

"What's the matter, Paul? Why are you shouting? . . . Oh, there's someone in there. . . ."

Her husband was already standing in the door.

"Geza! . . . Ha-ha! A conspiracy! . . . What a joke!"

Silence.

"Don't make such a face, darling. . . . You ought to be ashamed of yourselves . . . to hoax me like this . . . Ha-ha!"

"Get out! I never want to see you again!"

Screams, tears, curses, threats. Then the woman rushed out of the room and there was silence. Paul helped his friend down the stairs, for he was somewhat shaky. And he was talking all the way.

"There, there. . . . It'll pass. I'll see you home and put you to bed. Then I'll see to everything. It'll pass, like a bad dream. You'll start proceedings at once. It'll be quite easy. Why don't you say something? . . . I know it hurts, but surely you can talk to me . . . after all I've done for you . . .



Where are you going to? Don't you want to go home?"

"Yes, I'm going home."

"Don't you want me to go with you?"

"No."

Pause. Paul went red in the face.

"Do you think I've—betrayed you?"

"No."

"Well, do you doubt that I arranged it to save you?"

"No."

"Have I done you a wrong?"

"No."

"Aren't you glad that I've opened your eyes, that you're free? Aren't you glad to know that you've at least one loyal friend?"

"I am glad."

"Then what's the matter with you? Aren't you—grateful to me?"

"I am."

"Then what's eating you?"

"Get out of my sight! I never want to see you again."

### *Literature*

*(From the Diary of a Would-Be Author)*

*Eastern Front, September 8th.*

I have made up my mind definitely to become an author. Of course, I realise that I must start straight away, and if at all possible I shall write a short story this week and send it in to a high class magazine or daily. This has been engaging my mind for several days. I have been trying to think of a plot, a good, original plot, for my short story, but unfortunately I have little time to think. Only this morning, after I had settled down at the house of the Polish priest in the village we had occupied, secretly glad that I would have at least two hours to speculate on the plot, along came two enemy planes dropping bombs on us, and setting many houses on fire. We all ran out into the street, one of the planes was shot down and fell burning on the roof of a house. To celebrate this, there was a banquet at the village inn, and so I could not do anything about the plot.



*September 12th.*

To-day I had a vague feeling that I was going to find a plot, something interesting and original, but it went out of my mind, for those damned Russians attacked again, jumping into our trenches. There was a terrific tussle, and one Russian sergeant during the bayonet charge went crazy and began to sing something out of an opera. He sang and danced until I ran him through. Of course, in all this hubbub I clean forgot the plot, though I am sure I should have had it in another few minutes. I wish to God I could get back into that train of thought.

*September 18th.*

The plot, the plot! I had some idea about a girl. . . . I have it! There is a girl and there is a young man, and the young man is in love with the girl. That is an interesting beginning. I do not know how to go on, but I shall work it out all right as soon as I have the time. To-day I was busy packing up the belongings of poor Szerelmey and despatching them to his parents. He went out last night with a reconnaissance party, and apparently the swine caught him, and they only sent back one of his boots. I am very sorry for my poor old friend.

*September 21st.*

My plot is evolving nicely. It goes something like this. The girl really reciprocates the young man's love, only she is too proud to admit it, and she carries the secret locked in her bosom. That leads to all sorts of complications. . . . I am beginning to get the hang of it, and I am very excited and I am going to put plenty of suspense in it and unexpected twists. . . . However, I have not the time just now, for I must hurry up and write a report about yesterday's to-do, setting down in detail how we blocked the exits of the mine with hand grenades and what we did when the charge exploded under our feet. This dry-as-dust official work does not leave me much time for poetic inspiration.

*October 1st.*

I can now see the plot of my short story quite clearly. The girl, whose name, by the way, is Margaret, being the daughter of a well-to-do farm bailiff, receives the advances of young Aloysius somewhat coldly. Then one day they happen to meet in the wood, where Aloysius reveals that he is in reality a journalist and poet and has been staying in this lovely village incognito for three years. Something stirs in the girl's bosom, but she does



not give herself away, until suddenly—damn it all, I can't go on. It's heavy artillery this time, they're attacking from three sides simultaneously and I must crawl out of this hole.

*October 6th.*

It is all over at last. The hill crashed down on us and eight of us were left lying unconscious, so they caught us, and three days later they had the damned cheek to sentence me to death, saying that I carried suspicious looking documents. Fortunately, as I stood under the gallows I remembered my identity card in my waistcoat pocket, so they took me back among the other prisoners, and we are now on our way to Siberia. But that is by the way. Where was I? Yes, as they are walking in the forest there is suddenly a wild cry, Margaret gives a scream and is about to faint. At this critical moment Aloysius does not lose his head but orders the savage gipsy bursting from the thicket to be off with him, whereupon the savage gipsy obeys, whereupon Margaret realises that Aloysius is not only a poet but also a man and so after these exciting adventures she falls meltingly on Aloysius' bosom.

I am going to start on the short story to-morrow, and I am quite confident that the Editor of the high-class daily is going to like it.

### *The Cloakroom*

I do not know whether or not this problem has already been investigated by the economists of the world, but I thought of it for the first time to-day, and in calling attention to it I am, of course, not impelled by any desire to do injury to an honourable profession.

I have been wearing an overcoat for five months each year for four years. It is an excellent garment, made to measure, and I paid a good price for it.

On an average, I take it off three times per day at various establishments.

As every establishment has a so-called cloakroom, I usually try to slink past it. At the café, I put my overcoat over the back of my chair. At the theatre or cinema I say to the attendant, "I'm only going in for a moment." Once inside, I take off my overcoat and lay it on my knees.

But all this is useless, for the cloakroom business is a perfectly organised international industry which it is impossible to outwit. At the café, almost before I have had time to settle down, my overcoat vanishes, the cloakroom miss, an expert overcoat



thief, having come up behind me on tip-toe and, while I was looking the other way, taken the garment in triumph to the bandits' lair known as the cloak-room. Instead of my overcoat, there is a ticket with a number on it, but its meaning is approximately the same as that of a kidnapper's warning note: "Your overcoat is in our hands and will only be returned to you upon payment of a ransom. Should you fail to claim it within three days, we will end its life."

I have made a little calculation, according to which I have during the past four years paid away in cloakroom charges exactly twice the amount I paid for the overcoat.

The next time I will forget to get my overcoat out of the cloakroom and buy myself a new one, thus making a handsome profit.

### *Appearances are always Deceptive*

When I was seventy I was asked by a young man whether I could sum up my entire outlook on life in a single sentence.

I said: "Appearances are always deceptive." This does not mean that I agree with the sceptics, for they only hold that it is not certain that things are what we think they are, whereas I assert with certainty and conviction that nothing is what we think it is. The only thesis in which it is possible to believe with fanatical faith is: Appearances are always deceptive.

If I have a distorting mirror that distorts the things reflected in it, it would evidently be stupid of me to assert that there are things which it does not distort, since the only absolute rule relating to a distorting mirror is that it distorts everything. Now, human intelligence, in which truth is reflected, is such a distorting mirror. Where is the instrument that could straighten this mirror, since any such instrument must reside in the human intelligence itself? And where is the geometry by which it would be possible to calculate to what extent this