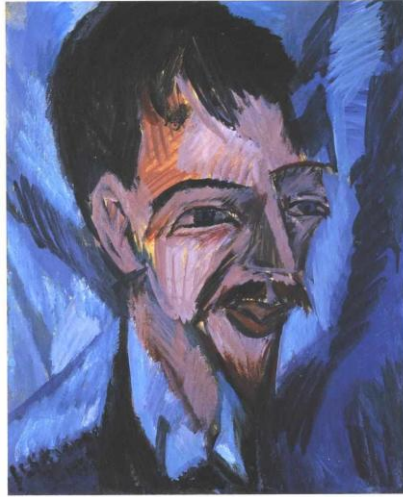


Alfred Doeblin



Beyond Alexanderplatz

ALFRED DÖBLIN

MOUNTAINS OCEANS GIANTS –
OMITTED PASSAGES

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MOUNTAINS OCEANS GIANTS

By Alfred Döblin

Translated and edited by C D Godwin

OMITTED PASSAGES

Döblin's powerful dystopia is the product of the author's deep-seated ambivalence about Humanity's place in Nature. In attempting to work through his thoughts and feelings on this pressing topic, Döblin somewhat lost control of the shape and focus of the novel. Its astonishing core – the Iceland-Greenland venture and its horrific aftermath, composed first with an intensity that almost brought on a nervous breakdown – appears in the published text only after 350 pages of “prequels”, written subsequently, which take us from the 20th to the 27th centuries.

Döblin himself admitted that Parts 3 and 4 almost “form a novel by themselves”. The extensive depictions of two emotional triangles, whatever their intrinsic merits, seriously impede the forward flow of the narrative, and may deter readers from continuing to the magnificent later Parts.

This English translation is therefore published with Parts 3 and 4 cut by about half (around 23,000 words), while the excised text is made available for downloading at the publisher's website and on my own website. I hope this approach will enable readers to enjoy the published version of the epic to the end; while serious Döblin fans can explore the deleted storylines and consider Döblin's intent.

The cuts are numbered e.g. [1]; page numbers are those of the published book.

C. D. Godwin

January 2021

PART 3: MARDUK

[1] p. 140 *so let him speak*: Foaming Ekbart, young over-tall in baggy work clothes, a scornful very effeminate character inclined to fall prey to one or other of his impulses. Blonde grave white woman Marion Divoise, standing voluptuous and listless in a window niche, allowing her greygreen eyes to wander. Many young girls and youths adored her. She was chaste in the extreme, sad strange love stories were told of her, she was called La Balladeuse. Of her family's industries she owned only the land they stood on, was unacquainted with Marduk. Who is he, she thought. If he could only move me, excite me. On the ground, chewing her fingers, Little Drutt on a stone step, tall black female who had fought fanatically for Marke, toiled tirelessly for the smashing of those Female Leagues that still existed. Dozens of men gnawed at her, so the much-noted and hated woman was nicknamed the Land Rat.

[2] p. 144 *groaned Jonathan*: Down below the blonde voluptuous Balladeuse pirouetted, she the first to experience a storm of trembling, writhing, her speech rapid, engaged in vigorous conversation with an unseen interlocutor, stretched full length again on the floor. She lay sideways on the boards, alone, as the throng clogged the doorway.

[3] p. 144 *dangling hand*: La Balladeuse lay on the floorboards, leaned on her elbows, menaced: "Let it happen. If she dares, it's her affair. But she'll have no help from me, she should know that. For the hundredth time, the thousandth time. I told her, right out. Ravailac has nothing to do with it. Why mention him. That's a nasty trick. Go away, Ravailac. Your shoe? I don't have it." She sat up, regarded her blue stockings, stood swaying, looked ahead and behind. Her hair hung down. Went zigzagging like a blind person into the chamber, head bent far back, steered for the podium and the two men, gulping deep breaths, hands at her breast.

[4] p. 144 *fire-mines were nothing*: La Balladeuse lurched into the middle of the chamber, cocked her head this way, that way, seemed not to know from what direction the voices came, now and then pointed with a hand and set off in that direction.

[5] p. 144 *not be gainsaid*: The blonde whispering gesticulating person floated up to him as he crossed the floor. They stood facing one another: "My boy. I tell you, we won't argue about it." He shook her off. "No arguing, my boy. We need a brain in our head. With a brain, you know what kind of eggs the hen lays. Would you dispute that?"

"What does the stupid woman want?"

She thrust her fists into her stomach: "That's what I'm telling you, Ravailac, whoever you are, the trumpeter or the Balladeuse herself, I'm done with you. You won't keep me down. Just try it, sweetie. Hup. You won't catch my shoes. They'll stay where they are. Ask the trumpeter what happened to his lamp. Froth, nothing but froth."

Marduk had gone on. "Froth," she screamed, swaying after him, rooted to the spot. She went in the wrong direction, scrabbled with her arms: "Seize him, it's Ravailac. I still have weapons, he mustn't escape. Marion, he's a villain."

[6] p. 147 *felt he was alone*: "I have lost a friend. I am alone. Who will help me." He hummed a sad melody as he gazed at the rain-dripping window. When his friend's radiant face caught his eye, Marduk hammered his chest, took his head in his hands in despair. "I am alone. Here I sit. Who will help me now. Who will help me now." He dropped onto a chair by the little round side table.

[7] p. 147 *leaned towards him*: Jonathan's face suddenly went slack, his shoulders slumped slowly, his lower lip drooped sadly, yearningly; the bad man sat there, bad man, yes, a bad man. He struggled. Marduk came across to him, righted the wine glass. A shuddering in breast shoulders arms: "My mirror," he thought, "that's what he is." He eyed him greedily, drank in the sight of him. No, he was not, perhaps not, lost. There's sorrow here, the fellow is suffering. Jonathan, his friend his child his heart. Jonathan, sad, questioning, touched his arm. "Should I?" Marduk with a choking a sobbing in him.

[8] p.147 *you can tell me*: Marduk turned around: was it possible that this should have been said; this was Jonathan. His hands gripped the tabletop, his eyes closed, a cold sensation flooded through him, he heaved a deep sigh. "Open the window," he asked Jonathan. How the rain drummed down. A damp wind blew in. Marduk struggled through an hour's work. Then lay down, without surprise, on his bed in broad daylight. Burrowed deeper and deeper into his pillows, pulled the covers over him as if hiding. He slept a deep sleep, as if bewitched. A sleep that penetrated his very marrow.

[9] p. 148: *more desolate land*: While Marduk argued with the Senate, Marion Divoise, blonde grave whiteskinned stood in a window-bay in the hall, swept the scene with her greygreen eyes. Many girls and young men were attracted to her. She thought, as she gazed up at Marduk: who is he, if only he could move me, excite me. –She broke down during the ensuing dreadful tumult and had to be carried home in a confused state.

Ever since then Marion Divoise, voluptuous blonde, the delight of many men and women, had tried to press herself on Marduk. Like many others she sought access to the Consul, in vain. He lived secluded either in the Council House or in his wretched country cottage. It was never certain when he would appear with his heavily armed escort.

Marion ceased to be the austere force that attracted men and women to her through a mysterious sweetness, she who moved among them with grave understanding, warm and then again remote. The ghastly tumult that had accompanied Glossing's speech to the Senate the day after Marduk's coup was embedded in her soul. She tried anxiously to pull back from it. Since then she had not really listened to any man or woman. She always followed her enticements and declarations with words of benevolent gentleness, all superficial. "How strange you all are," was her secret thought when she met friends; she often stayed alone at home in her room and laughed about people. Now and then she encouraged someone in his burning desire. But when the young person ventured

importunately at her lovely arms, neck, waist, a repugnance arose in her. It was a monstrous insult, she assailed the suffering lover with loathing and scorn, so that he turned away. She called him a beast. There were rumours that she enlisted earlier lovers to inflict severe refined humiliations on anyone who pressed too close to her, had him thrown naked from his bed onto the street.

Like Marduk with his feared bodyguards, she had a band of men and women ready to provide any service to the grave white woman. Now, to the incredulous astonishment of others who heard of it through whispers, she sought friends and lovers for herself from among them. La Balladeuse was ashamed as she forced herself to this. She was aiming at one man. There were scenes of terrible suffering as she sat with a joyful young creature, overflowing with happiness; the person threw itself at her feet, kissed her toes, and then would not let her neck, arms, breasts alone. She froze and burned, trembling in her whole body. The creature jumped around her like a bug, tried to mingle its spittle with hers; she turned her face away in disgust, her expression stony. She suffered, tried to endure it, even if it made her vomit. She withdrew, tried again with someone new.

And then once she found herself beside a man she had never seen before, a black man, a cowherd, whom she found repulsive. She desired him the moment she saw him. Her very being steeled her not to back away. No drug needed: she was certain of this man. He was still drinking at her side half an hour later. She did not touch her glass; with a shudder passed a hand over his round woolly head. He understood. He thought he was going to have sex with a slut, carried her carefully off to her bed in his gown. There she pressed a pillow to her face, begged for mercy. Weeping paralysed in a rage of self-loathing, she yielded to the defilement. She stood with her head leaning against a cupboard, sobbed implored: "Is it over? Is it good now?" Extended a delicate trembling hand to the mulatto without looking at him; it was icy cold and numb to the wrist. And how strange to feel his warm fingers, the terrible smell of this animal that stood before her, loomed over her; she felt moved to open her eyes, take in the tender sweet humble smile, take two steps towards him, rest her blonde head on his chest. Right into that dreadful smell. "Go now," she whispered as he dared brush his fingers across her shoulders. She jerked upright. He was gone, she had done it, it was behind her. She blew the air away. And when she thought of the animal, she collapsed to the floor with a little cry, in confusion laughed whispered scolded at the floorboards as she had in the Council House. The enormous excitement was still in her limbs, her limp spine, prevented her from sleeping, emerged as a high tormented note in her voice.

Now she dared talk about herself with other women in the household; but towards the men around her, young and old, tender and strong, she grew more cautiously observant. She tempted the men, tempted herself with the men. They sat beside her, hung joyful and feverish at her white shame-blushed neck. Nothing stirred in her; she stroked them, fearing more and more for herself. She had to lay her head weeping on pillows and cushions; they should not torment her, she knew they were good people. But she had often a weird bitter childish desire for the mulatto: whenever he showed himself near her house he was not allowed to leave. Something pulled her to him, some familiarity, he had to come to her. It was horrible how once she entertained him in her lovely plain room, served cakes and liquor, which she never did with others, to this black man in the yellow cowherd's smock. He flaunted himself grinning before the modest grave woman, splashed the dregs of his glass on her head, pulled her to him. She screamed in fear. The strong woman was possessed, struggling hitting him, bit his hands, then lay whimpering curled up on the floor. He left her there, panted angrily,

downed glass after glass, stuffed his mouth with cake. She sometimes had this man brought to her; she had no idea what drove her to him; he treated her like an object, she endured it all. She clung to a young almost boyish man whom she called Desir, was often distraught with him, sought consolation, was absent, pleading, good. Often at this time she dreamed of water, she was riding on it. Desir was a white swan swimming ahead of her. She was in a boat, he was towing her, towing her ever onward, far away.

When Marduk sought to bring more land into useful production, including land she owned, she tried again to secure a meeting with him. And since this approach was rejected like all the others, she turned to Marduk's young friend Jonathan. The lovely white Balladeuse was shocked when, shortly after a courier delivered a letter saying she had business to discuss with him, one noontime Jonathan landed his flier on the roof of her house. She stood beside the light craft as he tethered it, regarded the slim brown-haired youth leaning against the railing, who said with a smile: "Here I am!" He had little enough to fill his time, was she cross with him for coming. How this man, whom she knew from before, had changed in these few years! His smile was serene, rapt; his left eyebrow sometimes rose and twitched painfully. His voice so soft and friendly; when she answered she knew by his vacant gaze, mouth hanging open, head turned aside, that he was hardly listening. This was Marduk's friend. She led him down into the house, he wanted to stay outside, they sat in the garden. Soon she told him she wanted to speak to Marduk. He pulled elder branches to hide his face.

"Why do you want to speak to him? He has so little time. Leave him alone, Marion."

She sat upright, her desire to speak to the Consul growing more obstinate the more she looked at Jonathan. She became angry. "Is he better than me. Why does he hide away? He is Consul, he appointed himself, he must listen to what people want from him."

"Must he, Marion? He doesn't think so. He thinks the opposite: we must listen to what he wants."

She stood up, pale. "I knew it. I'm glad you have come to me, Jonathan, and say this to me. I want to speak to him, that's a fact, I must, I demand it."

"Don't act so wild, Marion. Many have acted wild, and now are calm again."

"Not I. Not I." She stood up, whispered. Jonathan eased her back into her chair. "Tell me what it is, Marion. I'll talk to him."

She was silent, then: "Good." And when she had finished speaking Jonathan thought: Marduk was right not to listen to her: women are bandits. "Very well, Marion. I'll pass it on to him. Let's go." But they had gone only a few paces when Marion suddenly squeezed his hand, stared so hard at him that he felt astonished, and the notion came to him that he should speak of her to Marduk.

The lovely Balladeuse was admitted to Marduk's presence. When he moved towards her in his room in the Council House, past the enormous wall paintings of the Urals flame-mines and the fleeing expiring people, brownblack like those in the pictures, she trembled for the first time. With his unsteady legs his giant's head his dark serious eyes he seemed to be stumbling out of the picture. Jonathan went ahead. Marduk offered his hand, smiled: "Who's this you bring to me?" He looked only at Jonathan, when he wanted to leave invited him to stay, smiled in silence after him when he was gone. With the same smile he turned like an automaton to Marion, whom Jonathan had seated on a bench. "What do you want, Marion. What are you up to?"

She felt herself moved in a mysterious way, disarmed. Feebly, softly, in confusion, trembling again, she said: the territory of the townzone should be extended to the north and northwest. Marduk asked: in such a case, would the Senate try to cheat her. She had to deny it, lied, she feared resistance from her own people, wanted weapons and protection for her properties. That would not be possible, Marduk asserted; with a mistrustful glance promised his continuing support, stood and returned to his place among the brownblack victims.

She spent only a few minutes with Marduk, then went slowly out through many doors and staircases. Jonathan was sunning himself on the great steps in front of the building; he was guarding a butterfly on his cap, shook it; she slipped past him. The meeting with Marduk left her with nothing but rancour against Jonathan, a dull growing rage against that, that man. She paced distraught about her room; that afternoon she rode out with Desir, cosied up to him on the way, wept wildly as she walked beside her horse across fields.

The powerful woman arranged spiteful acts against Marduk. Sororities, almost defunct, were growing active again in foreign townzones, their arms reaching out towards those borderlands where they supported clandestine oppositionists. Contact with these was good for the Balladeuse. She gathered her courage, supported oppositionists. Then she played with Desir again. She was strangely drawn into this man's life. The fine fellow made no claim on her. Only when other greedy women clung to him did she take notice, unwilling to lose his tenderness, with a sinking feeling read the other women's love notes, saw the garlands they placed around his neck. And she sighed and would not tolerate it. She wanted to hit out gleefully at these women, but underneath was a sadness. She meekly left Desir to another woman, meekly made friends with this woman, studied her, saw her liking her happiness, went again to Desir, stood there looking down, lay at his side, sighed empty-eyed, wrapped in his tenderness, the endless whispered words, the hands that held her head and throat, streaming nothing into her. She acted happy on outings, Desir was her husband, she wanted his child. No, not a child, lots of children. She wanted to see to feel her calmness, all the past should be calm.

During this time she gave birth to two children, two girls, whom she breastfed and cared for herself. How tender the motherly Divoise was to her children: she had lost none of her beauty and her ways. One day the younger fell ill. Such agitation: in a flash she was transformed. She dragged in every doctor she could find. She sat shaken in the shadows by the child's bed, screamed for help. She followed the quiet exertions of the men and women at the bed with fear hate trepidation. In the end no longer sat near the complaining wheezing child, sat by the wall where no one noticed her, bent over, covering her head a shawl that Desir had placed on her shoulders.

The child breathed in evenly with a high-pitched wheezing, breathed out with a gasp. A pause. Again the wheeze the gasp. The doctors could not prevent the loss of the little soul. When early one morning the little head no longer tossed and the eyes no longer hunted left and right, the child no longer stared in the darkness at the blanket from great round veiled eyes that never blinked, the motherly Divoise stirred, violet shawl over back and face, lay a while at the silent being's feet. Sobbing bitterly she took a little foot in her mouth, sucked at it, placed it at her throat. Carried the dead infant about the room, sat, the shawl falling to the floor, on the stool recently vacated by the doctor, held the corpse on her lap, sat it up. Her arms hung slackly on the little body in its nightshirt. Marion took no notice when spoken to, clung to the child, wrapped it in the shawl, carried it about

the room, humming, surefooted. She did this for the hours until dawn: pace, wrap the child, sit it up until it stiffened and sat upright on her knee, head flopping. A woman took the cold waxen being from her: "That's enough, Marion! Don't you think it's enough?"

"I didn't give her up," Marion shivered empty-handed. "You took her from me. Be clear about that." Still sat there as the corpse was shrouded. "My shawl, put the silk shawl over her. Now you've taken her. Now it's done."

She left the silent room. Along the passage. When she opened a door the older child was asleep there. Rosy morning was shining in. "Why just that one? Why? Could just as well have been the other. Should I wait?" She was trembling from the knees up to her throat; lifted the sleeping child up in both unthinking hands. A scream from her mouth: "Desir, Desir." The scream so piercing that moments later he was at her side. She hissed from a closed mouth, turning from the light: "Here's the child. You take her. Lay her down." He had to prise her fingers from the child's little arm as it dangled still sleeping over her shoulder, one cold clammy finger after the other.

From then on she hated Marduk. Nothing gave her more joy, nothing was so fervent as her hatred for the tall man, brownblack with his giant's head, dark serious eyes, unsteady legs. What if she left the child, abandoned her man: she was seized by the thought, it enfolded her. There was something like vengeance in her hatred. She nursed it calmly. She was sure of herself.

One day she stood before Marduk, who emerged from the Urals fires and the fleeing expiring people. "Come away from that," she scolded him, "that's not the place for you." She pulled him to the pyramid of skulls. "This is where you belong. Stay."

"What do you want, Balladeuse."

"Balladeuse. I have nothing to do with ballads. They were never my ballads. I can only say —"

"That you love me."

"I love you? Are you mad, Marduk? I, love you? Why? For what?"

"Laugh away. That's why you've come, why I let you in unguarded. There's often someone or other in here. I can tell right away. It's all the same to me."

She came closer. "You're crazy, Marduk. I forbid you to speak like this. It's shameless. I've done nothing to justify such an insult."

"You've lost your children, Marion. You came here for consolation."

"One child still lives, one died."

"Such a lovely child."

"What does my child have to do with you? Stay there by the skulls. If you had your way the whole world would be a pyramid of skulls."

"I must call the guards."

"Call them, don't call them, Marduk. Do it, don't do it. My heavens, what should I say." She had suddenly turned blue-pale. Trembled almost to collapse. She was under a terrible strain, looked down around her, scratched, rubbed her fingers. "I have nothing to do with you. I don't know what I want from you. You do me wrong to say I love you. I shan't leave. You shall not call the guards. Let me stay here a while. I'll be dead soon enough. You don't know me."

Tall Marduk stood quite still. Divoise was courting him. He felt nothing, but deep down something stirred in him, like window panes in a city rattling gently from the thunderclaps of a distant battle. His mouth began to form a smile all by itself. "I have a lot of things to do, Marion Divoise."

"So do I."

"What happens now?"

"Let me –" She swayed, closed her eyes, gulped: "let me – stay here. A few hours."

The stirring in him became stronger. He tensed the muscles of his arms, made fists of his dangling hands, softly: "That's not how it works, usually. I don't keep women near me."

"Let me – be near you, Marduk."

He had to go around the pyramid; stepped in front of the huge flame-picture; came forward again, his brownblack coat open. Divoise had closed her eyes, kept still, an inscrutable expression on her face. Marduk opened his eyes wide, bit his lower lip. He had no idea what was happening to the room, what was spraying hot and cold over his shoulders. He felt his legs urging him closer to her, gave a little laugh as he touched her hand: "All right, I'll tell them to find you a room. Don't gossip about it, it's not my style."

Her hand jerked back. She said tonelessly: "That's good of you, Marduk." He saw how she was suffering, took the seemingly paralysed woman by the arm, led her down a corridor to a room where she broke free, sat down.

"I won't be far away, Marion Divoise. Just lift this. They'll tell you where I am."

Blonde Balladeuse laid her face on the table. Not until he left did she emit the animal-like groan that had long lurked in her, beat her breast, tore threads from the tassels of the tablecloth. Then – suddenly – stopped, dropped her hands. Her shoulders sank, she hunched over, smiled to herself overwhelmed, rested her head on her arms, muttered: "I'm here. Landed. Or stranded. Or. Or. Marduk may come at any moment. When I lift the speaker, he'll come. My hand can do this, my little hand. I, in his house, under his roof. Marion Divoise, sweet thing, best thing for you is: go to sleep!"

She had no thought of her child, Desir, her admirers. Seemed to have reached the end of a long journey. And she slept a sweet hour, arms crossed under her head. When she sat up, felt: "What an enchanted house. What has happened to me. I can't think of anything lovelier. Marduk must come. Marduk must come."

When she lifted the speaker they told her: Marduk is sleeping. "He too." Her eyes glowed. When it grew dark she lifted the speaker again. He was still asleep. She tried again. A calm man's voice told her: the Consul is asleep in his room.

I'm begging, I am enslaved, I must arm myself. She said aloud: "He'll come soon." She gathered the threads from the floor, piled them on the table and sat by them. She turned on the light.

When the door opened, there was Jonathan in his white silk. "I've been with Marduk. He told me you were here. I'm glad to see you."

"He sent you."

Jonathan's voice was fuller, more resonant, firmer than before. "No. I came by myself. He just mentioned it in passing. I wanted to see you."

"What is there to see in me, Jonathan. You know me already. Maybe you wanted something else. I would never have believed it of you.

"What, Marion?"

"That you'd let yourself be deceived. I can't keep it a secret that I'm here. But I am not ashamed. Not at all. Just so you know this."

"I hear you, Marion Divoise."

"I have nothing to hide. I'm here. And now you are ashamed you came to see me."

Jonathan, arms folded in the doorway, placed his right foot before the left: "I am here to see you, Marion Divoise. If you have more to say, say it."

She bent her head over the silk threads on the table: "What are you going to do with me."

The young pale man walked slowly over to her from the door: "Come, stand up." And again: "Come." And when she stood up angrily, he placed both arms around her waist. Fell on her, sobbing suddenly: "Do what you want with him. Do it, Marion. I am not your enemy." And when she did not ward him off, he pulled her to him, kissed her, stammered: "You are here, with him. You are here," quite beside himself. His eyes, unfocused, burned: "I don't know what it means, Marion, that you are here or who allowed it. But it could happen that you will kill both him and me at one stroke."

When she struggled to free herself he laughed, groaned: "You know nothing of a man's life, Divoise. You only look on. Maybe now it's different. You don't know what's going on here. Because of you. It's all good. Yes, all good. I did not summon you here, but now you're here, now it's happened, I welcome you, bless your coming, Divoise." Hands pressed to his smiling upraised face, without answering her questions, went out proudly, almost hostile.

A guard led her to Marduk's room. It was a dark narrow high room, glinting white from every wall as if pressed from tin. Switches boxes levers at foot and chest levels. On the table, in the dark, tablets flamed with numbers and writing. Marduk regarded her gloomily from his low bench as she stood in the brightly lit doorway. "Marion, come in."

She took a deep breath. "May I sit down?" Sat on a bench near the door, and after looking a while at the floor held his gaze. "Marduk, I want to tell you something about me. I have lost a child. It was my shield. I don't know what's happened to the other one. I am defenceless. You see my shame. Yes, shame. If there's such a thing as shame, it's me sitting here on this bench, in your room."

"No one has ever sat there."

"I don't care. No one or anyone. I'm not no one or anyone. I shouldn't be sitting here and now it's happened and here I am."

She leaned forward, pressed fists to her mouth. From the table: "What's that you've thrown away?"

"What?"

"That, those threads."

"From the tablecloth in the other room. I had a bunch in my hand."

"Get rid of them."

"What?"

"Pick up the threads, they don't belong there. Come, pick them up. You threw them there. Why did you do that."

"I'll pick them up, Marduk."

"Do it." She wept, down on her knees gathering them up. "I can't stand. Oh my poor hands. I can't go on." She lay her head on the floor.

"Marion, don't make me cross. You must pick up the threads and put them on the table."

"I will, Marduk. I can't just now. There, that's all of them. They're all there." She laid them out for him, stood at his side shivering now and then. He looked at her, annoyed at first, then in cheerful contempt, placed a hand at her waist.

"Don't, Marduk. You think you've won. You'll throw me away. Take away your hand." And still staring unhappily ahead of her she swayed, threw herself on him where he sat, embracing, pulling him down. "All right. It's good. You're here. Good. Now it's good. I feel good. Oh my arms feel good. My head. I am well. I'm not shivering now. I'm well, from head to toe. How could I imagine! Move. Nothing can happen to me now. You can tear me to pieces, beat me, throw me out of the window." She let go of him, stretched out blissfully by herself. "This is life, Marduk, I tell you. It's a gift to me. You gave it me."

Something clanged within him. A constriction climbed from his chest to his throat, his arms were encased in ice. He felt disgust, a rage against this woman. She was assaulting him. He should teach her a lesson. What was it sitting beside him on the bench, stretching, talking, scattering threads on the table. His hand reached for the threads, he turned his eyes to the woman. "Your face, here." She let him raise her hands. Her head slumped back like a sleeping child's. She blinked, as if looking into a light. "Let me look at you, Marion."

"I cannot, I cannot, Marduk. Really I cannot, now. Call me, call my name. What is my name."

When he said it she smiled, laughed dreamily. She listened, put an arm over his shoulder. Marduk grimaced. He had to suppress his rage. As he tensed, he thought: remarkable, what's happening here. A feeling went through him, twitched in his teeth: better be in an aeroplane, let go the wheel, fly through clouds. Be a daredevil. And the weakness in his lips arms was gone. And in his chest. Master it. His anger rose. He swallowed, embraced; his right arm was already around her, around soft entranced laughing Balladeuse. Now his face changed. The tension was swallowed up, submerged. The right arm stayed where it was, the left was placed over her swaying breast. The unsteered aircraft that would carry him away.

"Marion," he let himself say, cold nose pressed to her ear. "This is a strange adventure you're taking me on. I know it's all a game to you. You are a crazy creature, I've heard a lot about you. So I'm to be one of those you leave lying in the road. That's your plan. I know it."

"Know what, Marduk?" La Balladeuse laughed.

"That you came here to bring me down. Have me under your thumb." Submerged swallowed up as he was, he wanted to hear her say it. He pursed his lips, silently rehearsed what she would say. But she would not obey, wiggled in his arms. "This is bliss. You can say anything to me. It is fulfilled."

He shuffled against her with a questioning reluctance, but she did not flinch. He had to grip her head to hold her mouth to his dry lips; pressed his lips to hers, with force. But he leapt back as if from a

hot stove, from the hot breath streaming from the calm body. Air streamed in. White teeth gleamed moist. He pleaded in the greatest agitation; now he was lost, sighed, pressed against her.

"Now it is good, Marion, I've given you what you wanted. Now go away. Goodbye. You will go, won't you, right now, away from this room. I've a lot to do, we're just sitting here. Oh Marion, please go. Why do you sit here, what's it for?"

He kept holding her. He felt his face overlain with a mist, as if it were melting. His hands swelled hot and heavy, grew together. Blonde Divoise drew herself up, removed his hands from her neck, smiled as she pulled back, eyes hooded: "I should go now? Go now? But where should she go, this Divoise, this Marion? She has no idea. Come, Marduk, stand up. Stand up. Your legs are not strong, but you can stand. There you are. But why should she go. She doesn't want to."

"So what do you want. You must go."

"I shall stay."

Now he was overwhelmed by the hot breath, the storm raged within him, he stood and looked at her: "Stay here." She, calmly: "I'll stay. You are here. Are you not here." He twining about her, she standing, he groaning laughing raging: "I am here. You have me. Now you have me." His open glowing face, head rocking back and forth, expression distraught.

"You, Marduk, look at me. I've had many men already, white and coloured. I want to make a wager with you. I know you want to fight me. I shall fight you. If you can move me to passion, bring passion to me, if I lose –." She had turned to face him full on, her eyes flashed, she threw herself laughing onto the bench, clapped her hands together, her laugh sounded very softly.

"What is it?"

"Whoever loses must go away."

"What do you mean."

"It's a big gamble." Her bluegrey eyes flashed and turned. Sobbing lurching within him. He was grateful to her; ah, she was a woman.

"Do you accept the challenge?"

"For sure, Marion."

They stood embracing, she giggled trembled. "We must make the wager. I believe nothing. I know nothing. This is my bliss. If I laugh, don't think it's because I have attained my goal. Yes, I am in bliss, because this is my battlefield. Because you are my battlefield. I am at home here. I wanted you. I loathed you, with a boundless loathing, without limit. Loathing was my backbone. Now you have come to me. I cannot let you go until I have experienced you in my very marrow. Until you have fought with me. If you cannot force me, you must leave. The loser must leave."

"Yes."

"Understand: the loser leaves. That's what I want. If I lose, if you grow tired of me, you must grab me by the throat and kill me. Or whatever. That must be. No mercy. Here I am."

She had turned off the light, her clothes rustled to the floor. "Here I am, Marduk. Where are you." He spoke with a quite other voice, he did not hear it: "You mustn't wait for me." They clung together in the dark, fell onto the bed. His helpless cry was muted, his arms were strong, he did not wonder

how, his hands as firm as his neck. “You think it a game,” she groaned, “my love, you are wrong. You think me a besotted woman, throwing herself at you. You are wrong. I’ve had dozens of men, I told you, coloured and white, handsome tender strong. All of them grabbed me the same way. None of you mean anything to me. I discarded them. I offer you my body, no need to force me. No need for roughness. I advise you, Marduk: have patience. Your task is to live. I suppose you’d like to sit here in your room, the tablets there flicker, you give your signals, you have your weapons, no one can harm you. In – three – minutes – all that is gone, Marduk!”

The man otherwise calling himself Marduk retorted: “I have no patience. You wouldn’t dare.”

“I won’t dare. I won’t dare. Maybe I’ll prolong this moment with you. Maybe I’m trembling. I want to wrestle with you. I shall wrestle with you.”

“You turned out the light.”

Her mouth was pressed to his, she mumbled into his teeth: “Wrestle with you, not talk to you. Stupid manbeast. You, what are you. Haha, I can feel you, shaggy fellow, are you proud of this wild chest, the whiskers about your mouth. Wrap yourself in your whiskers. I have prettier things than you. I have a bosom from which infants have drunk, my hair is long. Fine and long and soft. My skin everywhere smooth. When I go walking on my lovely firm legs, fat ill-mannered manbeasts drool after me.”

“Why did you turn out the light?”

“So. Say whatever you want.”

“I shall tell you who I am. Give me back my mouth. I won’t kiss you.”

“So tell me, for as long as you still live.”

“You hoyden, you soft warm creature, it’s not necessary for me to tell you who I am. You want to hide from me.”

A sudden fear twitched through her: My god, who is this speaking here? With whom have I let myself be caught up? What have I done? I didn’t want this. And then a surging: But I did want it. I do. You do want this, Marion Divoise. She implored: “Are you the Marduk who emptied the Council chamber?”

“You know I am.”

“And will you not ask, Marduk oh Marduk, who I am?”

“Balladeuse, whatever, you’ve had dozens of men, coloured and white, strong and tender, I’ll soon know you.”

Now she cried out. And as he forced his lips to hers, she embraced him. A dark surging muzziness was in him – was Marduk. And amid the weeping raging griping, all the grace the blessedness was drawn out from la Balladeuse. They clung motionless together. “I have you, Marduk. You have me. You want this. We shall not escape one another. I offered you the wager; I shall not beg you for mercy. I have steeled myself. You could crush me with your bones. Do not think you are stronger than I, you cowardly Marduk, feeble Marduk; me you will not reprieve.”

“If only I could see you, Balladeuse. It’s good to hear your voice. Keep talking.”

"How good to hear you, Marduk. I'm having second thoughts. I hope never to forget you. You know why I challenged you? In order to humble you. To see you miserable. In three minutes I shall have succeeded. Now you don't scare me at all. Now I pull back the curtain from you."

"Just keep talking, Balladeuse."

"Now you seek my mouth. Because you are a murderer. Because you know only murder. And want to strangle me. My mouth is not for you. Dream on."

"I shall stand and raise a dagger to your cowardly words."

She gloated: "Just what I was waiting for. Do it, Marduk. Oh do it."

He beat the wall with his fists; a faint light came from the doorway.

His great tousled head lifted, the panting twisted face, burning searching eyes. "Who is dreaming, Divoise?" Her gaze was fixed. This is he, Marduk. She clings to this body, her arms around this body.

And she. A chimney flue, hot breath streamed silently from her, no mention of bliss; white teeth gleamed moist. He was at once transported. Melting. A plane zigzagging madly through grey clouds. What are living and dying. His mouth was open.

"Now you will die, Marduk."

"Oh Marion," came from the one once called Marduk, "now I shall die. You – you are blessedness. God have mercy on us both."

She saw and heard nothing. A trembling went through her, a rustling buzzing in her head. He did not sense how her hands pushed his away, how a strength that she had never shown entered her muscles. The dark burning head, the snuffling head raised high, Marduk's head fixed in her gaze. Her blind eyes were fixed on him. Bliss clambered trampled broke through it all. The head lowered itself to her neck, her breast, through her ribs, into her breast. She bit right through her numbed lip. Gave a little sob a gulp. This was the wager. The shuddering, the horror. The arms released her. Deep darkness. The dreadful iron-rattling rending torment of air. It enveloped her in a shroud.

She sat up beside Marduk. She shook herself. She felt her way to the bench in the dark. Marduk's voice: "Who's there?"

"Me. I'm sitting here. Sitting on the bench." No, she had not been defeated by Marduk. That, that must be something different. Quite different, terrible. She dropped to her knees by the bench, sank to the floor. Oh to hold something soft, a doll a child. She stroked the floor. "Up, up," it sobbed in her. "I don't want to live."

She stumbled, went very softly on bare feet.

"Who's there? Be careful of the walls."

"I'm just going to the window."

She stood at the window, La Balladeuse whimpering sobbing in her closed mouth, fists drumming on the wall. With a groan she pushed the window open into the dark night, her body half over the frame, leaned out further, head down. Lifted her feet, with a cry. As Marduk ran towards her, she slipped away, kicked her legs. The big black window was empty.

Marduk stood in the room. Shook his head. Went to the window, stroked the ledge. Shook himself. Then. Frowned, lifted his fists, curled up on the floor. His mouth pressed to the floor. His cry rang out.

The guard ran along the corridor. The captain knocked on the door, opened entered. Hauled Marduk to his feet; he was frowning, staring, crying out. He sat him on the bed, dressed him. Led the shaking trembling jolting man around the room. He went to the middle of the room and kept turning around, kept asking: "What am I doing here?"

Suddenly he pulled himself upright, stood rigid, let go of the captain, shouted "Guards, guards!"

"Consul, I am here."

"Noise. Noise, I want noise." He pounded the metal side of his desk: "I want noise. There."

He stormed into the dark courtyard, the captain beside him. They had removed the shattered body. He roared: "Noise. Noise." Soldiers beat on sheets of tin. They banged iron staves. It was not enough. He stood in a dark narrow press of men beating metal staves. Wailing, arms outstretched, he tripped over himself. They had to keep going for the rest of the night. He stood tense in the circle of men, stumbled zigzagging from one to the other with a cry. The din could be heard in the town.

As day broke he had a bed carried onto an empty room. He lay until midday, the black silent captain at his side. Marduk would not let him out of the room. In his presence he wept groaned gasped without restraint. At midday they left the room. Jonathan's icy figure on the first staircase. Jonathan flung himself at Marduk's feet, embraced his knees; Marduk clenched his teeth. Jonathan seemed to be pleading for forgiveness or mercy. The man over him tugged impatiently at his knee, ignored the other who fell to the ground. He pushed through the onlookers, climbed to his room. "We shall – work," he said to the captain, his eyes overlarge and glassy. Spoke instructed ordered. Now and then thought: "I hear nothing. See nothing. What is happening."

That evening, pale as a corpse, Desir, the Balladeuse's friend, slipped into the building. He did not want to see Marduk. When Marduk heard, he had him brought. They faced one another. Tears welled from silent Desir's eyes. He went to the window she had fallen from, stroked the ledge, sank to his knees, sobbed, his face averted.

"You think, Desir," Marduk hissed, "that I killed Marion."

Stammering: "I don't know what I should think."

"Come, Desir. Come." And when he approached, Marduk looked long at him, hugged him close, murmured: "She – she was good to you. You were good for her. It was good, Desir."

"Why did she die?"

"Don't ask, Desir. Don't ask." And he released the other, collapsed to the floor, helplessly stuffed a cloth into his mouth to stifle his screams. Desire held him, himself weeping.

Next morning La Balladeuse's shattered body was burned. Marduk attended together with Desir and the black captain. "I would like to do something for your benefit," Marduk insisted as he left the hall with corpse-pale Desir. "After that, I would ask you to leave the town. Go far away, with the child. I shall facilitate it."

"What have I done to you, Marduk?"

"Nothing. You will do me a favour, since nothing binds you to this place, by going away. It would please me, Desir. You will do this." Desir regarded the Consul, who despite his rigid posture spoke gently to him as never before. At the Council House steps Desir fell to his knees before Marduk. "I have suffered a great sorrow."

"I know, I know," whispered Marduk. "But you will leave the town." He took the other by the arm. In the antechamber, flower-filled and glass-bright, he embraced the man, breathed: "She is gone, gone, Desir. La Balladeuse is gone. The place is empty now. She is ashes. Ashes, ashes. She came to me." He shivered, ground his teeth. "Why did she come to me? What did I do to her that she – went away? I did nothing to her. Tell me, you knew her: what did she want from me. She broke me into pieces and then went away. Why, why?"

"She said she hated you, Marduk."

"I never did anything to her. She appeared. She could have left." Marduk had let go of the other man, waved his hands. "Go away, Desir. I don't need an answer. Don't stay here."

Desir stumbled to the door, his eyes misted. Marduk forced himself forward. "Desir. Hold no grudge against me. Come." He embraced him. "You did not send her. My enemies did not send her. What was in her. Why did she have to go. And you loved her. Love. Love. Were with her for years."

"What did you do to her, Marduk?"

"Nothing, nothing. I swear. I am broken, broken. Can you not see?" And the helpless shuddering. Desir extricated himself, walked away. Left the townzone, wandered about in the west. Very soon came word of his agitating against Marduk the criminal. ... Those close to him often heard despairing cries from his room.

[10] p. 149 *only by habit*: Those close to him knew that he often whimpered in despair in his room.

[11] p. 149 *of cropland*: For a long time Marduk had heard nothing from Jonathan. In the fury of his activities he needed no reminding of that sorrow. Marduk had grown broader, heavier, head drawn in, small blinking eyes, tufts of grey at his temples. "I'm already grey, Jonathan, you see. And you, show yourself." Slim, mature, Jonathan in his silver cloak, hesitantly he offered the older man his hand. "You should help me, Jonathan. I have few helpers." Was he under threat. "No, no one's threatening me." Marduk with a tired smile sat down. The wall of the room shimmered pale, as if covered in tinfoil. "What are you up to, Jonathan, every day, every month?" Every day? Like many others he's opening up some waste land, no small task. "You're criticising me. You think it's not necessary, I could expand the factories." "No, Marduk, that's not what I think." Do you have other wishes?" As Jonathan sat silent, staring at him, Marduk too sat morosely silent. A guard opened the door; a brown man, senator of a western region, entered, made a deep bow, hardly dared come upright. Marduk testily asked his name and purpose. He just wanted to see Marduk, bow to him. "So," Marduk's smile was bitter, "that's why you've come. No use to me, my friend. You're disturbing me. You have no need to show yourselves to me. I'll tell you: you are good for nothing." And when the man had left, he growled that he would have a statue carved in stone, then they'd have something of their own material to bow to as much as they want."

[12] p. 149 *entry into the city*. "Come closer, Jonathan. All those old times. Let me think. I had you brought to me. You were not in chains. Then I concluded a – a marriage with you."

"Leave it, Marduk."

"I remember it well. It does me good to think of it, dear brother. That was a terrible dark time. But good. I was Marke's successor."

"I want to go, Marduk. Please, let me go."

Greybearded Marduk was trembling. He watched the young man eagerly, anxiously, felt that he was seeking his own death, that he was already half in mourning. His body shook, he mumbled: "How temptation always creeps up on me. Coming now from this side. I did not expect it." Breathing deeply he pushed at a vase in the table, banged it down with both hands. Jonathan's smooth face was flushed, his left hand was at his brow. "It's all right, Jonathan. Let it be. I'll come to your aid. I'll show you why you think badly of me."

[13] p.149 *in silence*: "Tell me straight. I'm a patient listener." The younger man stared calmly at him as a bright sunbeam lit up the bitter bewhiskered mouth. "What you think, Jonathan, is nothing new. It's no secret. Many think it..."

[14] p. 149 *to the fields*: "I don't accuse you, Marduk. On the contrary, I want to ask your forgiveness."

"Yes, I know, you already asked my forgiveness once. On the stairs. Or somewhere. That time. You went down on your knees, I seem to remember. Leave it."

"I stray here and there, yet lord it over them. – I am a bad man, no, Jonathan?" With a sigh he rested his head on the younger man's shoulder.

"You are not bad. If only I knew how to help you."

"You force yourself to say something nice, Jonathan, because I hurt you. Actually you mean something else. Stay by me. You my brother, who hate me."

"I want to help you, Marduk, with everything in my power. You must show me how. I shall come to you and sit by you, Marduk, don't treat me like a child. I am not angry with you. Really, I find in myself no anger against you. I have much to apologise for. Give me a chance to prove my goodwill. Marduk, who are you, who are you, you poor man."

"Don't say such things," the other shivered. "Just stay by my side, always. I have revealed my wretchedness to you. All so wretched. Not just me."

[15] p.150 *salvation*: He pulled away. He stepped around the table, his face animated, eyes gleaming, evil little glances at the younger man. "I feel weary. I shall stay a while here in the house. My mousehole. I shall help myself. Jonathan, I am already the only one who can help me. See my grey hair. A few years ago so shining and curled. Now like a brush. That is the fate of this land. Perhaps it won't be long before they carry me from this building. – Enough now. I fear that I shall continue in my wicked ways to the end of my life."

[16] p.150 *his disgust*: He continued slowly on to the park. When he saw other people his chest was able to breathe deep and full. He despised Marduk. "I shall never go to him. It would really be best to be rid of this greyhead. The state would be the winner. Everyone would win."

PART 4: THE DECEIVERS

[17] p. 150 *The Jonathan-Elina storyline*: Soft and slim, with a constrained often bubbling easily roused joyfulness, Jonathan went through the Council House. Ribbons and feathers hung from him. He was regarded as Marduk's companion star. Something of the terror that emanated from the Consul adhered to him. It pleased him to make use of this terror. When of an evening he sauntered through the streets, now emptier darker more silent than before, he often thought of his mother. She stood there in his inward gaze, shoulders no longer cleft, arms hanging motionless. She yielded to his proud melting gaze, the suffering sorrow-drenched approval-seeking knowing gaze that flowed from his mouth, his cheeks: she was a green distant spreading landscape, treetops branches foliage, sky above. That, he felt contentedly, was his mother.

Once as he was approaching the Council House – enveloped in solemnity, his silvery cloak drawn tight around him – a young light-brown person was sitting there; she had been dozing and saw him almost upon her. In a sudden panic she tried to escape into the building. It was locked. She ran headlong down the street. Only now did Jonathan come back to himself, look about to see who was chasing the girl. Nobody: he was puzzled. It was him. He half-chased after her, street after street. The girl was frightened, cried out as she ran. Passers-by recognised Jonathan, stopped and laughed. He rushed on. Suddenly she stood in a panic, ran uncertainly, often turned to look. He was annoyed, his knees were burning. He had no idea what was happening. He sped after her. She ran slower, in circles. He knocked her to the pavement from behind. He bent angrily over her as she lay on her face, dragged her up by the collar. She made no attempt to ward him off, held her hands to her face.

He shouted: What was she up to at the Council House. She whimpered, hid her face: she was a housemaid, she'd hurt the mistress's dog and the mistress had vowed to go straight to Marduk and lay a complaint. It came into Jonathan's head to tell her the complaint had already been laid, and he would take her to Marduk. She stood there, begged, showed her smooth foreign unblemished face, the slightly flattened nose, wide foolish mouth. He would not listen, insisted she go with him. Concealing his joy he escorted her firmly back through the streets. Then he dropped her off at her house, where he caused alarm by stating that Marduk had sent him: how was the dog. Fearfully they showed him the animal, which was limping. He declared that Marduk was at present giving special attention to dogs. No one should treat such pets as mere possessions. He returned every day for several days, apparently officially, to check on the dog. He brought a healer with him, who grovelled before Jonathan and identified several ailments in the creature. Jonathan told him to treat the dog.

Now Marduk's friend spent afternoons and evenings in this company. Quite a few ragged men and women sat there together, smoking arguing. They were people who had no taste for hard work, could not bring themselves to emigrate, many of them sick. Such gatherings were common in the town.

[retained text: In the years of Marduk the townzone region was almost a military camp. ... uncertainty and unreality lay on everyone.]

During these years Jonathan experienced things of a beauty and sweetness he had never known. He took in Elina, the girl he had followed, went travelling with her through Hamburg Frankfurt Geneva, southern townzone regions. The air more animated. The people lively unconstrained thronging mingling. He heard with scorn their deep reverence for Marduk. He was questioned anxiously about affairs in Berlin. From the moment when the young docile Elina joined with him he no longer had any interest in townzone affairs. A month passed; as he sat with her on the bank of the Main he was shaken by thoughts of the events that lay behind him, of the blessing that was fulfilling itself through him. "What dreadful things he forced on me," he whispered as she stretched out on the grassy bank in the summer air and pulled at his hand. "I can hardly think clearly about them, Elina. Tell me, Elina, is it possible that people can be let out of Hell into another slice of eternity, and can still retain memories of the earlier time? It's happening to me."

"But you'll forget soon enough, Jonathan."

"Yes, what I have done seems really incredible to me. I'm going to close my eyes for a bit, give me your other hand. How lovely it is here. How is it possible that such things as I experienced should have happened! How can people act like that? !! I understand none of it. To think I stayed in the city. Consorted with him. He was right: I really wanted to bring him down. Why did I bother with him. I only had to keep walking a few more steps."

"Don't talk about him. Why do you speak only of him, Jonathan. I can tell you lots of lovely things. I'll tell you about – poor silly Elina, who sat once on stone steps and thought about a dog."

"No need, Elina. It's all in the past, in a way. I almost grieve for him. He's still there, in Hell."

"Lie down beside me. You are much prettier than me. Tell me what I am. Tell me about me. I want to hear about myself."

Jonathan, his head in her lap, laughed: "We're in a meadow, like in a fairytale."

"What fairytale?"

"I don't know yet. Once I played with women all the time. It wasn't the same as with you."

"I am different? Better?"

"Much better. Why are you looking at me. You don't believe it. The women –"

"Well? They were much prettier than me."

"I can't remember what they were. But you are like a church bell on a Sunday. You don't see it, just hear something in the air. They say: that's a bell ringing. And believers go to where the sound comes from. And even when you sit in the church you don't see the bell as it rings. You are here, I can hear and see you. I'm in a meadow beside the Main. I can describe you exactly. That's you."

She sat up, pouted, took back her hands. "So really it doesn't matter who I am. You don't need to bother yourself with me. You hear jinglebells and you say: it's ringing, and that's enough for you."

"Precisely."

"So can I say what I want? Say nothing even? Maybe go away?"

“Don’t go away. You can stir yourself and move about and it makes me happy. God, they say, has counted every hair on every head. Me too. Come. I have counted every hair, every strand, know them intimately, better than God, for they are mine. And your nose and your mouth and your feet in red stockings and your dress: they are all you and I don’t need to think about it.”

“But as for you, Jonathan, I can say who you are.”

“Oh don’t.”

“Why not. I can. I can describe you exactly in just two or three words. So exactly that everyone can know at once and say it’s you.”

“Go on then.”

“You are the one Elina loves best. You are my joy. My cloudy sky and my sunny sky. My hunter my robber my forest my house my room my little pillow. My broken windowpane, my whole windowpane. I stroke you and you belong to my skin to my hand. My eye my ear my forehead my breast. All you. Now you know who you are.”

They hugged. He smiled as she followed the lines of his refined face with her kisses and lingered a long time over his closed eyes. “Open your eyes,” she cried, “you’re dreaming again.”

“Only of nice things, Elina. I was thinking how you locked me in that house with all those people going at me because they wanted no friend of Marduk’s. You had lost the key, and had to help me out of the window. Instead of climbing onto your shoulder I jumped past you onto my arm.”

“It’s better now.”

“That’s the first time I longed for you, in your room. You have to come to me, I thought, Marduk is ruining me. Now my time has come, after she’s locked me up for her benefit. But it was all quiet. You did not come.”

“I never found that key.”

“And I was overjoyed to hear you weep and beg outside. I said not a word. I put my face against the wood of the door. Locked in, but free. Jonathan free. A few hours later he was free.”

“Now your eyes are open.”

For two days they camped in a grove in an artificial house of the kind commonly used by hikers. The house, or tent, was made of gauze-like cloth panels fixed to a frame no thicker than matchsticks, made of the lightest strongest metal. They took the frame from the rucksack wherever they fancied and placed it on the ground. A gas flask was screwed in and warmed up a little. The double-layered gauze billowed up, walls stood strong and firm as concrete. Floors and ceilings were installed in the same way. Windows and doors, black or transparent, could be added. The single-roomed dwelling was anchored like a boat. And all about the countryside you could find pegs with chains and signs pointing to the next anchoring place. In some of these houses, the floors and walls could extrude beds of a mattress-like substance, storage recesses, benches.

Jonathan stayed here with Elina. She proudly wore a blouse that she had bought in Frankfurt behind Jonathan’s back. Women in the townzone secretly praised it as a magical material. It was a soft fabric resembling the finest fish-scales, a living web to be worn like pearls against warm damp skin, blooming as the skin breathed. Then the scales, myriads, separated. Another skin appeared beneath, tighter against the human skin, hard to remove. The outer skin dried, turned to dust. When bought

the blouse was white. A week later, under the greying and sloughing mother-fabric, a green colour appeared. Then the process, a generational change, completed itself; red was added, a violet shimmer. The mossy fabric, from botanical research stations, had to be handled very carefully.

He sat beside her on the bed. "Elina, come back to Berlin."

Elina had grown more ardent and strange. "I don't want to. It's much nicer here. You need time to forget it all."

"Come, Elina."

"I don't want to. What are you asking of me." She threw her head back. "Better not to have made this trip at all." She cooed laughter. "You're both frightened, scared to go into other towns. You and Marduk. But Marduk still knows what he's doing. He has his weapons and machines. From us he demands stupidity. Such childishness. I don't want to go to Berlin."

She wore a linen jacket over her curious blouse. The skin of her slim bare arms was brown, the hairs shimmered gold. And when she raised an arm and the wide sleeve fell back to reveal the shoulder, Jonathan leaned closer: "What's this? What's this you're wearing?"

"This? Oh!" She laughed, and her throat blushed. "It's my blouse. You haven't seen it yet. I bought it in the town."

"A green blouse. You bought it. I told you I didn't like it."

"It's green now. It'll become red, maybe blue. The surface keeps sloughing off. You know, it fits more snugly all the time. As if stuck on with rubber. You hardly know it's there. It almost grows on you."

"Ah." He was astonished. She sat straight, with a smile revealed her breasts. He paced about in silence. That evening he grew more assertive, and she yielded. She thought of nothing, enjoyed his arousal: "You're such a child. I should go. No one will bite."

"Yes, yes," he shook himself, "I beg you, plead with you, come away."

They packed up the house. And back in Berlin, in his room, he took her bracelet, kissed it, untied her shoelaces, pulled off her socks, rubbed her cold feet between his hands. She looked on, near to giggling, back bent, hands at her chin with delight as he tried to undo her bodice. She jumped back, lay in bed covered to the ears. When he called out she sang under the blanket: "Not listening. Go to sleep." When he lay down beside her she trilled "Jonathan." His hand lay on her neck.

"What are you wearing?"

"A blouse. The green one. Maybe it's pink already."

"Why wear colours if you won't show them to me? You've become so skittish. Why?"

"Because I want to. I'm not showing you my blouse."

He drew back his arm, said sadly: "How you treat me." She listened for what else he might say, but he was silent. She felt for him with her hand. He was lying on his back. She brushed across his face, felt his eyelids twitch. What expression did he have now. Memories? She turned over, pressed her face to his. And when they had exhausted their bliss and their spines had relaxed, Elina stroked his heated face. He bit her little finger; she breathed: "Do you want to see my blouse?"

"Blow your blouse. What do I care for your blouse. You are Elina."

"Why won't you look, Jonathan? It's pretty."

"I believe you. You're much prettier."

"I'm going to show you, Jonathan." She sat up, felt about her for the light; it glared white over them. She sat on the edge of the bed, turned her head to him. Her brown hair hung heavy. The garment moulded breasts belly shoulders, as if wet or made of the most tenuous latex. At her hips it shimmered greenish blue, in places on her back and breast it was a dull mealy white. She smiled proudly, stroked herself. It shimmered, the shoulders gleamed opal. He felt pained, held a hand over his eyes. She whispered seductively: "I'll take it off and show you." And very carefully she rolled the blouse up over her body. It rolled like a rubber skin. She rolled it to her neck, carefully extracted her right arm, then the left. Armpit hairs became caught up; she yelped, stuck out the pink tip of her tongue. He freed her; at once she cried: "Give it to me. You'll crush it." Tears flowed: he had already tossed it behind him on the floor, was stroking her reddened slightly swollen skin.

"Please, Jonathan, it can't lie for even a quarter of an hour, a minute. You know I love you."

"If you love me, let it lie."

"You must give it here. Give it back now."

"And what if I crush it. If. Look, Elina." She was so pale, so anxious, red spots on her face. Suddenly as he gave it back he felt the most peculiar love for her. He loved her with an intimate longing; tears rose to his eyes as he sat beside her. He pulled her to him; she resisted. And how happy she was when she held the rustling fabric, light as a leaf, in her hands, pressed it to her breast, breathed it in. She gazed at Jonathan from dark-rimmed eyes, cheekbones jutting strangely shadowed. She knelt on the bed to roll it back on. Her little giggles jogged her hips and belly. Then she stretched, breathed out: "I'm happy."

Jonathan woke up in the night. He had dreamed of a very light bouncing ball he was trying to catch; he jumped up and down, unspeakably arduous actions. The ball bounced away towards a window that cast a very bright light. The ball was white, ever harder to see, flashed a brief moment on floor or ceiling, and he had to catch it, this silent bouncing ball. He listened into the darkness. His heart pounded. Every beat sent a fiery gleam before his eyes, a hammer blow in his throat. He pushed back the blanket. Elina was groaning, loud groans. Her hands were searching. Jonathan turned on the light. Her flaming redness. "Elina, are you in pain?"

"Oh I'm fine." Threw her head to the side, curled up. He jumped to his feet. She followed him with darting eyes as he dressed. "What are you doing, Jonathan. There's no pain."

"I'll bring you water. You have a fever."

"There's no pain. I don't want a doctor."

"I'll stay."

"There's nothing I need. I feel fine. Come. Stay beside me." Her sunken anxiously searching eyes.

"It's that blouse."

"Leave me alone. That's an order. If you take away my blouse I'll run off. Just as I am."

"But I won't."

"Promise me?"

"Yes."

“Cross your heart. Now kiss me.” Their mouths came together. He wept with an inexpressible yearning. An image came to him: the ball bouncing and blinking in the white window.

For five days Jonathan tended his beloved. He listened to her dreams: how she talked to herself; everything would be fine; she was afraid to die. The blouse sank its gossamer filaments into her skin, another layer shimmered, this new one a shade of blue. As she lay in a deep prolonged sleep, a luminous sea-blue crept over her shoulders and breast. Her breathing became calmer.

From then on Elina’s eyes blazed. Her movements were sleek, fawningly a-quiver. Her laugh more brittle. And when he embraced her he felt deeply moved, never calmed, never sated. When kissing she pulled hard on his lower lip, pressed herself to him, knees trembling under her. As if she had woken from deep sleep, opened her eyes, laughed, punched him on the shoulder, left him.

Mockingly she accompanied Jonathan through the townzone region. They rode on a funny jolting bouncing cart. Under the seat-box the vehicle had long legs like stalks, wound around with wire spirals. These legs clicked purred softly when they touched the ground, at once bending low and springing up with a swift forward lurch. The vehicle was called a Grasshopper for its powerful hinged hind legs. Two stiff forelegs and elastic side-struts like antennae helped to soften the landing.

They danced like this over the forest floor, bright rugs on their knees, were wondering if they should get down to cross a stream. They paid no attention to their surroundings, and as they landed a cry sounded below. The vehicle leaped again, Jonathan leaned out to see. Another leap, a turn, back. He applied the brakes, it landed heavily at the location of the cry. A man was dragging a woman towards the stream. Both wore dark green clothes, were visible only when they moved. Jonathan jumped down, held back Elina, who was also preparing to jump, until the vehicle’s feet were secured. Otherwise the driverless weightless thing would dance off and crash into a tree.

The man had pulled up the gown of the woman lying by the stream to reveal a clawlike flesh wound in her pale back, spurting bright red blood. The woman’s head dangled over the stream bank, her face pale. The man was busy with a scrap of green cloth. He muttered as Jonathan approached: “Look what you’ve done. What can I do.”

Jonathan stammered: “You were lying in the grass. We didn’t see you. You made no sign.”

Elina: “But she’s dying, Jonathan.”

She threw herself onto the woman, pressed her chest to the wound. “My blouse is alive, it’ll help.” Blood trickled over her breasts, she bit her lip in disgust and horror. She lay stony-faced. As branches creaked in the wind she said: “Jonathan, see that no one’s coming,” tugged at her skirt which had ridden up over her calves. After a while she gently disengaged from the woman. The face had colour, she was no longer bleeding. She was bloody all over, lips and forehead spattered.

The man carried the woman to the vehicle as Jonathan tried to persuade him it was an accident. Jonathan released the feet, jumped in. The man stepped back, the cart stretched its legs, retracted, stretched, whirled high with a shrill metallic hum. It crossed the stream at man-height, turned in a circle, whipped past the accident spot on its way to the big town.

Elina was cleaning up, kneeling at the stream twenty paces from the spot, scooping handful after handful of water that she first breathed on as if to warm it. She walked back to the green man. “I don’t want to wait here for my friend. If you like we can walk to the town and find out how the poor woman is doing.” He was lying by the water. “Come on. Are you looking for something?”

He looked up suspiciously. "I'll stay here. When your man comes back I'll know how she goes."

After watching him a while, Elina had no doubt that he was looking for something in the water, and trying to conceal something at his chest. She sauntered off, and as she slowly came back humming, he stepped towards her. Now she knew: he was an exile, creeping back for no good, a Deceiver. A dreadful look of loathing on his unhappy face. His clothes were those of a mountain-dweller, a cap over his ears and pulled low over his forehead. He stomped heavily on, she always a few paces behind: "Not so fast, I can't keep up." He forced himself to slow down. They pushed through the beechwood. The ground was brown. And now she couldn't see him among the trees. She ran. And now there was a man close beside her, brown, she hadn't seen him. But where was the green man. She tried to run past the brown man, but turned back. He had the same cap low over his bitter silent face. She stood rooted to the spot. It was the green man. She hurried after him. What was going on. When he pulled ahead she couldn't see him among the trunks and brown earth. She chased him: "Tell me, I'm a little shocked. I thought you were wearing green clothes just now."

"Yes. And?"

"Now?" He started, looked down at himself. Raised his fists, groaned: "Now you'll run off. Betray me. I'm so useless. Useless clothes. My name's Lorenz. You, lady?"

"Elina."

"Elina, you can't leave. You've caught me out, I must protect myself."

"You'll keep me here? But I'm wearing something as well." She smiled triumphantly. "You think you have to wear coloured clothes to be a Deceiver? I can deceive as well. At Marduk's side. You don't believe me? Look at my shoulder." She pulled back her collar. The shoulder was flecked with blue. He was still goggling when she straightened her clothes. "You're surprised. Will you attack me?"

He grabbed her hand, pressed close, astonishment had opened his face, haltingly he brought out: "No. I don't know you, lady. Is your name really Elina. I don't know what your game is. How long have you been here."

"I'm Jonathan's girlfriend. He's my friend. But he's not Marduk. Don't be scared of him. I'm so glad to have found you."

Jonathan sped gently with the groaning woman over forest clearings, meadows, avenues. She lay behind him under Elina's shawl. He hardly dared look round, afraid she might die. He pressed hard on the lever, but the Grasshopper kept up its even swaying lurching. Children in the streets laughed at the humming love-carriage. He sighed, as if he himself were threatened somehow.

Little pink hospital amid treelined lawns. When the nurses had lifted the woman down, Jonathan stood chewing his lips, then slowly climbed the steps after them. "They'll say she's dead. They'll come through a door, out of a lift, say there was nothing they could do." He stood at a window. "No one's coming. I'll be here a while. How many have stood looking at those trees. Counted them: six in a row and five behind. These are not the trees they saw, they saw something else; these trees are just registered here, they wander in, come and go." He groaned: "I didn't want to go to Berlin. I didn't want to come here. Oh for a power in the world that can help me, carry me away and swiftly end it all. Oh not to see trees again. Oh great Power, help me, make it so nothing has happened here. Let her not die. I want to go away from Berlin."

And suddenly, he knew not how, Marduk popped into his thoughts, gloomily unsettling, and behind him even worse things, such bad dark cryptic things. He was transfixed. He threatened without moving: "If I come out of this, they won't escape so easily. Something must happen. I can't bear it, can't can't. I'll put up a fight." He straightened up, had no idea what he was doing, he groaned, stared pop-eyed.

A nurse rustled quietly up beside him. She stood silenced a moment by his look, then: The woman is weak from loss of blood, will recover in two or three weeks. He ran down the steps, screamed and raged as the Grasshopper leaped, had no idea why. "It's all good, Jonathan, calm down. You're going back to Elina. It's over." He saw her purple skirt along the path, stretched out an arm, they held each other tight, ignored the man standing silent to the side. Muttered sweet nothings as if they'd been parted for months, lay beneath a tree.

"Jonathan, you haven't seen who's standing there." She watched smiling as he noticed the brown-clad man, whispered: "He's a Deceiver. He's been exiled."

"Strange," Jonathan gazed at him, "I thought as much." He stood up: "She's all right, she'll be better in a few weeks. No need to worry."

"He thinks you'll betray him. Talk to him."

Jonathan rocked on his heels, back and forth; he felt: How swiftly everything is fulfilled. "I owe you something. I shall certainly not betray you."

"Don't force yourself, Jonathan. I don't need your help. It's enough if you give your word not to betray me."

"No. Why are you laughing, Elina?"

"I'm happy you've given him your word. I'm so grateful. You are my Jonathan."

[18] *p.151 crueller methods*: He had them taken aloft one by one, dropped from pilotless planes to smash on the ground. He practised slow freezing by spraying rain on shoulders and neck, and gradually all over the delinquent's body.

[19] *p.151 power they possessed*: He it was who outside his tent caused one of the frozen broken figures to move in a gruesome manner. It drew one leg up, then the other, the torso leaning and lurching; amid profound silence he had it walk towards him; it flung the snowy head back, nodded at him, sank to its knees and lay on its side, its back, making gobbling sounds. A white frozen human figure, a corpse. He had it leap up, head menacingly for the bystanders, who scattered.

[20] *p.157 to everyone around*. When one night he dreamed of a mirror – he was looking into a mirror, was shocked to see his lips so pale, split in the middle, oozing blood; he moved closer to the mirror's surface, rubbed it warm, the bleeding stopped – he felt a longing for Jonathan. He spoke aloud: it's all starting again. Suddenly, without warning, the image of Jonathan rose forcefully before him: he could not understand the profound fervour that filled him, how fervently he thought of Jonathan. Affairs in the townzone are going so badly, he thought, Jonathan knows it, must know, he's my friend, there's no news of him, he should be at my side. He dressed, put on a bright yellow

cloak trimmed in silver. He waited like this for Jonathan for many hours, leaning against the wall of his office, the greybearded man. Now and then he felt angry with himself for letting the English envoys leave freely; he should have smashed them hurled them down massacred them. Jonathan, Jonathan will come.

Bugle calls below. The land was in motion. When Marduk moved forward to see what was happening, the pale youthful man was there facing him. So unexpected was the sight that Marduk stood still for several seconds, gazed at the carpet with its black and blue pattern, then let his eyes glide to the human figure, unsure if it was the real Jonathan or the projection of a dream. Dressed in white as usual, Jonathan stood under a lamp, delicate blue embroidery on his collar and sleeves, arms crossed, head inclined, radiant, smiling, eyes dark, thick black eyebrows creeping like caterpillars over them.

The yellow-gowned man sat in shadow. Took a black folded satin cover from the back of the chair, laid it over his knees, stared at the other. Stared ever harder at this moving apparition, glowing cheeks, white silk cravat. Moved his lips: "I have thought of you, Jonathan."

"A long time since we've seen one another, Marduk. I never had the feeling that you needed me."

"I'm glad to see you. How marvellously young you still look."

"My days pass one like the other. Oh, when I look around here –"

"Please, look around."

"Here I can stand or go or look around: it does not discomfit me."

"So distant from me. That you can say this to me."

"I am just as much your friend as I ever was. Only now can I look at you. Now I see you for the first time. I am grateful that you summoned me, that I can feel this."

"That you can say this to me." Marduk's fervour was aroused when he heard this. "And I too, Jonathan, was never so well-disposed towards you as now. I looked forward eagerly to your arrival. I think I dreamed of you last night."

"Shall I tell you of my dreams last night, Marduk. I dreamed of Elina, my girlfriend. I hadn't seen her for weeks, she was taken from me, or left of her own accord. I encountered her swaying above the street I was on, she couldn't come down. I went on and on, stretched out my arms, she glided on. Then my arms grew long, they were like balloons that dragged me and carried me up. She turned towards me. And just at that moment when I woke up, calm and happy –"

"What was it, Jonathan?"

But he said nothing, smiled at the floor. Marduk softly: "I know. You were lying at her breast, the breast of this woman."

Jonathan gave a friendly smile. "What should I tell you."

"I wanted nothing more from you."

They chatted a while longer, Marduk became taciturn, but his eyes never left Jonathan. He seemed to heave a sigh as the younger man stood up. His words at parting seemed to cost effort, his face was inscrutable, a smile contending with rigidity.

Hardly had the blessed pale man left, the rosy-cheeked joybringer, when Marduk, staring wildly about him as he pressed against the wall overcome by his emotions, rang the bell. The guard came silently in. "Detain Jonathan for an hour. Send to his house. There's a woman, I want to see her."

Half an hour later fliers came down by Jonathan's little house tucked into a hillside, asked for the woman. When Elina, puzzled, a rose between her teeth, appeared at the door, they bade her in Marduk's name to accompany them to the Council House. Already they were escorting away the bewildered woman, who chewed silently on the rose stem.

In the same room where Jonathan had appeared as from a dream in his white blissful clothes, Marduk received her, grey, drawing his lemon-coloured robes tight about him; said to her: "You are the woman who is Jonathan's girlfriend."

"Yes. My name is Elina."

"You have no reason to fear me. There's a chair, sit down."

"Is Jonathan here?"

"He was here. I spoke with him. He is my friend. He told me about you."

She sat, looked down. After a while she straightened her skirt below the knees: "Is your curiosity satisfied?"

"No, Elina. I know Jonathan will be angry with me. I can't help myself. They should have given you time to dress properly. You are cold. Will you spend today with me?"

"What."

Profoundly sure of himself Marduk said: "Yes. There's no other way. Don't try to argue. You will stay here. Just stay calm, Elina. Nothing will happen that need cause you unease. For sure you should not be afraid of me."

She sprang to her feet. "I will not stay."

"Jonathan knows where you are. He'll find out. You must stay here. Don't excite yourself."

"Let me out, Marduk. You are bad. I already knew you were bad. You spoke to him, about fetching me here?"

"No, Elina."

"See what a scoundrel you are."

She rattled the door. It did not move. She faced him, brandishing her fists, shouted out, shook him by the shoulders: "Let me out." He made no move.

She flung open a window. Now he jumped back, held a hand over his eyes. She shouted: "I'll do it, Marduk. If you won't let me go I shall do it."

He was suddenly very pale, his facial muscles twitched, his eyes were closed. He made his lips move, his voice timeless: "Elina. Don't do it. Don't do it."

She calmed down, dropped to the floor, whimpered, strangely distraught and moved: "I want to leave. I need help. Jonathan, help me!"

Slowly Marduk's hand lowered. He opened his eyes. She was stretched out on the floor. "I did not knock you down. You did it yourself."

He stopped looking at her. When she stood up she tried to catch his ever-averted eye. She had an uncertain feeling, as if she had done something wrong. She said nothing more. There was a slight pain in her chest when he moved silently towards the door. She was startled but comforted to hear him say softly, gazing at the floor: "Don't worry. Nothing will happen to you. They'll take you to a room." And as the guard led her out he repeated: "No fear. Nothing will happen to you."

In the room where la Balladeuse had waited, rumpling the covers, talking with Jonathan, Elina waited two long days. She wept, longed for Jonathan, wild fears at night. For hours she tried to think and feel into Marduk, and was in torment. For two days Marduk made no appearance.

But what kind of being was it that on the third morning opened her door, stood against the wall in a long yellow belted robe, grey head bowed, gently: "Elina, would you permit me to sit here." She was in deadly fear of him.

"In an hour you will be able to leave this building. And will go wherever you want. Take a greeting to Jonathan with you. Greet him from me. He had no reason to be concerned for you. I took the wrong approach. I see that now."

As she sat there on the edge of the bed she felt moved to say: please don't keep standing, it's your room, you can sit down. Then, looking at her from his big brown eyes he started up: "You love Jonathan. Tell me about your love for each other."

She was startled, then smiled down at her lap. "Yes, he's mine. I'm his from the bottom of my heart. Do you want to know this? Since I have him the Earth has become lovelier. Since I have him, everything has become better. I myself have become better. He didn't need to, Jonathan, he was always good. What should I tell you, Marduk. I miss him, every hour."

His head stayed bowed. "Can you tell me more."

"About Jonathan? I could talk about him forever. But you will surely not believe what I tell you."

"Please keep talking, Elina."

"But you know him yourself. You must not think me unworthy of him. He knows this. No one in love could think that. My love for him is not from yesterday until today, and tomorrow is nothing. So deeply, so intimately am I his, that I cannot imagine how it could ever be otherwise. How what Jonathan and I have could die. You can laugh, Marduk; I think that if you were to kill me together with Jonathan –"

"What then. Go on. I shall certainly not kill you."

She sat there, eyes closed, after a silence whispered: "The world would be more beautiful, it would be more beautiful. We would no longer be two people occupying a speck of ground, a little room. We would wander, breathe soul into this place, that place, like a cloud. We would make many people happy. Maybe we would come to you. I have sometimes thought whose happiness has entered into me, which sweet departed soul do I have to thank."

Tears streamed from her eyes. He did not ask why. "I weep for him, Marduk. How he has suffered these last days. You are not a bad man. What happened to him before we found each other. He has such strength for suffering."

"I saw that early on. It won't die like the other strength you spoke of."

She smiled: "So many people have love, Marduk. So do animals and birds and butterflies. Even lions and bears." He made no response to her smile. "Are you playing a joke on me, Marduk? I really don't know what you are up to."

"Go now, Elina. Thank you for talking to me. You have no hard feelings towards me."

"No, no. And now I can go."

"I'll open the door." She gave him her hand, looked askance at him. "Farewell, Marduk. Really. How did you become so grey? And why do you wear a beard?"

"Don't let Jonathan be angry with me."

When she was back at her friend's house and had calmed down, Jonathan urged: "Run away with me." She could not. "You, Elina, I see my fate."

"What is it?"

"The same fate as the fugitive Desir, the friend of Marion Divoise. He hates me now. He wants to meet. He shamed himself, he was too quick, too transparent. But now he wants to meet me, with you, my love."

"I shall never go to him. I am not La Balladeuse. I have only you, I told him, he heard. Together with you is my life. He knows it and it is true. He – there is something repulsive about him. At first I thought him a villain. I don't know how you can be his friend. You, Jonathan my delight."

"Was I his friend? Was I, am I? He murdered my mother, I told you. That's how he began his Consulship. Then he stood there and had no idea how to go on. He wavered, kept wavering. He always wanted to abandon his Consulship, he depended on me. So I was his friend. He nursed the suffering in me, so as not to give up in despair after destroying everything he depended on, his plants his trees, the wonderful work he did. What does Marduk want with me? To him I am one of those metal bulls that Marke erected: I am supposed to remind him. I am supposed to roar. Roar in pain. Otherwise what he does is all in vain. His Consulship will drop from his hands. Maybe he is driven now by power alone, and he realises that there is nothing more to him. That he must join in, roar along with the bull. And he doesn't want to do that, Elina, listen to me, so he seizes on every possible expedient, extends the boundaries and so on. What did he want with you? A mouse in his trap!"

Elina shrank back, raised her hands: "How angry my Jonathan is! It's not you at all."

"Of course it's me. Even I can be angry. No more veils. He placed veils around me to break me to his will. No more veils. I had to roar in pain, I almost died on the Baltic, and afterwards hardly a week went by when I did not struggle half a day with death. He knew this, and it made him feel good. I was the Urals War. He forced it into me and sated himself on it. The pictures weren't enough for him, Marke's pyramid of skulls wasn't enough. When he sees me, hears me roar, he knows something, he is sated, he can swallow his madness more easily. It tastes good to him."

Alarmed, she clutched the arms of her chair, looked at him with big eyes: "Most of what you have said I do not understand. But you must go away from here, I see that. Why did you stay here so long with me?" Pale Jonathan stood still, his head slowly drooped. Elina softly, as she stepped closer: "For his sake, of course." He said nothing, head on his chest, pressing folded hands to his brow. "I know it, Jonathan. For his sake."

His hands dropped, all at once he lifted his head, was at her side, embraced her. "I have you. I love you. Come. You are my life and my light. Your hair is my joy. Your sweet skin. Your wet mouth. My throat. Your dainty breast, I shall creep into it. Now kiss me. I have you again, Elina, Elina." His knees buckled. "I shall pray."

She sank down beside him: "Jonathan. There is nothing I can say. I am so close to you."

After this they went together side by side as usual. Their arms were linked more firmly than ever.

[21] p. 163 *quiet hard woman* who had been one of the female lovers of the Balladeuse, Marion Divoise whom, it was rumoured, Marduk had thrown out of the window in shame at having loved her.

[22] p. 167 *save my life*: "You have a lover. Go to her."

[23] p. 170 *in cowsheds*: In the most cynical way they laid hands on young creatures who, just outside Salzwedel, were enticed by the locals' curiosity to stop and talk to them. The main company was hardly out of sight when women hurled themselves on the outsiders, tore away their clothes as laughing men looked on, made them pull on boy's short pants open at the crotch. Fastened to this garment was no fig leaf, but a raw beet with green tops. Their hands were tied behind their backs, and they were sent off through the snow to find their troop. A punishment detail came by and burned nearby houses. On their way back, no human booty having been captured, they led a herd of cows along behind. Tied to them were the corpses of captured female warriors; the same shameless beets wedged between bare thighs. The cows were driven by two women, hands behind them. They too wore short pants and the wagging beet, but not in silence with bowed heads like those released earlier; their breasts were bared, and little squealing piglets in a sack around the waist showed their snouts, snapped at the breasts.

[24] p. 172 *tied behind them*: Zimbo grinned; on some his people had stuck the beet-symbol.

[25] p. 173 *Castel departed*: "No beet for you, Angela Castel. You're destined for higher things. Ask Marduk to show you the window that the Balladeuse jumped from."

[26] p. 173: When Jonathan woke up, his light metal flier was a wreck. He had to walk all day through the dangerous wintry countryside. His base was in the Mecklenburg region. He ended up on the road taken by Castel's band on their march from Lauenburg; he watched as organised groups of peasants combed the land for suspicious people. The quiet man walked on wrapped in a white sheepskin, frightened as if he were the target of a pogrom. Curses from the people hurried him along. In a dark meadow he felt that he was somehow bound to these peasants, and did not want to leave them. And with a shiver he felt that he had betrayed them. Fate had led him to prostrate himself before the Deceivers. Suddenly in his thoughts he saw himself running down the Council House steps after a ragged girl: Elina. It had begun with her. Then flight, travel with her, attraction,

love. Hardly an hour's walk from his house he stayed with a Deceiver he had befriended, an old man who moved about him in puzzlement at his dejection when the townzone was already falling to them. Venemously Jonathan abandoned his room, locked himself in a laboratory. He sat on a box, sat from noon until it grew dark.

In the night, having slept only an uneasy hour, he jerked upright: flames were before his eyes, in the flames human body-parts, shoulders arms, a writhing body, its belly bared. It moved, burned red hot. His mother. His mother was burning. "To Marduk, to Marduk," the cry rose within him. "I must go. I cannot. Oh help." And he whimpered as he dressed with numbed fingers: "Oh help." He ran from the house. In the dark he could not find his way back. He wanted to go home. He had to wait for two dark hours in a furrow, until a grey light appeared in the sky. Then he began to stamp and walk about. He rapped on the door of his house: "Anyone there? Anyone there?" And roared and roared, not waiting for an answer: "Anyone there?"

Even as a shocked Elina stepped out, he continued to shout and pound on the door. Led inside, he kept shouting until she placed a hand over his mouth, pulled him onto a chair where he sat stiffly clenching his fists, saying nothing. She was wearing only a thin gown; when she pulled his head to her breast he could feel the warmth, pulled back, again mumbled: "Anyone there." He stomped around glaring wildly. "Stay where you are," he told her after a while as he pulled a stool close to her; she hid her face. "I am beyond help, Elina. I know when I speak with you that even you cannot help me. When I came to him, Marduk had me detained. They hauled me up. I was dazed."

She wept aloud, he would not let her approach. "Where should I go, Elina. I can't be on my own. I have to go to him."

"What did you say to him, Jonathan."

"That I'm a Deceiver. It had to come out. I was ashamed of myself. It's out. It's good. I have nothing to do with the Deceivers. I've never had anything to do with them. I despise them." His eyes burned into her, strange and hostile.

"And Marduk?"

"Did with me what was right. Just not enough. I should have been whipped and branded. That's what I deserved. Or expunged me from the Earth. Now I'm beyond help. Oh. Oh."

"You are with me, Jonathan. We shall go away from this place."

"I can't. I won't take myself away. I won't leave him. I won't go away from him. I – can't. Now you know."

"I always knew it.

He raised his suffering face to her. "So what do you say, Elina?"

"But you don't want any help from me. I am your enemy, it seems."

"No, don't say that. Come here to me. Help me forget."

He stood up. He embraced her, and she leaned her face against him with an absent searching expression. Her whispered: "I told you about my mother. He killed her. But to me it never seemed that he had killed her. No, don't say anything, don't laugh at me. It seems to me as if he was something together with her, as if he had a bond with my mother, like the father I never knew! He. He. That's how he is with her. I can be calm only near to him. Away from him I am torn apart."

She whispered, looking away. "And what is your stance towards me?"

"I don't know, Elina. I think it's good for me to be with you now."

"I suppose it's all over with Marduk?"

"Don't say that, I beg you, don't say that." He let go of her, paced about the room, stood at the window. Ruddy light was glinting behind the grey sky.

After he had stood quietly a while, saying nothing, she placed one knee on the stool, lowered her head deep in thought. Without changing her position she called: "Jonathan."

"Yes."

"Jonathan, I have an idea."

He quickly turned around, stepped across to the unmoving woman, gripped her shoulders. "Don't say a word, Elina. Please, not you too. No advice, please. Don't you torment me too."

She enounced clearly: "You need advice. You need help. I'm not in the least tormenting you."

"I see, I see. Now you're going to go against me."

"I have an idea, Jonathan. But I ask you to let me do what must be done."

"You think I should be alone. You're abandoning me."

"No. I shall go to Marduk."

He let go her shoulders, bent down, tried to see her downcast face. He sighed as he drew back.

"You're going to Marduk."

"Yes."

"Because I am beaten?"

"Jonathan, I am going to do it. Let me."

He retreated to the wall, sat on a window bench. "Marduk had me detained and expelled. Now you."

"What can I say. I can give you no clear answer. I wish you only well. It pains me to see you like this. I think I shall, I shall – do to him what you wanted to." And lifting her head, still deep in thought, hearkening with a little smile into the distance, she breathed: "I have to go to him. Do you not think he is already waiting for me? It was clear to me that he would reject you. I shall help him. Then – you shall come to him just once more. If you come and I am there, he will not reject you." She coaxed: "That's how it is. Come now, Jonathan. Come. See if I am not you. If I cannot carry you to him with my body. Come, have no fear of me. We've lain together a hundred times." And she went to the distraught man, embraced him: "My Jonathan. My delight. Hug me so that I am entirely you. All at once I feel so good. Don't hold back. Open your lips, open your eyes. I am Elina. Ah! I have such longing longing longing for you. Unutterable longing."

His head was on her shoulder, he whispered: "How strange you are." Held her tighter.

"Jonathan, I am your haven. You are calm. Nothing will happen to you. You'll be fine with me."

"Oh what are you."

"Come, I must kiss you. I yearn for you. Your mouth. Your eyes. How I love you. Don't hold back."

"I can't. I can't hold back from you."

"You know me again. Elina, your friend. And you are my joy. I have nothing to give you. I must kiss your hands. Your feet."

"No, Elina."

"Am I not your Elina?"

"You are so forceful."

"For you. I can't see you standing there. I want to devour you completely. Everything about you that I see makes me jealous. Your jacket, your hair, I can't bear to see them outside of me. Ah kiss me. Am I not your Elina?"

"You are and are not. You've become so wild."

"It seems to me I've never loved you until now. Now I love you for the first time. The first time. As if I'd merely played with you before. So insatiable, Jonathan, I am so insatiable for you. Come. The sun is rising. It's bright outside. Lie down with me."

"I don't know what's happening to me when I see you."

"So don't stand there. Do you not love me?"

"You frighten me, no, you horrify me."

She laughed, embraced him roughly: "I? Don't say such things, I have such longing for you."

He tried to break free, but she held him tighter. He begged: "Sweet Elina, what are you doing. Have I upset you. Have I hurt you."

"I feel good, more than good. How sweetly you beg. Don't upset me."

"No, my Elina. Your eyes, so overtired."

"Now you are my Jonathan."

They tumbled onto the still warm unmade bed. She was insatiable in her ecstasy. She kept crying: "I missed you so." He consoled her; it did him profoundly good to comfort her.

Hours later, in broad noontime, she stood beside him as he awoke. He dressed hastily. She kissed him as he dressed, he had to fend her off. She pleaded and accused: he wanted to leave her. As they stood in the snow-covered garden, wintry fields right and left, she turned pale, clung to him. "I'll be leaving soon."

"Not to Marduk."

"I must."

She pulled away, ran onto the house. When she appeared at his side in a white fur coat, white fur hat, she regarded him. His head hung. She raised her arms: "I cannot." He stood unmoving as she ran through the white garden onto the road, sobbing: "I cannot."

She ran for an hour before her weeping stopped. She saw the snow-decked trees, endless white fields. She was more subdued now. She took deep breaths. She felt: "How lovely it is!" And then: "I'm going to Marduk."

[27] p. 175 *a few paces*: "A woman has come into the camp, a Deceiver like you, or the companion of a Deceiver. She is called Elina."

"I don't know her."

"She is probably a Deceiver herself, though for some reason she denies it. I have reason to detain her. She will be placed in your jail."

[28] p. 175 *too far*: To the others over whom she still exercised power, Castel conveyed nothing of her conversation with Marduk. As she walked back to the jail she reflected grim-faced that it was on account of this woman that Marduk had come, he was interested in her. She clenched her fists. And when Elina was brought to her an hour later, Angela Castel discovered that she was the partner of Marduk's friend Jonathan. So Jonathan, the most frivolous of lovers, had also been discovered. Many wept in the jail that evening. Elina, sitting with Castel, observed in wonderment and a gentle joy. "We shall be sacrifices. What can little Marduk do to assert himself against the world," they wept in defiance. Elina thought: I was unable to weep for Jonathan, even when he was locked up. But still I wished him well. What will Marduk do with me."

That same night she experienced a dreadful assault by the barbarians on the prisoners. She heard the death rattle of a woman nearby, the crackle of little flamethrowers, saw in their light the raging men, half naked, barefoot, the ignited mass running like a veil over their bodies. They flung themselves under dried leather hides; she lay beside Castel. "Must I often go through that again," she asked Castel in the grey dawn. Castel nodded grimly, still lying there: "As long as the dogs enjoy attacking us."

"Does Marduk know?"

"Now now, my little chick. Go to sleep, so you can be alert tonight."

"What does he have planned for me?" wondered Elina. "He looked at me as at a stranger."

[29] p. 175 *nothing for her*: That night the barbarians unleashed their fiercest assault on the prisoners. Death-throes of strangled women; rattle of flame-devices illuminating berserk half-naked barefoot men, fire licking like a veil over their bodies. Some women hid under dried hides, watched all day as male corpses were thrown from windows. She lay at Castel's side: "Must I often see such things," she asked Castel in the grey dawn. Castel gave a rom smile: "For as long as those dogs enjoy attacking us."

"Does Marduk know?"

"Enough, my little chick. Go back to sleep, so you can be alert come evening."

I wonder what he intends with me, Elina thought, he looked at me like a stranger. All day long she had to look on as dead men were thrown from windows. The women's numbers dropped. Night after night, day after day several were raped strangled beaten, killed by close-range weapons. The attackers liked to take prisoners; kudos if they could seize a strong female alive. These were paraded outside the jail, whipped around the building, tied to tall posts, their clothes slit and a beet wedged in. Usually this process ended in a powerful authentic Marcher touch: prisoners hung in chains on an iron pillar in the square. Fire smouldered; they would either choke or burn to death if they could not pull free. But the chains did not end at the prisoners' hands feet knees bodies; they continued as strings of horsehair sewn through tongues arms chest-muscles. The prisoners, bravely or in mortal

fear, had to tear their own flesh. Men stared in amazement and revulsion at the flailing screaming fainting creatures, and those who tore free to writhe bleeding on the ground.

The devices in the jail were running low. And when it became clear that the end was near, the women began to turn their gaze on Elina. Castel kept her always by her side, watching her. Elina had never claimed to be a Deceiver. The women hated her, Castel had to protect her. Now they assailed Elina: she was a friend of Marduk's, she should stand with them. Elina flinched back: she had only been detained by Marduk.

Now the women began to torment her. They tied her to window bars, visible to the fighters outside. Those outside had no idea who she was, knew only that the Consul had brought her here. They interpreted Elina's martyrdom thus: the women were taunting the Consul. She became a particular target.

[30] *p. 175 below the sills:* In those terrible days it happened that help came from an unexpected quarter. Men from the attacking band, fanatics, half in league with the defenders, allowed themselves to be captured and then set about the attackers in murderous fury. Here was the fiercest fighting: it drew them. The attackers had taken their eyes off tender familiar Elina, day after day up there tied to her window bars. Among the women, defender after defender was laid low in the furious assaults; the attackers never made it through to Castel and Elina.

When only a small group of women were left, embittered icecold exhausted, hardly able to handle the devices, with hardly the strength in the foul air to remove the corpses of men and women, they first yielded up the men who had come to them, in order to gain distance; they had no more use for them. Now they would be done with Angela Castel and Elina. When Castel refused to release Elina, it was clear both would have to be killed. Castel had come every day to urge silent Elina: she must go to the Consul, to protest not against Death, but against this unprecedented barbarism. Only once did she elicit a reply. The tender girl had gazed at her from tormented eyes, held her hand: "He is not human, he is a beast." Desiccated little Angela did not untie her.

When the leader of the women heard the whispering among them, and in uneasy desperation proposed to offer this woman to the men, it was already too late. Shortly afterwards, the women experienced the final devastating assault.

[31] *p. 176 by the hair:* The roaring goggle-eyed foaming climbing clambering onstoring men, heedless of losses, gave all it had. They clambered over the roof and through high windows. Appeared behind and among the barricaded women.

The rope in the square was drawn taut between two stone columns; waiting. But those inside were seized by bloodlust, men and women both, gave and sought no mercy. Struggling throttling groaning breaking.

[32] *p. 176 gravestone over it:* Jonathan, this gentle sufferer, thinking at last of directing a poisoned arrow at him, had sent Elina. Once something had attracted him to this loving woman; when the fighters seized her and dragged her down the street she looked at him in a strangely meek way. She

could think of nothing to say when he asked what she wanted. Clearly she saw through the game for which vengeful jubilant Jonathan was using her. Maybe she had volunteered for this. Away with the woman. To jail. To the other women. Mortify her.

[33] p. 178 to London: Can we wait till morning. Marduk left the captain. Soon there came a din of tramping horses and shouts in the gathering dusk. The captain knocked at the door of the room where Marduk was lying, heartbroken. He'd better come out, take a look. Sniffing, ill and lame, Marduk shuffled with half-closed downcast eyes, let himself be led outside. Torches flared. They were men from a war-band. Marduk saw teams of horses being tugged apart. He saw a rope linking the horses. Some dozens of female bodies hanging from it. Drawn-out whimpers, moans. Most hung silent. A rider called down: This is the last lot from the jail at Linden. Captured with our bare hands. Another shouted: Castel's somewhere among them. Marduk groaned: these ruffians should be sent packing, the rope untied, the horses chased away.

Castel was dead. Half an hour later her broken trampled body was laid in the corridor, eviscerated, trampled head missing above the nose. Then they laid out three bodies tied together. The two on the outside were dead or dying, tied together with their own intestines and clothing. In the middle was Elina, cowering between the soft oozing masses. She screamed when they separated the bodies, opened the bundle. One arm hung slack. She was covered in blood, hair glued to her face and mouth and nose. She could not straighten her curled legs.

Marduk, bareheaded in a long sheepskin, stood in the doorway, taking in the sad procession. A symbol of the retreating bands. They were heaping scorn on him.

Elina was lifted up; men ran in, carried her out. Before Marduk entered the room he glanced at Angelelli: "I said: till morning, yes?" Angelelli: "We'll still manage it in the morning."

Past midnight, in the light of the moon Marduk bent over Elina's straw cot; a young woman was watching over her. Swathed in furs the man stared silently at her, seeking, seeking, seeking. He groaned on the bedside chair; the young woman retreated into the darkness.

[34] p. 180 *never despair*: And he searched and gathered in the region of his former base. A gloomy feeling had seized him, never let him rest, drove him on. What was it. He had to complete the job. In quiet moments Jonathan came into his thoughts. Hurling down the steps. Elina right behind him. That woman with the horses, between the horses, dangling from a rope. The horses foamed, warriors jeered. Castel's corpse on the rope, that wicked woman, the other one still twitching between two corpses. The house to which the band brought the sacrifices was lifeless; brownblack smears of blood in the hallway.

Once as Marduk was entering a big gold and white theatre built by some transient bigwig, now filled with provisions cases barrels, a man's voice sounded nearby. He was holding a belt: Should women be recruited. "No," Marduk shook his head. No more women. They must all move out, strike camp, head east to the Elbe, be quick about it. He left, not looking at the white belt the man was holding out to him.

Marduk stood on the hill, on hard-frozen ground, beside the shattered giant skeleton of an ash tree. Icy air blew in gusts around him. "All things in the world come to an end," he thought. "I shall break out." Back in the house he packed his rucksack. Now the man laid down the belt he had been holding. Marduk wanted to open his mouth, call to the man, but he brought his left hand to his mouth and covered it. Whose, whose whose belt was it. White, with silver inlay. It was – his eyes widened – Jonathan's belt.

"Where did you obtain this?"

"A woman gave it me. I was to show it to you. She wanted to help us."

After an hour's riding they halted by a row of buildings ruined by fire and explosives. Rubble from the toppled tower of a neighbouring building lay on the flat roof of the low building. The entrance was half blocked by debris. They clambered past, a dog came at them. While the fighters beat away the strong snarling biting beast – finally it stood slavering on the unscalable rubble heap – Marduk rattled the closed door. There was a small window beside the door. Marduk, sensing someone watching him from the side, started back. A woman poked out her dishevelled head. A pale thin face that grimaced and flared. The head suddenly vanished. Marduk pounded on the door: "Open up." Through the dog's yelping he could hear whispering and then low voices by the door.

"You want me to open up. I'm not opening up for you."

"Open up." Now he knew: it was Elina. "Why won't you open up?"

"You think I'll let you throw me in jail again, you beast. I'm here just so you can torment me?"

"Open up, Elina."

"Yes, open up. Open up yourself, it'll do you good. Try it."

"I want to talk to you, Elina."

"Wait, I want to talk to you. Go back from the door."

"What should I do. Call off the dog."

"Go back from the door. Back to the rubble heap."

As the fighters struggled with the dog that was racing around the rubble heap, Marduk stepped back. The door sprang open. In the opening a narrow man-sized figure could be seen, flashing metal and glass, pushed on wheels. An assault device. The woman was beside it, her hand on a glass lever; frowning, eyes glittering, mouth releasing and sucking in air between drawn-back lips, clenched teeth. Her left arm hung slack. Like Marduk she was wearing a white belted sheepskin.

"Well, Marduk? How goes it with you now? There you stand. You want to ask me something. No doubt you'd prefer to answer me first."

The thought ran through Marduk: a shame. She's a Deceiver. I've fallen into a trap. What an ending. "I wanted to ask you about this belt."

"You're afraid now, Marduk. But you threw me into jail, with Castel. You ordered her fighters to do with us whatever they wanted. You know how that worked out."

"They leaped about you like savages."

"Were they that? They were also cowards. Was it not a joy for you to see us brought along roped together, behind horses. Was it not a particular pleasure? Us hanging there. Admit it."

The shouts of the fighters, the dog's howling were so loud that both fell silent. "You are a Deceiver, Elina. You come from Jonathan. I regret nothing. I had to pin you down."

"Go on."

"What happened next is not my business."

"Why do you speak of Jonathan. His name, you beast, you beast." She took her hand from the lever, wept loudly into the cupped hand. Her left arm was bent at the elbow, its fingers touched her breast.

Marduk took advantage of this moment amid the uninterrupted din of human and animal raging to pull the device swiftly out of the door. It jogged bumped down the five steps, fell over, broke apart spreading fragments of metal and glass. Elina had let her right arm drop, leaped two steps behind the device, stood there limp, glared angrily at Marduk, tears trickling from her eyes.

"So, you succeeded even at this."

Marduk, hastening towards her, drew himself up, one foot on the lowest step. "We can chat more easily now."

"First Jonathan. Now me. To think people like you were ever created."

"What did you mean by this belt?"

"Now you ask. I had someone tell you."

"You wanted to join yourself to me. Tell me yourself, Elina, whether you do not deserve to be killed by me."

She stared a long while at him in silence, no longer crying. Her head bobbed up and down as if beyond her control. A soft voice: "I shan't invite you in. Wait. I'll fetch my hood."

She came right back, gave a little smile when Marduk was not to be seen on the step. He called from behind the pile of rubble: "Raise your arms, Elina."

She came down the steps: "I can raise one, if it amuses you. The other you bound tight to me. Show yourself." The two fighters stepped back as she sauntered past them in the cold air.

Marduk behind her: "You have nothing?"

She went on, head bowed: "Come. Walk with me." He hastened to catch up. "You want to know what I meant with the white belt, Marduk. Do you know what actually I wanted from you?"

"When?"

"When I came to your rooms. Send that man away. I am unarmed. If you mean to kill me, you can do it by yourself if need be."

He waved back the man, who had killed the dog and was dragging the bloody carcass behind him on a rope.

"You don't know why I came, Marduk." Her face was averted as she spoke huddled into her furs, looking always away from him. "And you don't need to know."

"Jonathan sent you."

"Don't speak, don't speak," her head turned, her eyes glowed, "I told you, don't say his name. You mustn't. No, you must not." Her face tight-lipped, bitter, her eyes were filling again. She looked away, sobbed.

“Where are you taking me?”

“Come.” The road petered out. They went across a frozen meadow, the ice on the puddles crackled. A long narrow woodland came, quite light within. “Here. Leave the man outside. Let him wait in the meadow. He mustn’t bring that dead animal in here.” They wandered among tree trunks, beneath the tangled lines of branches. Elina stood on a little rise covered in dry brown leaves. “Come.”

“Are you tired? Do you want to sit?”

Elina, head drooping to her breast, pulled the hood over her face. She breathed: “Give me the belt.”

“Here.”

“No. Put it down.”

“Where should I put it?”

Elina’s knees buckled; her face pressed into the cold rustling leaves.

“What is it, Elina?”

She wept quietly down there, her hands clutched at leaves. “Here.”

Marduk sighed, gazed into the trees. “What is up with Jonathan?”

“But you know. Your friend. Our friend. My friend. With the white belt. You always wore a white belt. A white gown, you always liked to wear your white gown.”

“What’s up with Jonathan?”

“See for yourself. Your friend. Our friend. My friend. With the white belt. You always wore the white belt. A white coat, you always loved to wear the white coat. “

“What is up with Jonathan?”

She gulped, whimpered wept, lamenting: “Don’t ask. Oh oh, don’t ask.”

He shivered from head to toe. He braced himself. It surged from knees to shoulders, pulled him tall, dragged him low. He shook his arms, waggled his elbows, thrust his empty grasping hands back and forth. When he threw back his head to clear his overfull throat, he was tumbled to the ground beside the lamenting whimpering writhing Elina, athwart the little grave mound. Clouds of leaves drifted over them. And there lay great greyhaired Marduk in his white fur coat; his hat rolled down the slope. He raged, stretched out his arms: “No, no, no.” Implored Jonathan, called out his pet names, searched for him. He threw himself onto his back, his hands full of leaves, rubbed his red swollen face. He jumped up, knelt at the foot of the slope, body swaying back and forth, in whispered conversation with the mound, pressing his forehead ever deeper against the ground. And Marduk blessed Jonathan, embraced him, would not leave the sand the moss the dry leaves.

His trembling abated, he raised his head, removed his hands from the leaf-covered torn twitching face. Elena stood blank-eyed at his side, one knee bent to the mound, held out a hand to help him up. “Pick the belt up from the grave.” He looked around for it. “Hang it up here. Beside the – other one.” Marduk allowed himself to be led on ten paces. There was an oak tree. A short rope dangled from a knotty branch. “He came here, Marduk. I don’t know when. I lay fainting in the house. They say he asked after me at the house. And after you. You – were fleeing. I could say nothing.”

“He hanged himself.”

Her calm resonant voice: "Before he went away he spoke of you. And of his mother. That's why he came to you. He said he could not abandon you. He went into the copse when you would not receive him."

"What did he look like when they found him?"

"I don't know for sure. I didn't see his face. He was – Marduk, Marduk – like a man – burning in fire."

Her shoulders heaved, she spoke on louder: "He was burning. It's true. I could not help him. I didn't help him. If only I had helped him. If you had." Marduk stood still. His eyes were closed.

He was holding the belt. When he opened his eyes his expression was firm, tender. He slung the belt over the branch, his muscles no longer trembling, his eyes fixed on the rope, fingers clenched. He stood there. When he could open his mouth he whispered, without changing his gaze: "And now it's all past, Jonathan. Now it's past." He repeated it tonelessly. He moved his neck, turned his rigid face to Elina. He fell against her shoulder. She held him with her right arm, pressed him to her breast. He sank onto her, she struggled to keep his soft sinking body upright. He seemed on the verge of sleep.

She lowered him gently to the ground, his body would not stay leaning against the trunk, lay slumped on the icy woodland floor. His breathing was regular, his features relaxed. Elina spoke to him as she knelt at his side. His eyes opened; they looked into emptiness. She supported his head, put his cap straight. He let her stand him up, walk away. She led him.

They came to the meadow. The man with the dog was still there. They walked past him on the crackling ice. Marduk seemed still asleep, said not a word to Elina holding his left arm. The line of demolished buildings. The man with the dead dog slouched behind them.

As they approached the rubble-heap in front of Elina's house, the man jumped ahead of them, blocked Marduk's way: "Where are you going?" Marduk looked long and hard at him: "Wait out here. Wait for me." He climbed the steps very slowly, Elina following.

For long minutes, Marduk on the window bench kept silent. Head leaning back he seemed asleep again. His head dropped to his shoulder. Then his big eyes sought her out. She was sitting across from him, at a window.

"You, Elina."

"What, Marduk?"

"What are you doing here?"

"I live here."

"Here is not a good place to live." He rummaged for a thought: "So much rubble. It's cold. Very cold. Winter goes on and on. What are you up to here really, Elina?"

"I live here."

"You live here. You don't have to live here. You should let the house fall down. Jonathan is dead. That's another thing. A fine young man, the one I knew. And you forgave him, Elina. You forgave him." She looked across at him questioningly. "You forgave him. Say it."

"There was nothing to forgive."

"He didn't know what he was doing, before he died. When he sent you away."

"He did not send me away."

"But he did. Did you not say he died alone?"

"Yes."

"Then he did send you away."

"No."

"He didn't know what he was doing, Elina."

"He did not send me away."

Marduk lifted his head away from the wall, unsure: "But you came to me. Did you not –?"

"Yes. And you threw me in jail."

"But you did come to me."

"Yes, but he did not send me away."

"So what happened?"

"I – came away of my own accord."

"From him? When he – you said it yourself – he was burning? You came away. No, Elina, you're just saying that."

"I came away, Marduk. I'm telling you. I am concealing nothing."

"You left him." He stared at her. Now his mouth moved. He placed his hands on his knees. He raised both arms: "You hurt him. You left him. Against his will."

"Yes," through clenched teeth. Her fingers curled, her eyes gleamed at him, her mouth twisted in anger and pain: "If only I had not! If only I had not." Her feet stood her up, took her to the door; she leaned against the doorpost, groaned at the floor: "You know, Marduk, you know it's good that the house still stands. That I am no giant to tear it down. I would if I could. I would, I would have to grab hold of the house and tear it down. On top of me. And – on top of you too." She dug into the wood of the doorpost. He watched her angry face, she gulped: "Go, go."

Then she ran with little steps, hesitant, back into the big room.

Marduk felt something lift him up. A distant fear twitched throbbed in his heart. He stumbled after her, had to. His breathing irregular, dreaming. Sleep in every movement. Did not want to pull an old familiar veil over himself. "Don't run from me, Elina. Why are you doing this. I am no murderer. I am unarmed. I won't hurt you. Stand still for a moment. I won't follow you, just want to see you. I won't hurt you. Don't run. I must say something to you. You must say something to me. So. Stay there. Sit. I can't stand." A clashing darkness in him. Fragments of a city in a distant battle. But it faded. He seemed to be behind a mountain. Untormented.

"Let me see your face, Elina."

"Leave my face alone."

"I must see your face." The clashing had faded. He felt calm in his muscles, fear evaporating, the deep almost oppressive slowing of his heartbeat. How gently sleep crept over him. He let it, did nothing to ward it off. He could sit beside her averted back, dream. The dream in him: "I sat with you once, Elina. In my fortress. In the city. I was Consul. If you want to take vengeance on me, do it. I can't stop you. Lean against me. Oh lean against me."

She slowly turned round. Murmured trembling: "Why? Why should I lean against you?"

Then she lowered her head to his chest, trembled and groaned even more. "Lean on me, Elina."

"I cannot, Marduk. Why should I. When I can – embrace you." She pressed against him. Pulled his head to hers. He held her lightly, gazed into her hair: "This you do. This you do."

"This – yes, now. And here you are. You let me embrace you."

"I don't want to. There's no point."

"Be gracious to me, Marduk. Look at me." Darkness swept from his neck up into his head. His brain was swamped by a deep, an ever deeper black. His pale lips spoke half-conscious words: "Out of the window. I've jumped out of the window. Hold me. Tight. I'm falling."

She shook him. His body was limp. His head lay on her shoulder. She felt dampness on her shoulder. It had come to pass that Marduk wept on her shoulder.

She could not lift his head. A dream through him: "I'm falling. Along the ruts. Along the field path."

He shifted. Stood up. She looked into the wide eyes. He knew he had been chasing her since the camp at Linden, since he had sent her to jail.

She held tight to him, studied his bearded defeated face. Breathed, importuned: "Marduk, forgive me. Look at me."

"I see you." His hard cheek against hers, his neck yielding: "Temptress."

"Not a temptress. I am no serpent. Be merciful to yourself. Be gracious to yourself. You, with you."

He freed himself. Looked eagerly into her eyes. Stood, stumbled very pale gazing down at her: "Now, now, now – Elina! Now I fall."

And swayed back and forth. Staggered against the chair behind him, fell flat out dragging the chair with him. He lay stretched on the floor, leaning against the chair back. In a deep faint. She pulled the chair away. Held a hand at his mouth: a warm breath. His cheeks wan, mouth open.

She felt under his head: no blood. She pushed his hat under it.

She ran frightened to the door, listened. The fighter was immobile there by the rubble heap, had heard nothing.

And as she came back step by step, saw him lying, the grey bearded face, the long body in the white sheepskin, on the floorboards of her house, she flung herself at him with upraised face and arms in a wild surge of bliss. She tore off her coat. Tore the jacket, the blouse from her breast, pressed her bare skin to the cold damp wool. Squeezed against him with body arms legs, snared him, overwhelmed him. She paid no mind to his condition. Caressed his hands, pulled back the sheepskin, kissed his knees. She tore the coat from his chest, kissed the row of ribs one by one, rubbed her breasts on his chest.

She jumped up, glowing. To the window. She opened it swiftly quietly, took a handful of snow, shut the window, warmed the snow at her mouth, blew on it, ran on tiptoe to kneel over Marduk and rub it on his forehead eyes his lips.

It was agonisingly sweet to her when in a dream he pursed his lips, licked at the snow. She let him lick. Held snow in her mouth. He licked at her mouth.

An hour later Marduk stepped out of the door, sent the man away. He went with Elina down the street behind the man. It was growing light. They crossed the meadow, through the wood. Beyond the wood they could hardly see the man, Marduk's knees were weakening. He lowered himself to the ground. Swathes of mist up from the nearby river. Marduk's eyes were sad, small, he turned his head aside. "Lovely life," he whispered, "lovely trees, lovely mist." She lifted him, he leaned on her shoulders.

"Why do you stare at me, Marduk?"

"It's more than I thought possible."

Her eyes gleamed; he was always about to fall in a faint, looked away from her dangerous eyes.

"Lovely mist, lovely trees," he held tight to her, "lovely human. Lovely human. Human hair, human fingers, human ears human throat."

"They were always there."

"Human hair. Human hand. Poor shoulder. What are my sins."

"I have another shoulder, Marduk."

"Good shoulder, poor collarbone. Marduk seeks your pardon."

In the moors south of Grindewald forest, Marduk set to work again. Given the dangers of the work and the dubious reputation of the Consul in these parts, his troop had not grown larger. If a result were to be achieved, it would be necessary swiftly to relieve Zimbo and the bands of their weapons. Marduk's Hanoverian troops suffered several setbacks. Success came and went. Tender Elina fought alongside.

In the great push led by Marduk that ended in the destruction of almost all heavy weapons of the bands east of the Elbe, Marduk, strutting about strong and cold as a stag, even equipped Elina with weapons. They all wore mirror-clothing, they had to advance on clear sunny days.

As Marduk adjusted the mirror-facets on Elina's clothing, tin strips laid over one another like rooftiles, which had to be separated and turned about like sails according to the light, she hooked a hand at her already fastened collar and threw back the hood that hung over her face. "Stand still," Marduk ordered.

She took off the hood, pulled back from Marduk, closed the door to his room. "Not the clothes. Not the clothes. Me."

"We're in a fight, Elina."

"A fight. But us. What are we fighting for."

"You know what."

She breathed close to him: "I – am still fighting for you. You must know me."

"Not now, Elina."

"Now, or when. Now."

As they embraced in the straw, he saw the first eyes arms. Winding herself around the hard sinewy hairy body she stammered: "Nothing of me that is not yours. Leave nothing to me. Everything, take everything. Leave nothing behind." She dived into him, melted floated away.

He breathed: "Don't say Marduk to me. Who is that."

She almost died in the embrace, wanted to die. He stammered to her throat: "I shall live forever. Live forever."

[35] *p. 180 about half*: Here Elina died. Herself invisible, she was directing an unguarded giant flame-thrower like those from the jail at a passing cluster of band commanders – over-confident, for nothing prevented her from simply destroying the device – when the flame blew back at her, turned her to ashes along with the fighters.

[36] *p. 182 clenched teeth*: Elina was dead. Why had he not gone at her side, to the west, the south, and lived on with her. Why did he not want to live with her. Sweet Elina was gone, for nothing, into the dark the emptiness, and he was following behind. Jonathan too was dead. Thoughts surged in confusion behind his brain. A copse of growing trees, horses with women prisoners on a rope, over rutted fields.

[37] *p. 182 in a coffin*: He wept ever more wildly for Elina, out of his mind. His thoughts tumbled in confusion over a waterfall, a wheel. Council House snowcovered plain horses. And always Elina.

His mouth sucked. He was sucking eagerly humming mumbling growling snuffling at something held to his mouth. Elina was putting something in his mouth, something to drink. He sucked snorted in his sleep. The dangling slumping body profoundly unconscious as the ribcage no longer expanded, the heart slowed its beating.

PART NINE: VENASKA

[38] *p. 450 not be calmed*: Once in the north, among the conifers and lakes of the March, the imperious Marion Divoise had lived, La Balladeuse, who drew girls and men to her without knowing how it happened, and who watched fearful as they thronged to her, and remained alone.

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