ALFRED DÖBLIN

WALLENSTEIN

Translated by C D Godwin

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VOLUME TWO

Book 4: Collegial Convention in Regensburg
Book 5: Sweden
Book 6:Ferdinand

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Volume 1 contains full translations of the first three Books:

Book 1:	Maximilian of Bavaria
Book 2:	Bohemia
Book 3:	War

Volume II contains full translations of the final three Books:

Book 4:	Collegial Convention in Regensburg
Book 5:	Sweden
Book 6:	Ferdinand

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Book 4
Collegial Convention in Regensburg

22. Christians

THROUGH THE PAIR of crystal windows in the ornate pretty chapel of the Residence in Munich shone a red wintry sun. The narrow vaults, white polished plaster, took on purplish flecks and lines, as if breathed upon. Floor of jasper and agate; on it the Bavarian court on kneeling-stools; Spanish costumes, lowered shoulders, bowed heads – grey hairs, white wigs, dark tamed locks. On the pulpit to the left of the big silver altar with the relics and St George on his charger – in gold, three plumes on a helmet set with diamonds, rubies, emeralds – a tall priest with glowing eyes, dressed in a tight-drawn black Jesuit robe, was speaking. In his intimidating enthusiasm he waved his arms over them, though they weren't looking:

"It is permitted sooner to hate God than to love him. For God is too far from us, too lofty; it is a sin to approach too close to him, even in our thoughts. To dare to love him like this or that everyday person, drape ornaments jewels and gold on him in order to demonstrate tender feelings: this serves only to demean him. It constitutes an insult to his divinity. Crawl before him, shrink from him, resent him even: this well befits a person. In that moment when you no longer fear God, you have already denied him. He has not suffered you to be his friend, is not your father, mother, your paramour, your bosom brother. He is not even your king and prince; he declines to be your judge, his judgement is not accessible to you, he pronounces judgement when he chooses and on whomever he chooses. He does not permit us to comprehend him, or investigate his being, and so in his presence the only proper feeling is one of Awe – and with this you have fulfilled your duty as human beings.

"Woe to those who believe that God is our Father; almost no further step is needed to embrace heresy. So Sunday should be held holy, for the sake of God; yet you do not hold God holy? Forget not who you are, whence you have come. Do you know how the original sin of your life came about? Are you conscious of all the sins you drag around ever since that day – auspicious day, or inauspicious? See the baseness of humanity, its pitiful desires – and you the children of God! Look at your day, filled with toil, the satisfaction of bodily needs, a hundred vexations, a hundred joys, all blown away, of no more weight than a lightning flash. Lawsuits – envy – the urge for riches, for status – rebellious underlings: this is your life once you are fully grown, or old. Now more fun, now less, games, men, women, wine, beer, tourneys, deer, boar, music, pictures, sleep, languor, comfort, bitterness – all for nothing and a bit. Gloom and groaning when you grow gouty and bent, crouched behind the stove, your empty jaws sup only broth, pain in the kidneys, constipation, incontinence, stomach cramps, and then sleep and sleeplessness.

"Such is the life of the child of God. You feel ashamed, I feel it with you all; you need but grasp this, remember it, keep it always in view. Yes, reflect, remember! Calm the soul, quench all desire! Know him alone, God alone; you have the right to know his name, hear of his existence: it is enough and enough for us. Have the right to fear God: see, I have said it.

"And you feel that I speak the truth. Truth is with me. We do not cradle ourselves in the sentiments and dreams of a maidservant. For us, life is too serious; it is ever present to us, we know it, have endured it, know what awaits us today, tomorrow. There will be no angel to

greet us, no promise will be made to us. Let us leave aside the games of children, the dear things, and of fools, the dear things.

"Tomorrow bells will ring out and there will be early Mass. Menials will clomp about the courtyards, the steward will sit high on horseback with his whip and plumed hat. Tomorrow early the bells will ring out: we shall lie half asleep on our backs, then sit up, say our prayers; and the cries of infants for milk and attention resound in our ears. We drink our morning broth, it may be thin and cold, we must inspect our cellars where we keep our treasure and our goods, fasten the chests, for soon carts will rattle across the bridge; they must all be loaded and sealed; we shall exchange curses with the labourers, who will try to cheat us about their wages, we shall be on guard; peasants shuffle past.

"When the bells ring out tomorrow, a mother will have given birth, she will rejoice, her husband will rejoice, and the siblings gaze on the poor little worm. And in many places during this night a change has occurred, one has died of hunger, or of cold by a well, at a stable door, one has been struck down by robbers, one swept away by fever, someone old, sick, who welcomes death, snuffed out in the bedroom. Our life, our life! How can anyone be proud! How can anyone dare be proud, and claim the title Human in a boastful tone – unless he has formed an image based on the strength of his muscles, the cunning of his thoughts, the immoderation of his desires! And what dumb beast is not, in that respect, his superior.

"Our life, our life! We have died a thousand times, out of pride, when we have seen what we are; and it is not by the emperor's crown, the prince-elector's crown resting on our head, nor by the bishop's mitre, the tons of gold, that we are lifted up, but rather by Awe, and horror. Our only comfort is our inability to reflect. Forgetfulness, intoxication only feign to carry us across the abyss. As far as we can see, the only salvation against death and nothingness is Awe.

"Break, o my knees! O my heart, let your pillars fall! Roof above, crush me! Let a hundred cannon, a hundred siege guns be aimed at me: here are my heart, my eyes. I am annealed. Yet still I can laugh at you. You turn iron and marble to dust in the air. I can pray, can tremble!"

Frail old Duke William fell forward from his stool, his pale face slumped, the stool scraped sideways. His son the Prince-elector, hard-faced, grabbed at him.

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As the priest came down from the Neue Veste and passed by the wide stables not far from the Chamber of Curiosities, a man, unarmed, touched his sleeve in the fading light and spoke to him as he turned and stopped; said with a timid expression that he'd prefer not to stand here under the eyes of passers-by and the prince's guards. They slipped quickly down a side alley.

"You are the priest who gave the sermon in Our Lady's; I heard you. I'm one of Tilly's men, I'd like to talk to you."

"What do you want," asked the Jesuit, quite calm.

In a rasping voice, looking wolfishly at him out of satin eyes, the undersized bearded man, a livid scar running from the right brow down to the corner of his mouth, begged that he might speak with the priest in a closed room, wherever he liked; speak about matters that lay on his heart; swore he had no weapon, no hostile thoughts; he needed help. They went by a devious route past the Jesuit College, at the back wall climbed the steps to the big Synod

House. In the dark cell the cleric set a candle at the doorpost; the room was small and high, quite bare; above a bookshelf on the long wall hung a picture of St Francis in the wilderness.

The stranger sat beneath the candle; after much urging from the priest at last explained himself. Born of Protestant parents in Austrian territory, was converted many years ago by a Commission.* Parents gone missing, or killed in the uprisings; – and here he came to a stop, his eyes glancing ever and again at the big painting. Then he wanted to know: What's the meaning of that picture? The priest made some reply. And now the stranger's words came swift and tumbling: He's come – it's been prophesied to him, he'll be killed this year in the war, in Lombardy, he needs an amulet, trusts no one else, he's desperate, desperate. Tears stood in his eyes, he sobbed, sobbed, stared piteously at the priest. Carefully suppressing a smile, the priest asked if he had really attended the sermon.

"You have an amulet," the man pleaded mulishly, still gazing at St Francis. "You know everything, I listened to you, give me one. Have a heart."

"My dear man, if you are destined to die, as you say, my amulet will be of no help."

"I don't want to die, your reverence. My father and mother are already dead, for nothing. I've broken no laws. All I've ever had is troubles and grief, and now I'm to die."

"My dear fellow, you must put all thought of magic charms out of your head. That's wicked soldier-talk. Be pious, pray."

The haunted man's eyes were eager in the candlelight: "Will God help me?"

"Pray."

"But will he help me."

"You must not make demands."

"What's the point of praying if it doesn't help? Give me an amulet."

"Fellow, go on your way. I can do nothing for you."

The priest rose calmly to his feet. The man clenched his fists: "But I am no fool or rogue, to be sent away like this and fobbed off with words."

"You are a fool. And that's putting it mildly."

The soldier trembled in the doorway, standing behind his chair. "Because I won't pray? Others too don't want to pray. And they have no such rotten luck, they don't have to die."

"Who in your wicked company will not pray?"

"Who? You have to ask? Your own pupils, you've brought it to that. For sure. My best friend was a novice of yours, he advised me to attend your service. I don't regret it, I noticed well that you see everything rightly, and agreed with all of it. And now you fob me off."

The priest stepped closer to the weeping man, who held his crumpled felt hat to his eyes. "Who sent you to attend my service?"

"Who? Who?" the other mocked, stubborn and fierce. He stared briefly at the priest, then rammed the hat back on his head and with two strides leapt at the painting of St Francis, pulled it down, rushed at the priest who stood there shocked, butted him in the chest with the picture and away through the open door. The frame caught the candle, left darkness behind.

A week later, as the priest entered the building, Brother Porter announced that a young man was waiting for him in his cell. The priest was able to dismiss the porter, who accompanied him for protection; he recognised the young man at once. Only when they entered the cell did he notice that the tanned man with the refined features dragged a painting behind him. The priest stared hard: “It was you?”

“I didn’t send him, Father. He was always at my heels, he’s a helpless creature. I had to take the picture off him by a trick. Here it is.”

“Thank you. Have you a request? Leave it by the wall.”

“Unlike my timorous friend I’m not going to die, but as you see: here I am.”

“Do you have a request?”

“I won’t ask you for an amulet. May I speak with you?”

The priest sat at the window, where crumbs had been scattered for birds. “Your parents greatly lamented your leaving.”

The man by the lectern smiled grimly: “I chose a truly spiritual occupation, please tell them that. I became a soldier, now under my third banner. I must struggle like the angels and devils for my soul; whoever is not strong loses the struggle.”

“You serve under Tilly?”

“Don’t ask about me, Father. Tell me, what do I need?”

“Speak out, my son.”

“I’ve fought in a dozen big battles, been captured, escaped. I’ve lived my life year by year since I ran away from you, just as I wanted. When my regiment of pikemen was disbanded I begged, found work, got up to no good; and when by chance I found myself here and heard you preach, see, Father, none of them sitting there thirsted so avidly for your words as I. You must tell me more. I – need it.”

The priest, bitter: “Thirsted – that was not necessary. But you are a young blood, and are sure you will be forgiven.”

“Speak to me of God.”

“Go strike men dead – Danes, Swedes, and do not ask about God.”

“How does it stand with God? When I studied with you, read from Thomas and Aristotle, I quite forgot to attend to what they were saying; I took it in without thinking. Now I need it; how does it stand with Him?”

“So you are afraid, dear boy.”

“How must I think of Him while I live, and of myself when I die?”

The priest sat at the window where birds were hopping, hunched low over his knees. “The only thing you need do is break your pride. You can do nothing more than tear God from your heart. Mark this! Carry it always with you. Yes, tear God from your heart. Before that vast eternal being, every stale insolent thought of yours must remain silent, your eyes blind. It is written: take not His name in vain: but that’s not enough. Don’t bother him with your death. His name, I tell you, must be eradicated in you. He should be nothing more than the warning

sign at the brink of a dreadful abyss: 'Here and no further!' Yawning abyss! No one, living or dead, has a claim on Him. Nothing is given to us from Him. Woe to those who merely think on Him. But you are right, dear boy, there's no need to ask me: you do what you like, murder, steal, go to church, give alms, love, marry – it's no concern of His. Who cares? Paltry human! I am not His advocate. But be sure of this: God lives. Just not ours."

The other rested elbows on his knees, chin in hand: "Not think on him! Who then placed Him in our hearts? That was a crime against humanity. If you're right, that is, Father."

The priest calmly stood up: "I have spoken, Vincent."

"It's no help to me, Father, what you've said. It might have been enough when I was your student. Now I need something more."

"Take Saint Francis as your bosom companion."

"You can't brush me off so easily. But I think you don't mean to mock me. Why do you need saints, and the Saviour?"

"The Saviour tells us how we should live."

"Reverence, how did the Saviour come by God's word?"

The priest, back turned, kept silent a long while. "We are Christians, we pray to Christ."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

The priest turned a stern tight face to him: "There is nothing unclear. Pride is to be broken, in every human. The god you have in you is the last remnant of heathendom. 'God,' says the heathen; no matter one god or many. You've been allowed to get away with it for so long. Now it's time." He glared grimly at the soldier: "Is it not true, you wish to become a heathen?"

Unsettled, tormented, his tone challenging: "I don't know."

"What don't you know?"

"Whether you are a Christian."

The Jesuit smiled coldly, slowly drew back his head. The soldier pointed: "You're laughing!"

"There is no one more Christian than I."

Eyes blazed from the doorway: "You want to bring people to despair. I've prayed, had fun, felt I was up to hard tasks – through God. Now that's to be taken away."

The priest sat at the window, said nothing.

"It's all to be taken away." – "Yes."

Arms flailing: "For what? For whose benefit?"

"My dear boy, now I must laugh. I am a priest of the Church; how should people be any concern of mine."

"So take yourself off, Father, and bring your wisdom to the pope, the bishops and monks. They are there for us people."

"No need; they already know it."

"And what do they say?"

"Well, they don't trouble themselves with God. For they are pious. They help people by busying them with devotions, spiritual exercises. For Christianity, only a very few are ready."

The young soldier: "I'm not one of them." – "No."

"I wanted to establish God again in me. I wanted to pray to Him, be led to Him. To Him."

"No."

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Wallenstein in conversation with the Venetian Pietro Vico, who was floating ideas for a crusade against the Grand Turk: "Tell me something new, sir, I beg you! I fought for Ferdinand at Gradisca. Wittelsbach has delusions of grandeur, has never forgotten Emperor Louis the Heretic* who fought against the pope. Wittelsbach should have been beaten down; now he sits there on the Isar, the dark man, primps and preens himself, counts his pennies, denies his stomach. A prince!"

"He won't set himself against the Emperor."

"Ferdinand is the best of men, a noble man, a knight. He is a child. If you doubt this, just look at the outcome of this evil war. He was supposed to crack the skulls of those worthy Bohemians, my kinsmen. Had to perform his imperial duty, that's all. But he was a child. I can just picture him glowing with imperial pride, seeing victory over the Bohemians in his pocket. And then to go like that to the Bavarian!"

"Yes, he was ill advised."

"Into the lion's den, thinking to devour a calf! Whyever did he go to Maximilian just then? Because Munich was on the way back from Frankfurt. Do you know those advisers at the court in Vienna? – 'I simply must offer thanks to the man in Munich, show myself to him, you can't stop me' – and then right away they had something else to think about."

"And there Max had him!"

"The mouse came out to play right under the cat's nose."

"Haha."

"Cat ate it up. Grabbed it, threw it around a bit, then down the hatch." Wallenstein continued: "Well, sir, he'd waited long enough for the Emperor. Who couldn't avoid him. He'd helped him don the imperial robes,* but only to have the pleasure of dragging him down to himself. 'Show me what you're wearing!' says Max. And when Ferdinand left Munich, he was almost no longer emperor."

"My dear sir, those times, thank goodness, are long past. Soon you shall have a free hand for all sorts of things."

Wallenstein's laugh was shrill: "I should have been in Vienna when they helped Ferdinand down from his carriage after that trip: basted, lame, dumb. And none of them knew what was up, and after all he'd won the prize in Frankfurt, was Roman Emperor, and had already nabbed victory over the Bohemians. I wonder what went through their minds, those wise old men in the Castle! 'The Emperor's sick, he's melancholy,' they cried morning and night, sent for physicians all over the empire."

"That they did."

The Duke laughed immoderately: "They'll have purged him to kingdom come. He atoned all right for seeking the congratulations of his cousin Max."

23. Demons

TO THE VILLAGE of Bubna near Prague, where the Duke had a dairy farm, came a troupe of players conjurers quacksalvers. They first cried their skills fit to be heard all the way to Prague, then built a fence of boards, erected a deep stage. Invited by the Duke to his little summer lodge, some of them one afternoon performed, under strictest secrecy, a special entertainment.

A large hall was placed at their disposal. Elegant ladies and gentlemen occupied the balconies and galleries, servants clustered at the open doors. Spiral stairs wound down into the hall. At the start of the performance a masked player shouted from the door – he wore Greek-style buskins strapped around the calf, a loose white Greek toga, his right hand grasped a hammer from which a lightning-bolt projected; he had the imperious dour expression of a Zeus: Somehow the troupe neglected to include me in the play. You may come down into the hall, if you please; there'll be such jolly fun.

It was dreadfully hot in the hall. If you looked down, the air roiled and curled over the polished floorboards as from an oven or a blaze. But those who went down noticed no heat, felt no constriction of the chest. Standing tall and oversized, two tawny chimpanzees wandered the boards, dropped now and then onto their hands and ran about. They clambered up pillars, gazed and spat across at the galleries, came back down, flaunted high rumps as they scampered on all fours. Where they had sprung from was a mystery. More and more figures appeared down below, from who knew where. A young lady pulled free of her chaperone, she wanted to see the funny monkeys close to. As her foot touched the lowest step and the heated air of the hall assaulted her, she rushed forward: now a naked figure ran about, jumped up and down in high spirits spinning about itself, yelping. Slowly and without embarrassment she betook her plump pink limbs, buxom body up to one of the brown-furred chimpanzees; it slid across the floorboards as if on ice. A black tail long as an arm, whip-thick, had grown from her spine; she flicked the creature on the nose with it; she still wore her silver shoes and gay dangling garters, her excessively large breasts shook, blond curls swayed like a cowl over the amused snub-nosed face. The two apes romped behind her, then flung their arms around each other and began to dog her steps.

Close by the stairs a grave little man lay quietly on the floor, having turned unhappily this way and that, began crawling on hands and knees. People stepped on him, scolded him; he begged their pardon, kept crawling between their legs, under their feet. Now and then he raised himself, caught his breath, looked grave and sad directly into faces, went again about his work. None were puzzled by any other; all were intent solely on themselves.

An elderly lady joined in. She wore an expensive sable stole, kept it on despite the heat; observed everything eagerly, but from time to time her uneasy hands fiddled under the chin with the clasp of the stole. Suddenly she emitted a horrible scream, tore the stole from her as if suffocating. And now she stood on the spot bare-throated, feet apart; bent back her head,

took a deep breath, and from the florid face overtopped by a tall grey wobbling wig came a donkey-like trumpeting honk, lips turned blue, the waving arms trembled and dropped the fan. She quickly walked on, retrieved the fan with a swish of silken skirts, breathed heavily, seemed somewhat relieved. Only to emit as if inspired, after a few turns that slowed, became hesitant, with much stroking of the fur, the same harsh bray. It at once drew loud laughs from all around, including the spectators; she responded by turning pale and indignant.

An officer who braved the descent to the hall met with a serious mishap. He planned to put on a special show for the gallery with his sword and muscular prowess. He crept unnoticed down the stairs, slipped on the last few steps and bounced across the floor. And now he couldn't stop moving. He looked like a little carved wooden manikin, legs tight together, hands clasped, thick neck, thick head; now he stood on his hands, now jumped upright, fell on his back, now whipped over on his belly, back on his feet in a flash, stood still, took a step. But the lead foot pushed him into the air, he had a struggle to bring the other foot along, and in this way he hurried about the hall, rising a yard high at each step, always striving to cast a friendly smile at those below and up in the galleries, show them his sword, his mighty arm muscles. At once the hall turned against him, threw him to his knees, hurried him along.

Many more came; it was evident to all that the situation harboured the seeds of uproar and discord, that they were faced with an evil entity. This became clear when a priest dared to enter the fray with a determined expression, prayer-book under his arm. On the stair he pressed the book to his chest with his left hand, with the right he held aloft a silver crucifix. He meant to exorcise the hall. In fact, as soon as he stepped down a furious tumult erupted, screams everywhere, figures tumbling madly about. At the same time the hot vapour swirled around him in curious swaying spirals, thickened like smoke; as he brandished the crucifix, flames flickered at the tips; with challenging composure he opened the prayer book, the pages crumpled, turned yellow, dark brown along the edges. And suddenly the book was ablaze; the shocked man dropped it, the book lay smouldering on the floor. When he let go the melting blue-flaming crucifix and blew on his burned hand, he gave a sigh from his inmost being; the black-haired long-gowned man closed his eyes, lifted his arms in a yearning gesture; the cassock with its wide sleeves was already fading in waves of acrid air. He could dance a jig like nobody in the hall, a slender youthful body on long legs in linen hose. He gazed out from artless big blue eyes, sang what sounded like a hymn. His voice, a bright trill, resounded triumphant above all the noise; belted out so prettily and joyfully that up in the galleries they looked shyly at one another from little eyes, spoke of trivialities and had to suppress the tremors within. He had a slightly foolish young man's face, with a snub nose. Soon one of the chimpanzees came and dragged him by the ears; the people watched anxiously, the singing was interrupted by little frightened squeals.

It all made a seductive impact on the servants thronging the doorways. Doorkeepers barred the way with staffs, but it was too enticing. As the vapour swirled thicker in the hall, little groups of people ran in, a moment ago they could only stretch out their hands, now they were in a Tower of Babel, limbs asprawl, tongues hanging, making odd faces, strangers to one another, filled with an unfamiliar restlessness and contentment. They collided as if dreaming, rebounded away, collided again, could never have enough of it. They leapt, under some

impetus shoved each other into the hall, and were then suddenly deflated, strangely lost and confused. A few noblemen went gravely among the throng, raised their arms, cried with a flourish of the hat: “Here is the renowned So-and-so, praise him, honour him;” went on with a solemn grimace. If someone asked: “What can you do, sir?” he answered: “Anything you like; nothing is obscure to us. Praise us, honour us!” They spread their arms, nodded respect.

Horses pranced among them, each with a man on its back. Dogs leapt wolfishly; no dog had entered the hall. Several gentlemen stared around after making loud noises, then polluted the floor, there was a stink, they pointed, seemed delighted, neighed laughter. One man, tears dripping from his eyes, presented a dreadful sight: his jaw hung down to his knees; the gaping lips of a mouth full of teeth long as arms smacked monstrously; the skull and upper part of the face rose glumly behind; unseeing goggle eyes and shrivelled little belly trip-trapped on little legs like stalks. He clung pitiably to a pillar; stepped on from time to time, slurped snorted snarled horribly. Snuffling he would approach someone, grab the frozen shrieking man tight by the hands, the jaws loomed like pincers; he wrestled the twisting flailing man into his maw, sucked, turned blue. Under the horrified gaze of the onlookers he swallowed the creature into his swelling body. They beat at him, spat at him, he howled, sobbed; tears and drool trickled disgustingly. A few short minutes later, the bustle around the unspeaking fellow resumed as before. Only bluish transparent shadows of people stood close to him; these were ones he had swallowed earlier: from time to time they tried to force a way into his mouth to fetch their bodies, but he closed the jaws with some difficulty, teeth snapped angrily at them.

Breathless, drenched in sweat, several tried in distraught confusion to reach the stairs, the hall doors; now their former figure was restored; they grinned and lisped timidly. They made enquiries, a trembling was in them, they burst out laughing when people told them what was happening below, pushed their way roughly outside. Some, almost beside themselves, were seized by a melancholy, sat helpless, hid their faces.

Amid the hall’s heat and the growing press of people, the tumult grew. People hit out; gradually noticed one another. Any who did not slink away found this new home congenial. Suddenly the leaping man, the unhappy officer, sprang with this woman, then with that, up into the air; she screamed, he whooped, and though not entirely master of his legs he improvised a preposterous clacking dance over the heads of the throng. Once he pulled a half-choked victim from the giant-mouthed man’s teeth; roars from the frustrated fellow, wheezes from the rescued victim sailing limp through the room on the arm of the leaping man. The dogs kept up a running battle with the apes, now here now there across the floor. An impetuous decision led the hymn-singing youth, suddenly fallen silent, to assault the young horsetailed lady; she flung the tail around his throat, he upended her; she shrieked piteously.

A voice called out as animals milled about the hall in frightful numbers, horses, cows, boars, as various apparitions changed shape in the blink of an eye, tumbled head over heels; called out: “The Duke, the Duke,” the cries ever more piercing. A pillar of fire went through the hall; hissed like a waterspout, stretched slowly up to the ceiling; as it meandered turned to ashes people and animals who failed to move out of the way. Acrid smoke billowed.

Now those in the galleries and outside broke windows. Shattering screams arose from the hall and down from the galleries. The pillar of fire stood still. As if cut off at the knees, it

collapsed suddenly. Smoke swirled across the floor, lay thick on the creatures screaming singing helplessly in the tumult. Draughts of fresh air blew in.

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Following this alarming event, the population around Prague and in other Bohemian regions experienced a whole series of demonic irruptions. Two devils from Hell broke free of their chains and went marauding in Bohemia. They targeted in particular the region along the Elbe-side cliffs of Goat Mountain by Aussig, in the valley of Waldheim, let themselves be glimpsed in the dusky light of evening, soon were impudent enough to show themselves by day. In the months of April and May they were seen running around on triple-peaked Starling Rock with spears in their backs, long bobbing shafts, the barbed points embedded in the flesh above the hips; these must have been hurled at them from the pit of Hell as they made their escape. They went about like weary pioneers of an artillery regiment, as if what they carried on the back was a leather kitbag with trenching tools, from which they were loath to be parted.

But they were discovered on numerous occasions, as when a little bit drunk at the castle of Děčín they removed their cloaks and the guest-room servants suddenly made a grab for the jauntily bobbing shafts, thinking to remove them. Screams of blue murder, shrill yelps and howls arose, the two Grim Reapers flung up their arms, eyes starting like apples, bodies doubled up over their lovely waistcoats, the shafts quivered, metallic clanging on the floorboards, in a flash the pair rushed howling spreading smoke all around up the chimney; a green liquid leaked down from the shafts; they clattered and whistled on the roof.

By the end of May it was only too well known in the whole region that they were absconded demons. They once spoke of it themselves: During a disturbance in Hell none could hold us back; the tumult in Hell increases day by day, everyone growing bolder, it will come to violence; we are merely the forerunners of whole hordes.

Thereafter the pair allowed nothing more to be seen of them; and one evening cowherds on the slopes by Bodenstadt observed two figures wrestling silently in the clover, apparently going at one another with spears. But they were demons, who had sworn either to kill themselves or be rid of the spears. In the heat of battle they flung themselves right left; the shafts waggled over them like erect tails; suddenly one lifted the other up, a loud crack!, a piercing scream, whimpering; one lay pale and motionless on his back, the splintered spear thirty yards away, the victor crawled towards it, snuffled at the end where green satanic blood dripped. He lifted up his unconscious companion, dragged him along in his jaws by an arm, pulled out the spearhead and pissed burning urine into him, whereupon the other gagged, stirred and came round. They plugged the oozing hole in his back with tree bark. Then they went at it again, yelping. The victor ran howling with envy around the straight slim other, who picked up the detached iron spearhead, tied the other to a tree and began banging lustily on his spear-shaft, spat at him, and heedless of his wails pulled on the shaft until he fell on his back spraying green ichor – he'd soon be done for. The other, grimly determined, sat on him back to back, pressed the wound closed, plugged it with pitch that oozed from between his teeth, and with the body of a little kitten that happened to be lying at his feet.

And once they both appeared one noontime at the crossroads outside Bodenstadt, as naked hairy demons with ungainly horse's hooves, red fur, staring goggle eyes, hanks of black

hair combed backwards, hardly bigger than boys of ten; they jabbered coarsely together. Birds in the fields flew up at their approach. Suddenly the demons themselves flapped as ravens behind a young girl, dropped to her shoulders jabbing sharp beaks into her bare flesh. Blood-curdling yells from women and lads; horrible to hear, the bellowing of spooked oxen, hens flapping, pigs squealing. Peasants barricaded their doors, bells pealed. A good hour later two fashionable gentlemen came along, mud on their silk-laced shoes, seemed exhausted. They gazed in surprise at the empty village street, called softly for people, a mug of wine, fingered their swords. Doors opened hesitantly, people enquired through windows whether they had not seen something. But they had noticed nothing, had only – they said this with a puzzled air – smelled a disgusting stink, but that might have come from a mouldering cow.

The peasants would have suspected deception, had not the dumb beasts still been kicking vigorously in their stalls; the barber was still treating the hole in the poor girl's shoulder. They came out, all smiles that two noble trustworthy gentlemen should come along just at this moment. One of the gentlemen, lips contorted in fierce glee, observed the girl's wound through his spyglass; she flinched back wailing, ran across the street, summat's not right with them, one of 'em's the demon that pecked me. General mockery of the wounded girl from the peasants thronging the street; they bowed to the visitors.

But the gentleman had been ready for the rabid girl, he made them show him the salved wound again, he would apply an Italian cure. The girl resisted, the man raged with a harsh laugh and threats. The shamed and offended peasants pushed the struggling maiden into a shed; haughtily he dismissed the mob. He sat alone facing the girl, gazed at her, feasted on her fear. And as he grinned and folded his arms behind his back, his nose grew long and suddenly it was a thick strong beak, his loose cloak was splayed and lifted by ruffling plumage, and a raven sat there on the bench, jabbed its beak into the wound, pecked, hacked, tore. It flapped around the girl as she jumped up beating about her and bleating horribly; forced her away from the wall, out from a corner, went for her forehead, the screaming mouth, clawed and cawed, had its fun. With one leg it held fast to the apron-string at her shoulder, then sank its head into the bloody wound, meanwhile felt with the other leg for her mouth, clawed streak after streak from her nose downwards. Its fat feathery body pressed against her pallid cheek, beak stabbing; it jumped onto her nose directing jabs left and right at her flailing hands, pulled her knotted hair into disarray, the powerful wings beat before her eyes, blinding her.

So engrossed was it in the frenzied struggle that it failed to notice the knocking. Only when the door burst open did it flap wildly up from her. All saw the mighty raven, feathers flying. At the very same moment there sat the sword-clinking gentleman, he lunged fuming, eyes flashing, right at them: What impertinence, he'd only been driving out the evil spirit that had entered her; see the feathers, now it's vanished, useless unruly fools and bumpkins that you are. His hands were behind his back; when he brought them forward they were bloodstained up to the knuckles. In their terror they kept silent, let him through, the girl threshed unconscious on the ground, foaming. In the priest's parlour the two gentlemen calmed down over a glass of wine; they caroused noisily all afternoon, until towards evening the hapless cleric plucked up the courage to celebrate late Mass: he meant to question them, what had brought them to this village, such an honour, by what paths had they come, and – .

And as he sat lost in thought in the sexton's room it seemed already to him that he was growing, that something sacred was speaking through him; he was almost choleric and could hardly be restrained from taking to his heels. For the other peasants too had grown suspicious, they stood outside the little church muttering darkly together in fear. Stuck their heads through the window of the priest's house: the guests had flown. The one who had kept in the background went whistling around the neighbourhood, took an interest in granaries ovens larders cattlesheds, kept asking his cringing guide what it was they mostly lived on here, what would cause them most torment and misery. The crops had failed that year, the rain seemed never-ending, the sun had shone warm only a short time, barely a week to mow and bring in the hay; grain black with ergot.

The noble gentleman, dazzled by the novelty, drank it all in. His insistent questions were strange; but whenever one of the hoi polloi came up to laugh at him and quickly run away, the gentleman would transfix him lightning-fast with a dreadful eye that stabbed to the heart; the fellow would clutch his chest; who knew a man's eye could move that fast. Hissing softly, looking at the ground, the gentleman would enquire after his friend, disappear around the corner. And at once would be back again, scolding: Where's my friend, has some harm been done to him, I'll lodge a complaint with the regional governor, the vice-regent in Prague; railed, screamed: I want to know right now – where is my dear companion.

A black hen clucked on a roof; he cawed, cackled mocking at it, over his shoulder saw the priest approaching, tore the biretta from the priest's head, slipped through the open door of the church, cackled again in the doorway grinning: I shall seek my friend. And already the space inside was filled with tumult, laughter, clapping. He mocked the priest from behind the altar: "Bring me my little brother," whooped, lured on, the priest tried to recover his biretta, a cold slime sprayed over him, he flinched back in disgust, in his horror climbed the tower stairs, pulled on the bell rope. The alarum rang out across the valleys. Nearby villages responded, he kept going tirelessly, amid the hellish crashing and commotion below he tugged at the bells and made them peal out. They hopped from altar to confessional, squatted spreading filth on statues of saints, crucifixes. Neighbours arrived with creaking wagons, brought axes fire-pumps water-buckets, piled up in the lanes.

The priest, rigid with terror, in the stretching and straining of his arms heard and saw nothing. He was still in the tower when the bell, swinging high suddenly, came out of its seat and slammed down to the street, killing a pig as it shattered. The same impetus swung him to the side, he followed the bell, head upturned, his neck snapped. Space, the church itself, began to shake, expand, spread out, chalk dust trickled down the walls, a hole suddenly gaped in the wall of the tower, as well as falling stones two copper-red figures with tails emerged zigzagging. A bleating in the air. In the tumult below, the villagers began to quarrel; the neighbours thought they had been hoaxed, in some puzzling manner an obscure rage flamed in them: they had to scratch and gouge as if to soothe a maddening itch. Bells were still ringing out from nearby villages; people ran shouting down from the hills, along the brooks, horrible wrinkled faces, thick bulging lips, groaning breasts, interrupting their work, a meal, their sleep, wherever they stood or lay. Down by the collapsed church they punched and scratched, demented men and women no longer knew who they were. All must go in the pot.

At a pause in the fracas one would gaze troubled and distressed at another's throat, squeeze the neck; it was the imperative of a terrible teeth-grinding all-pervading passion.

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Peasants cast ploughs aside, sent their women to watch the cattle, sat gloomily outside doors and cowsheds, smacked their lips. In many a spot they came together in crowds, loitered, took comfort in the sight and feel of one another. They ambled aimlessly down to the woods, clustered at manor houses, scattered again across fields. They clumped mutely, under a spell, helpless, mistrustful, stood with sluggish humours by little wooden wayside shrines, crucifixes. No one drove them away. They snuffled grimly at the shrine. One cried in contempt: "We have no reason to linger. We'll be on our way."

"We shall stay here."

They searched each other's faces, clustered, felt again the strength of a neighbour's muscles, crowded together. Closed in on the crucifix. Those at the back felt left out, pushed harder, the cry ran forward: "That thing can't stay in our field." Harsh laughter with it.

"Christ, Christ!" stolid from those at the front, almost touching the shrine.

"The priests put it there."

"They know why they do it."

"Caps off! So you know and don't forget what you must do at such a place. The reverend priest put this up."

"It cannot stay in our field." In all of them an urge to act, leaping from muscle to muscle.

"Knock it down." – "Down with the shameless thing!" – "Shameless." Every cry strong enough to draw fifty more behind. Those cowering at the front, praying almost, were shoved helplessly against the shrine; the mob broke the post in two, smashed it. Now they knew what they wanted: on to the next crucifix; the hunt was on for shrines of the crucified man.

From scattered cottages on the ploughed slopes, people watched dismayed and upset, shut themselves in: "That's not the way at all. They won't manage it like that." The grey priest of the parish, suddenly infected, crumpled his cassock and stormed off down to his flock, from his tempestuous breast delivered a furious sermon: It's holy work you are about, I am on your side, someone has stolen our Christ and put a false one in his place. The mob swallowed him, it was a battering ram hurling itself at the wooden shrines. Ever and again he struggled free, the cry rose on all sides, everyone gladly took up the refrain: "They stole our Christ. This is not our Christ. It's the Christ of the gentry, the princes, knights. Believe me! A false Christ. A mark of serfdom. They've built castles with cannon, ramparts, ditches, walls, to keep us down. Churches are castles. The Saviour wanted to free us from them, they've taken him into the churches, bound him, locked him in. He stands in our fields so we know we are serfs, must remain in our servitude. Come all ye that labour – hoho, kneel down, ye that labour. In Rome he sits in his Peter's castle all of gold. Satan has vanquished the Saviour. He's stolen him away!"

"We must set him free!" – "The pope's in on it." – "To the church." – "Save Jesus!"

Men and women came running from Aussig and Děčín, the mob grew, an agitated mass eager for action, yet deep down troubled by a feeling they were on the wrong path; ever and

again they faltered, sought to calm themselves. “We’re spreading the gospel of Jesus, that the gentry stole from us.” – “Deceivers! Rogues!”

Yet they assaulted not manor houses, not the estates of nobles, but only churches from village to village. And their rage only grew under the sense of a wrong path taken. Beating on house doors they cried: “Get up! Bring out your Christ! His image here, out with it, it’s a false one.” They hauled dung-carts from sheds, hitched oxen, piled on crucifixes, images, prayer books. Women wept at windows, children shrank back in fear from fathers who had no eyes for them. A young one-eyed peasant from Aussig, formerly one of Mansfeld’s men, wept passionately, waved his arms at the piled up cart: “Our Lord Jesus Christ has been besmirched. Thou wast not our shield, because we never knew thee. It’s not our fault, we didn’t know. It’s not our fault we came too late to think on thee. Forgive us sinners!”

Many bystanders sank to their knees. Frightened cries: “Jesus, Jesus!” – “Forgive us!” – “Mercy!” The strong, the angry would not be swayed: “We’ll save him!” One man pushed his way through, arms thrusting like a swimmer’s he reached the encircled well; when he began to pull on the pump handle people melted back. Tiger-fierce he carried the filled bucket to the cart. Everyone watched intently. With a great swing he tipped water over the crucifixes, called out in a savage broken tone: “Second baptism. It’s done!” Joyfully, arms raised he gazed at the trickling heap, and around him silent people stretched arms out to him. “Into the earth!” shouted the fanatical baptist, shook himself, turned pale. Unthinkingly obedient, they pushed the cart out of the alley, at the first meadow dug a hole with picks, tipped the crucifixes in, even the ones with the mildest face and women weeping at the feet.

“His body in the earth. He himself, raised again from the dead, lives in Heaven above.”

As the mob surged on: “Now we’ve managed it all so well, should we not head for Prague and tell the governor what we’ve done and what we think?” The berserk baptist, angrily grinding his teeth: “Let’s head to Vienna, the Emperor, and tell him we want no more lords over us and no violence and acknowledge over us only Jesus Christ and the Roman Emperor. We demand an accounting for the desecration of our beloved Saviour, we want our Jesus back. And recompense.” – “Recompense, recompense!”

People running up asked: “Where to?” From the back, the middle: “Where are we off to?”

24. ‘Naught to do with Religion’

EMPEROR FERDINAND observed with deepest satisfaction how the German Empire had been brought to heel. It was his decision that had set in motion the dreadful Wallenstein machinery, he alone had prevented any curbing of the machine; on and on it toiled. At court people would rise to their feet meaning to sully his delight; he would stare back with unruffled composure, twinkle sympathetically, majestically. Prince Eggenberg is too soberly conscious of his safety, unable to play, unable to win; good, one can make use of him. Trautmannsdorf has courage, but he likes to take his crooked back and lie in the sun, look on yawning from his cosy corner. Big Lamormaini grunts his pleasure, sniffs the great roast being prepared for the Church in the north; enough said, any more would be carping, nothing that concerns that man has ever gone entirely right. Money cannot flow fast enough to Herr Meggau; Baron Stralendorf grumbles

about an unseemly army only half Catholic, as if repression from a Protestant hand is less rigorous than from a Catholic. And what is he up to in Munich, dethroned Max, no longer playing emperor but just one prince among many, gnashing his teeth. It was he who conjured this adventure in what is already the distant past, but for his urging the Duke of Friedland would never have risen so high to be taken on as imperial General. The Emperor owes him thanks, but the Bavarian is unhappy at the course of events; it seems, really seems, that nothing in the Empire pleases him any more, it's no fun being the sacrifice. And victory is no fun for the Duke of Friedland. His fate has burdened him, there's bad poisonous blood in him. When he conquered Lower Saxony it drove him on to Denmark; when Denmark lay prostrate, Bethlen stirred; once Bethlen was pacified, the Turk beckoned; Friedland the burning sword that cannot but slash, someone must rein him in, control him.

But to Emperor Ferdinand everything was clear: his piety had been rewarded by the Mother of God with these men and a subjugated Germany. The Emperor, who in the months after the crushing of the Danes and Lower Saxons wandered still jaundiced from swamp fever about the castle or in Wolkersdorf or at Schönbrunn, now looked events straight in the eye, coyly and in tittering captivation, accepted them in furtive silence like a hermit who lets hinds and stags stray into his hut. He watched the destruction of the enemy in Silesia with painful excitement, then suddenly a crack appeared in him: he became clairvoyant. The huge campaigns came, the victories: he knew before they happened; it occurred to him he knew much more, it sometimes seemed Wallenstein knew this secret, but cold reports showed that the Duke was ignorant of what had occurred. And so the war danced on at his feet, mysteriously silent; ecstatic courtiers raved at every success, bells rang out across Holstein, Pomerania. Ferdinand was filled with a growing placid coyness. He became guarded, silent; over yonder he saw his fate playing out. A monstrous hand* was visible in these events driven by warriors horses cannon, the warriors had no idea what they were up to, why they fell; horses galloped and thought they obeyed the reins and the coachman, cannon were made of bronze, and not one believed that something more than the skill of their handlers steered the balls of stone, lead, chainshot. For those with eyes to see, a hand was writing on the soil of Lower Saxony and Holstein, the writing clearer line by line.

The Empress had to join in. For all his intimacy when together with her, taking a stroll, riding out, bringing her presents, Ferdinand seldom thought of her. He went about with his creation: a gentle absorbing woman filled with fierce passions; it was Heaven's grace that led her to him, she was the vibrant echoing space within his soul. Now at her side in a closed chaise across May-bright hills, he showed in little phrases how matters were progressing out there. Ferdinand's face had still not recovered from his sickness; the almost bald little skull draped in folds of skin moved on a wobbling neck, his chilled collapsed body bent, curled like a hedgehog in brown and dappled heaps of furs, hands and feet often trembling. The white-blue eyes were content to gaze straight ahead. He whispered humbly: "We are a tool of the Almighty. The prayers and intercessions were not in vain."

The lady from Mantua, torn from all her connections, allowed herself to be carried along almost unresisting; a sense of profound sinfulness never left her. Gritting her teeth she bent bowed braced herself at his side into the role he wrote for her; ever and again violated herself

in horror and bliss, uncurled just for him. The trilling folksongs of Lombardy, sweet, free, bearing in them the joy of a pure radiant landscape, memories of country dances, bright costumes, festivals – she would never hear them again, or only as a parody that pained her. What the Church was, that there must be a Church, a holy Church of blessings, became comprehensible to her in her sinfulness, her inconsolable alienation. At prayer she snuggled up to the Emperor, there was a pure blessed communion between them that absolved everything; and she was able to stroll with him without flinching; if only she could stay like this. She became patroness of new Orders, was drawn to old ones fallen into ruin; the treasury of grace she accumulated must alleviate her life, pour darkness down to shroud the path she walked. She discovered with suicidal joy that the harder colder air of this country pleased her by and by; that she went down streets here as if back home. Only foreigners visiting her from Savoy and Mantua found her unrecognisable with her strange wide eyes, saw how ravaged she was by grief; put it down to the lack of children.

And while the Emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was thrust up to the heights, steeped in victories that conferred on him a celestial power, in the Empire his adherents jostled to control the division of the looted spoils wherever they could be seized. Their hot eyes focused on the two archbishoprics twelve bishoprics in Lower Saxony, the famous towns of Magdeburg Bremen Halberstadt Merseburg Lübeck. Now they could seize what they had so long lusted after. These prince-bishoprics symbolised the decline of Catholic power. Slowly, imperceptibly almost, they had slid into Protestant hands. Those dark times were over. Among the Emperor's allies in the League the muttering never stopped as war bared its true face, all smiles towards Wallenstein's lot, all glares toward the Danes. They did not draw the Emperor into their secret, planned to confront him with demands like those claims for compensation during the Duke's rise to power. The sharp-eared gentlemen in Vienna diverted the stream, soothed the rage and opposition to Wallenstein's actions, all the while alluding to the prospect of the reversion of the bishoprics as a potential concession from the Emperor, but first victory, victory first. They became tractable; meanwhile the iron Bohemian's war-chariot rattled unhindered across Lower Germany. When the Bohemian and the Emperor with him blaze up in all their awful glory, negotiations over such demands will take on another aspect, and not to their liking: so thought the counsellors.

Clerical dignitaries turned up singly and in groups in Vienna; their representatives appeared at the Imperial High Court, before the Imperial Court Council. The smaller their bundle of legal papers the harder the case; it was certain, following the peace treaties of the previous century, that numerous estates, bishoprics and archbishoprics had fallen into the wrong hands – even if land and ruler had meanwhile turned Protestant. But the Church had been stripped of its property, according to the letter of the law had suffered injustice, like the injustice done to an invalid unable to eat, whose dinner is meanwhile gobbled by the healthy.

While the court kept its own counsel, the demands of the prelates grew shriller. Premonstratensians demanded restitution of their monasteries in the archbishopric of Magdeburg, even though barely the tiniest proportion of the population was still Catholic; the Benedictines were stirring. Without delay! they shouted in the courts of Vienna – the more heated as they observed from the splendours all around what sums were already flowing here

from the conquered lands; – At once! The illegitimate occupants must vacate and relinquish the buildings together with all movable possessions still within; the assets had been expropriated through ecclesiastical negligence, through the trickery and violence of heretics, thousands of souls deprived of eternal salvation. They flocked like creditors to the castle in Vienna, buzzed about the grave dreamy Emperor. No summons to an audience followed when Prince Eggenberg told him of this commotion among the Old Believers: "I am not the Emperor of Benedictines and Premonstratensians."

A dogged little abbot, Caspar von Questenberg, from Strahov monastery in Prague, found a way to smuggle himself in, prating effusively of his lost monastery of St Mary in Magdeburg, also of the monasteries God's-grace and Jericho in the same territory, until Ferdinand offered him with a sigh a note authorising a claim on the monetary value of those foundations. This failed to satisfy Caspar; prelates who learned of it saw only a sign of imperial opposition.

Abbot Anton of Krems-minster was a Benedictine, knew of his Order's estates that had been secularised; he turned to Eggenberg for assistance. The two old friends exchanged smiles: "I will merely repeat to you what His Majesty said to the canny Caspar: that he is not Emperor only for the monastic orders." Anton's view: Yet no one can be distressed by the execution of legal decisions; only heretics and rebels will be divested. Eggenberg lifted a hand: "He won't."

"He will want it, Eggenberg. One can entertain a different view, but one can also say: it is not seemly to dine at a full board and let others go hungry."

"It's not like that, you misprise him."

"I know it's not. But we want our dinner."

And others cried not Hunger, but Revenge against the Protestants for dissolving the monasteries and estates. The fiery abbot of Strahov spoke out frequently: the Church has lain for decades in agony, Lutherism has pounced on her and plundered her; body-snatching has occurred; the injustice must be rectified; penalties must follow. A provost of the Society of Jesus in Vienna spoke to Strahov; the Society was engaged in a growing programme to build new monasteries; the Jesuit praised the abbot's zeal, praised his arguments, found them incomplete. And delighted and fortified him with the suggestion that body-snatching requires two parties: one who has died, and one who lives. Did Lutheranism commit a crime by living at that time; was it to the Church's renown that she almost died? If weeds proliferate in a field, corn cannot thrive; when the weeds are cleared, crops find their place; herein lies justice and injustice: not with weeds and corn, but with gardener and peasant. The Church's gardeners failed to tend their patch. Now we shall regain everything, and let nothing hinder us. Away with weeds; make room for crops to flourish.

The clerical lords managed it so that abbot von Questenberg addressed a letter to the Duke of Friedland, explaining his advice to the Emperor and pondering possible military consequences should it be adopted. The Duke lay on the coast at Wismar, organising an army against Denmark and preparing against the threatened Swedish invasion. He wrote back: They should not bother him with politics.

Baron von Stralendorf, proponent of restitution in the Privy Council, turned up at the Town Hall in Wismar. What, an irritated Friedland demanded of the noble gentleman, was so

important about this matter that they send him a special investigator. After Stralendorf had detailed with some warmth the injustices suffered by the Church, the gaunt General, as he hustled the gentleman towards the door, declared that his wartime days did not permit long debates; if the estates in question belong to the holy Church, then the Imperial Court Chamber will pronounce a verdict, and then the only question will be how to execute it.

But when the tall baron remarked hesitantly that the Emperor might not view the matter entirely with favour, the General came alert, cast a shrewd penetrating glance his way. He summoned his friend, jovial Arnim von Boitzenburg, and asked him, as a Protestant, in the presence of the baron, who bowed his head, if he'd like to conquer Magdeburg for the Catholics. When the man turned pale and cast irresolute dismayed glances left and right, the General took his hand: It's not my idea, it's come from – somewhere, where it seems there's a hunger for cattle, but no rope to catch them with. Don't worry, I too lack rope for such cattle. And there – he taunted Stralendorf after dismissing Arnim – is his answer: the war has naught to do with religion, people should stop making difficulties.

But you are Catholic – the baron after a long pause raised his head; – do you not see benefit in exploiting the advantages for religion that arise in the course of the war.

"Perhaps people think yet again," the General retorted, "to put a spoke in my wheel. If I am Catholic, that's my affair. I'll thank you, sir, not to meddle. I delouse all rebels alike, whether Catholic or Lutheran."

Whereupon Stralendorf, very calm, made soothing noises: it was only a query, for which he was not to blame; in an empire there are numerous interests, many desires are in play. Wallenstein's gaze was sceptical: "The Emperor has perhaps grown too mighty for this one or that. They'd like to pinch him a little. And no doubt this or that one may enjoy fishing in troubled waters. He should not let himself become the tool of underhand mischief-making." Stralendorf's departure was no more ceremonious than his reception.

"They want him by the collar," Friedland stretched his arms up by the window as Arnim came back in. "They mean to squash him under the pope's hat. He's too big for them, much too big already."

"I hope your Grace will not feel inhibited or tied on my account in any decisions. I can grow cabbages in Boitzenburg, or go and fight for the Poles."

"It's not you, brother. I'm most grateful to you. It's him they want by the collar, the Emperor. That's the point." He paced through the room. "See now, see now, the League is still active. Someone will have to kiss their lordships' feet."

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In Rome there resided in the golden Vatican a panther named Maffeo Barberini, Urban VIII. No one could say he did not understand his times. He had achieved power by assuring each of the two parties at the Conclave that he was the sworn enemy of the other. Above the entrance to his library was written: Think only of Safeguarding the Church. There were sufficient arms in the papal arsenal for forty thousand men. He built Castelfranco on the border with Bologna, reinforced Sant'Angelo in Rome. His arsenal toiled away in Tivoli. He desired monuments not of marble, but of iron. As war flared across the Alps, he renewed the Bull of the Lord's Supper

'In coena Domini', cursing heretics, Hussites, Wycliffites, Lutherans, Zwinglians, Calvinists, Huguenots, Trinitarians, Anabaptists, and pirates at sea. The German heretics must be smashed, the stolen properties wrested back into the hands of the Church.

Even while military activity was in progress, his envoys at the Viennese court declared: The Church demands that, wheresoever the power of the Emperor, Guardian of the Church, should reach, measures must be taken to assist the restitution of her rightful property. Wags at court laughed: Wallenstein must march out to conquer Magdeburg Halberstadt and other German ecclesiastical lands for the pope. No need for the League's wailing, or indignant remarks from that bigot Baron Stralendorf, to cause a special delegate to be despatched to Vienna as victory bells pealed in every street. A discreet papal commission was already scouting the occupied lands and the rest of Germany in order to estimate the prospective revenues for Urban; his plan was to use the funds to extend the borders of the Papal States, defend the League against an over-mighty Emperor, help France against Spain.

Into the ear of the departing Nuncio in a locked room Urban whispered: "The Church has never seen such pious princes as these Germans and the Emperor Ferdinand. I know it. But it would be terrible if they had no piety, for in the end, their atrocities and shameless looting are justified only by their faith. The Emperor may invite us to take over the monasteries while forgoing compensation for the lost years; we shall consider offering him and the League a portion of the revenues. Do not forget to throw out this remark, which you heard from my own lips: the world will lose its balance if not for France; and as you do so, bow to Habsburg; they will understand. For the rest I have no more love for France than for Germany, the table is big enough for many children."

And unwilling Ferdinand was called back to Vienna from Wolkersdorf by messages from Eggenberg: a formal Papal Nunciature had turned up, demanding to be received in respect of a particular matter. In the Spanish Hall, dangling limp in his armchair like a magical bird poking its passionless beak through the bars of a cage, Ferdinand, mild and silent, curious, heard out the Italian gesticulating in his cardinal's purple, attended by a great entourage.

Once again the Holy Father extends to him, this time by word of mouth, congratulations on his victories that shake the world with their fame. It is principally through the piety and virtue of Habsburg that the grieving Church has emerged from her misery and can now look about majestically, the Bride of Christ bestowing a sweet grateful smile on her erstwhile sword-bearers. To declare this before the whole world in a formal public audience is the dearest obligation of Pope Urban. Let also those not yet subjugated or fallen to the sword know what they may expect if they persist in their obstinacy. Yet the Holy Church does not hesitate to express her joy as her children once again gather round her, as rejoicing she presses to her heart the foundations and monasteries torn so maliciously from her, and lets bygones be bygones. She receives them at the hand of the imperial House, to which she directs no reproach as to the losses suffered.

Present at this audience were almost the entire Privy Council, envoys from Bavaria, Electoral Saxony, representatives of the Prince-bishops. Their faces masked, their concern not betrayed by the slightest gesture. In Ferdinand as he listened there congealed a dreadful feeling that stopped his mouth, laid itself upon him hot and constricting. I am under assault.

It is an ambush: they mean to present me with a fait accompli – the plundering of the Empire. Me, the Emperor. They know I shall never allow it. They mean to force my eyes open. He was overwhelmed, in no condition to look askance at them. In turmoil he extended a hand to the haughtily declaiming cardinal.

"What was that? What was it?" he whispered agitated in the corridor.

He had sat barely half an hour when Eggenberg and Trautmannsdorf were announced, as he himself awaited his Mantuan lady. Still in his extravagant audience finery, he sat hunched in an armchair, purple blankets and rugs tumbling over its arms as if they had no business with this man. The chamber half dark. Not moving his arms, not standing and not looking at them as they came in, Habsburg drew vertical strokes with his gloved hands, breathed: "Don't talk. Not necessary. The visit has been received." The two men, shocked, like him still in their finery, stepped hesitantly closer, bowed; he continued calmly: "You are disturbing me. Assume I did listen to you earlier, I endorse your arguments. It is good."

Eggenberg: "We have no arguments. We want to proffer an explanation."

"Accepted. Thank you. You may leave, sirs."

The prince, pained: "What have we done wrong?"

"I am awaiting the Empress. Thank you." His hands kept tracing lines in the air.

Trautmannsdorf's nails dug into his palms: "At the risk of arousing His Majesty's ire: we are not to blame. I cannot refrain from saying this."

Ferdinand's head turned almost in sympathy, his left hand floated free: "Saying what?"

"That we are not to blame. The cardinal has made fools of us."

"How strange."

"We agreed a formal speech of thanks to Your Majesty, conveying a papal blessing."

Without a word, for several minutes the Emperor let his white eyes wander from one to the other : "What are you saying."

Eggenberg's voice deep, trembling with fury: "It is necessary that we lodge, in all formality, a protest with the Vatican regarding the conduct of the cardinal here. Against propriety, against good faith." Tears stood in Eggenberg's eyes; he stared bitterly at the floor.

The Emperor's face softened, his voice sounded more relaxed: "Count Trautmannsdorf, is it true you were duped?"

"That is a feeble word for what has occurred."

"And the two of you, and others? The cardinal made a speech in our presence, before we knew what was going on?"

"He wanted, he managed to – "

"Enough, Count Trautmannsdorf." The Emperor turned his head to the corner, the tall golden crucifix; his expression softened again; as he laid his head on a shoulder his breathing became easier. "I am glad I was not the only one surprised, and that you are my friends. That you intended nothing against me. In truth, Eggenberg, had you been giving me the same treatment you gave that other time –" the Emperor's voice was very quiet, preoccupied, a

monologue – “I would hardly have found pleasure in anything again. It would have seemed I’d done enough here. I had the thought earlier: it has come, the very day I should spend thinking on our Saviour. I wouldn’t have borne a grudge – it tormented me only for a moment. Go. With my thanks.”

The counsellors bowed, stepped hesitantly back a couple of paces. Then Eggenberg begged the Emperor’s pardon: what were they to do, actually; how would His Majesty approach the Holy Father and the question of the monastic foundations. That’s enough, was the Emperor’s first response, head supported in his hand. Then, in a whisper: As always I hold the Holy Father in great respect; he has full authority to absolve and condemn; what is this question about? – About the foundations. – I shall give it some thought.

Then she arrived, preceded by her ladies and their chamberlain, who all made a dignified exit. She helped him out of the heavy ceremonial cloak and sashes, let the fabrics drop heavily rustling to the carpet. He sat exhausted, head in his hand, spoke little. “I think,” he said as she fussed over him, “our life is not long. Today I would soon have become master of every difficulty. – I would,” he whispered later, “soon have taken the same path of abdication as my Spanish ancestor, Charles the Fifth. That’s how much it horrified me.”

Pale, drawn, her face lined, mouth and eyes wide open, she tried to take hold with her left hand of his right, dangling between his knees: “You wanted to enter a monastery;”– she sat hunched, hugged herself like a wrestler – “oh, you were right to think so, Ferdinand.” She put an arm over his shoulders, he let her draw him, gazed silently at her almost frantic eyes. “There is nothing apart from Heaven and Mary, Jesus, the saints, Ferdinand. We can do nothing more than prepare ourselves for salvation. Oh how happy I am that you are willing to seek salvation. I rejoice at your side, you my life.” He let her babble on. His inward lurking calm was seldom interrupted during these days.

“Oh do not give up, Ferdinand,” she whispered, sinking to her knees. “Be there when the call comes. I shall be at your side.” Ferdinand lifted an eyelid, looked sideways at her, called her name. Called again. The lady from Mantua rose forlornly to her feet.

“Eleonore, will you listen to me? That is all over. It has all passed from me, for now. Men have appeared before me with proposals. Let me think them over, with you.”

“I cannot. Forgive me.”

“What did they want of me? I was supposed to condone bad things, base things. They’d like that. Ha, I am not to their liking.”

“Will you forgive me, Ferdinand, for being unable to follow you. Summon your Father Confessor, or they say a papal legate has come to the court: he can help you.”

“He can help me! Why did he make such a scene? I won’t think about it. He wanted whole territories. They are greedy; dare to approach me.”

“The pope asks for territories? Then give them to him. Rejoice that he demands them.”

“I won the war by Heaven’s grace, by a thousand prayers and intercessions. Now I am to show that I earned it. Is he not like the tempter, this pope? I founded my power with God’s grace, now he tempts me to injustice and infamy.”

"Ferdinand, of whom do you speak! Rejoice! Give! Give to me, so I can make a present!"

"I have nothing to give, Eleonore. I own nothing myself. The more I became Emperor, the more they took from me, and there it is. I must administer it all, provide for it, dispense justice. It's true, I have nothing at my disposal. I really am poor, Eleonore."

"Give to me. Don't say such things. I need it, must have it. Won't you think of me, am I not your Eleonore whom you fetched away from Mantua? And I shall give to him, the Holy Father."

"Are you the second temptress, Eleonore? I'd yield the sooner to you."

Suddenly she sat stiff, hardened her face, clear and grave: "I know there is a tempter to whom you will yield, because he forces you. It is you yourself. If it were to fall on me I would be unable to resist. Where it has struck you, you cannot do otherwise. I know."

"You know?"

Turning aside she enunciated: "I know. You cannot escape yourself. You are no more able to choose than I."

"We are pious. We have committed no crimes. Why should I be unable to choose?"

"Try."

He stared at her, as if stabbed: "I – I rule…"

"Try."

"Anyone coming to steal will find me and my sword-bearer."

"Try."

"It means I am not yet emperor?"

She turned to face him, flung herself at his knees. "It means, it is not enough. Emperor, not emperor: it is not thus that I want you. Come with me. Be my companion – to Mary."

Ferdinand's face resumed its placid alert expression: "You must not confuse me, Eleonore. We must not become agitated. People seek to wrest territories away from me by force. A guilty conscience gives voice to this. I do not thereby forget what I owe the holy Church and how much I have to thank her for directly."

She clung to him as he struggled to his feet, waved her arms as if they had grown stiff; doubting, anxious: "Yield to me. Soon." Then, in rapture, she screamed: "No! Do as you please. I shall not advise you. I wish never to have advised you. Do. Do as you please."

25. Restitution

AS THE PRIVY councillors waited to hear Ferdinand's decision, they were surprised to learn that orders had been given for a departure from Vienna. The Court Equerry affirmed: he had received the order direct from the Empress herself. Ferdinand, in a state of unmasterable anger, unstoppable mounting revulsion, and withal a certain fear, had decided to leave Vienna, closet himself in Wolkersdorf, not conceding that he was being forced from the imperial path he had followed. He glowered, spat: he wanted none of them. He sought instinctively for a recurrence of the blackout he had once suffered; his path led into this blackness. He tussled as

strongly with the Nuncio as with his counsellors, with all of Vienna, this jungle of buildings about him badgering, intruding, voices all around the castle on every side.

Now the Nuncio, a man whose familiarity with the Emperor did not extend beyond that one audience, dared despite warnings to appear in the private chambers mindful only of his mission, and managed to persuade the Emperor, clad in a riding cloak, staring bleakly at him, to hear him out. Reluctantly, silently, the Emperor settled back on the stool from which he had reluctantly risen; under compulsion, almost in agony, he lowered his body to the plank from which he had just freed himself, pressed his hat-shaded face to his breast, placed hands together in his lap, said nothing. In mute expectation he waited to hear what was being concocted, now and then glanced slyly at the red pontificating man, at the arm that had dragged him back here.

Later he let him know: You will be informed shortly of the imperial decision. He had been challenged, would make his own decision. They should feel it; they meant to ensnare him in their petty disputes. His legs carried him to his secretary's scriptorium, arousing alarm; he dictated on the spot, barely an hour after the Italian had taken his leave: I require opinions from the Privy Council and the Court Council in the matter of the religious foundations.

Now let them show their mettle.

Then to the Empress's chambers. Her ladies saw her at Habsburg's side observing him, stitching herself to him like a spider to a grey wall. He remained in Vienna.

Ten days later Colonel Neumann brought to him clear hard words from the Duke. The plan was declared stupid, it must be rejected. The silent Emperor kept hold of the letter hour after hour, did not read it. Papal Nuncio! Pope Urban! Monks! Electoral princes! What do they want, what do they know! Compared with this man, this Duke! There lies Friedland with his army all across the Empire, oppressing to be sure, sucking dry to be sure, let no power hinder him from doing what he wants: to flatten the Empire. Let them all vanish, those who would mutiny against me. How ruthlessly he goes through the Empire, this sinister man, this Friedland. As the Emperor crouched over his body, passion tore at his entrails, cold horror ran over the skin of his hands, his back, tremors in cheeks and lips; he shuddered, squeezed himself small, relished what so savagely assailed him. A hot crimped laugh escaped him. He thrust Wallenstein's letter into his breast, before standing and presenting himself to the questioning eyes of the Empress, who had just come in.

She was so stirred by his joyous expression as he left that she knelt on the red carpet all alone, squealed softly, and giggled.

There now followed the first efforts of Prince Eggenberg to rest the Emperor's power on shoulders other than Wallenstein's. Caught unawares by the Nuncio's attack, he quickly understood: restoring the clerical foundations could bring influential League figures on side to share the risks of the situation. Little Eggenberg sat next to Ferdinand in the formal discussions, small white goatee squeezed onto his ruff collar, high forehead deeply creased, wine-red face wrinkled, unwilling to yield. He felt they would have to do harm to the Emperor, but more and more each day since the victories it seemed to him that responsibility for events lay not with this sallow man under the blue-white baldachin, but with himself. However the

Emperor might demur, the House of Habsburg is in danger; Ferdinand is a dear child, Saviour spare this ruler from misfortune. He was intimately bound to the Emperor, had wooed for him, played the father's role; he understood the Emperor's fascination with the ducal monster. But the Emperor cannot be allowed to shake the House. The counsellors sitting silent around the table, biting their lips, were already won over to the cause of restitution; they were intoxicated with power; the making of presents to the pope and whomever else seemed to them a triviality. The discussion limped on, the Emperor made a formal exit.

"What advice do you have for me?" Ferdinand asked at the door to the Empress's chamber, embracing her in whom he could hide himself. She responded joyful and trembling, sought to read his face; his head bent low.

"But you will find out, for I have prayed for you," she exulted.

Ever more tentatively, Ferdinand's hand felt over the crumpled letter from Friedland that he carried in his belt. To the power of this man he owed his faith, his piety, the support of the holy Church. The territories they coveted lay now under his aegis, he could not give them away as items of plunder, any claim on his imperial prerogatives he would resist, raging and peremptory. But they gained ground from him by claiming the same standing as the generals on whom he had bestowed gifts. The holy Church demanded its due. As envoys from the League and the pope clamoured around him, the dark thought kept rising: They want to weaken me, weaken me, I see it.

Once he found himself gazing at the page where 'stupid' and 'insolent' appeared; he shook with pain; a whisper within him: I must do you harm, forgive me, it must be, think no ill of me, my soul's salvation requires it, you don't know. Be good, be good. Then he laid it out before Eleonore: "They may have their territories."

Eleanore stared from passionate eyes. "How I envy you, Ferdinand, that you have been granted this choice."

He gave a cheerless laugh: "I thank you from my heart." How uncanny, the way this woman invaded his soul, his decisions.

But the Emperor, swooning in agitation as he sensed this crackling timber-blazing life beside him, had a wild desire to do her a mischief, watch her flare up, make her suffer. The wish to do ill had awoken in him, the urge left a vengeful feeling. He yielded raging. Grinding his teeth, sweat breaking out on his brow, eyes retreating into their grey caves as he stroked her thin left hand: "For the Saviour's sake I shall be remiss in nothing. I shall be guided by whatever honours him." She clung tight, groaned. "Yes," he sighed. On his knees beside her he prayed, and then they embraced.

One night he summoned the Empress to him. He greeted her fiercely: "Am I again so far gone that I don't know whom to summon? My Fool, stupid Count Paar? Do not look at me."

"What is it?" She wept over his bed.

"You rejoiced too soon. They speculate that I dare not summon Friedland. But I shall, I shall, regardless."

"Do so then." She was helpless.

“He shall come, I tell you. His eyes will not acknowledge you. He’ll clap you in irons because you strike at me.”

“What have I done?”

Reluctantly he lay back down: “Nothing, nothing, by our Saviour, nothing. I am lost, sold out. That’s all.” Again the stranger. She stood up. “Where are you going?” he asked, mocking. She knelt before his crucifix.

Days rolled by; every day the Emperor sacrificed long hours in prayer beside the lady from Mantua. Lamormaini, big Father Confessor, came to him. Ferdinand rose clumsily to his feet, disturbed in his devotions. Lamormaini praised the Emperor for preserving, amid the glory of victorious fame, his humble faith, his childlike obedience. The slender Empress, hastily bending a knee to the smiling limping Jesuit, rushed from the room, her breath stormy. Ferdinand’s numb legs carried him to his chair, his hands shook. Subdued, softly he said: “Thank you.” Hung on the Jesuit’s words, collapsed, confessed.

Next day he conveyed to the Father Confessor his decision on the clerical foundations. He has taken counsel with himself, called diligently and sincerely on Mary and the saints. Through the grace of these celestial beings, it has been granted to him that a dreadful and difficult campaign has come to an end, of which as of now the outcome is favourable. His throne, once insecure as nothing else on earth, has been strengthened. Now he has been approached in the matter of the restitution of properties lost over the course of decades. He was, even before this, not blind to the fact that the spiritual powers have a claim on these properties. And yet he has baulked at occasioning new outbreaks of unrest in the Empire. For sure, in so baulking he did not do well. The Church must be rewarded for the inexpressible help granted to his prayers. To win back the poor souls in these foundations fallen into the clutches of heretics is his first duty as a humble god-fearing man, to say nothing of Emperor. To him, his Father Confessor, he admits that he has swung back and forth, sinful and wary. He wishes to be freed of sin.

The priest smiled: “Happy the man to whom it is granted to use his power to the advantage of the holy Church.”

Pope Urban the Eighth, surrounded in his gilded weapon-clanking court by artillerymen engineers surveyors intriguers, by legates vice-legates notaries, in the presence of the French ambassador received the report of his Nuncio with joy. He depicted it as self-evident that the Restitution Edict should come to pass, and really it was a negligence hardly to be forgiven that it came to pass only now. The Frenchman congratulated him on behalf of Louis XIII, whose relative the pope was. In Urban’s name, the German envoy Paolo Savelli was informed by Francesco Barberini, cardinal and Secretary of State, that the pope felt not the slightest obligation to arrange a procession of thanks regarding the announcement of restitution, and furthermore declined absolutely to concede to the Emperor the initial appointments to the recovered bishoprics; that he held fast to all that which was the Holy See’s.

Eggenberg had expected more for the imperial court. But from Rome came chilling news: the pope planned to assign half the rents from the restored clerical properties to the pious League led by the Bavarian, Maximilian. At which Trautmannsdorf smiled thinly at the princes,

and the abbot of Krems-minster looked at the floor. But Eggenberg outstared every eye. He asserted with vigour that the news was pleasing to him, yes, pleasing; his concern was to set the imperial throne on sturdy legs; one must cooperate with Bavaria, one can rely on Bavaria.

"For what purpose" – Krems-minster stared straight ahead – "have we summoned the Duke of Friedland?" Eggenberg: "You will come to praise what I say now: the Emperor has not been freed of the Devil only to fall prey to Beelzebub."

The vituperation, unveiled threats that poured into the court from the Mecklenburg headquarters never reached the Emperor. Count Stralendorf conveyed the Friedland point of view by means of obscure circumlocutions; Ferdinand listened to his report inscrutable, grave, with a silent pregnant heavy tenderness. Suddenly he leaped to his feet, looked about in agitation, paced up and down: "Who is this Friedland? How did he bring me into contention with the holy Church? How could it have reached the point where it robs me of my soul's salvation?" He stood small, torment in his eyes before the haughty count, sweating. And as if to atone for misdeeds he gave redoubled and strict commands: nothing was to be held back from the Church, whether of goods or of souls.

It was at this time that he issued the Edict: rescinding and setting aside in all newly incorporated regions and those conquered by imperial troops the old principle of religious freedom, as incompatible with imperial duties owed to the Church; let those of other faiths quit the incorporated lands at their discretion. The care and responsibility of the ruler requires adoption of the maxim: *cuius regio, eius religio* – the religion of the ruler determines the religion of his territory. Emigrants are to leave behind one-tenth of their possessions.

The Edict was flung out as if in expiation, and the Emperor, enfolded and stabbed by his Empress's almost frenzied joy, sated and numbed himself in the extremism of its execution. It seemed to him fortunate that he could be the Church's sword and protector. And he had triumphed over Wallenstein, had raised himself over him, beaten him in battle. Wallenstein was blind, mechanical, the sword; the Duke did not understand that there was more than mere conquest of territory. He was master over him. He loved Wallenstein more cordially than before, when he thought of Wallenstein his eyes became hooded, an intoxicated joy coursed through his body; sometimes his knees trembled when he thought of him. In a strange way he felt that Wallenstein was bound even closer to him, because he had fended him off, hit out, wounded him. This pleasant feeling smouldered like a warm vapour: now the Duke rampages on my behalf, he is a beast, a monster even, he curses me, would like to tear me limb from limb. The image was enough to make him laugh.

He insisted on reports of the measures effected, properties taken over. Again wailing delegations appeared before him from individual towns and bishoprics of the Protestant faith, he received them only to lord it over their pain, and take humble note of the approbation in the eyes and mouths of the Jesuits. The lady from Mantua was present at these lamentable spectacles, relished them as their joint work.

He had totally forgotten Maximilian of Bavaria. He was the Emperor, able to grant himself the office of Protector of the Pope within the Empire, and give it force. He stood above Wallenstein, his servant and subordinate.

During these weeks, the cries of expelled families rose a thousand and again a thousand times to Heaven from southern and northern regions of the Empire. The armies of Wallenstein settled calmly over the many territories; idled in their camps, consumed the resources of the local population and the wealth of the towns.

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"Cowards, fools, stinking Jesuit devils!" were the curses aimed at Vienna from Friedland's table in Güstrow and Wismar. But following the Edict the Duke cursed and wrangled noticeably less with those around him, when usually he leaped on any sign of sulking. This matter worked away deep within him. He saw himself goaded by a clique against which he was helpless. They could not harm him, he had the Emperor in his hand, but there they were, they dared to raise their heads, had achieved a sort of victory. A bad man, this Emperor, flabby, almost contemptible. They pushed and jabbed at him. One must be on one's guard against these people. He was angry that now he must give away something he did not want to give.

Friedland's troops occupied the whole coast, Electoral Brandenburg had been forced to accept billeting, the regiments held Electoral Mainz in check from the Wetterau down, Trier was kept cowed from the Eifel hills; Cologne quite defenceless; Saxony felt the sting of Friedland in Lausitz, down by the Bohemian frontier. The Duke's friend Marshal Arnim comforted him over the Edict, that scrap of paper: let those sneaks and chicken-thieves at court enjoy their little victory.

"The Emperor's weak, he's in the hands of fools and rascals who dare not come out against me. It'll bring them no good."

And it was as an almost comically inept action that he set about the assault on Magdeburg, which he was supposed to occupy; he thought to cook only his own soup at that fire. Once again he asked Arnim if he would conquer the proudly Protestant town for the Catholics; and in fact he did assign to the expeditionary corps regiments officered mainly by Lutherans. "They wave their Edict about," the Duke mocked, "hilt of wood and blade of cardboard. We'll have fun making war with those." He demanded that the town play host to a garrison; the town declined, for fear of the Edict. Then after all manner of incidents – Croats skirmishing with fishermen and carter lads, two thousand sheep and all the town's pigs rounded up, threats of a blockade, he imposed a contribution of two hundred thousand talers, of which one hundred and fifty thousand were to be delivered to him immediately; the Hansa would stand surety for the rest. At a meeting with the Duke the surprised syndics were assured that the Edict had no validity, they weren't to worry, and in future should not prevent Wallenstein from occupying the Elbe crossing; the age of religious wars in the Empire was definitely over.

Then he withdrew to Mecklenburg; the money was his.

The Duke lay a long while with his armies on the northern seacoast; he must become master of the Baltic Sea. His own possession, Mecklenburg, required it.

Such vast quantities of goods rode on the water's grey back. Bundles of hemp from Livonia, flax in tubs, grain. From Riga, wax by the hundredweight for the clergy, wax from the Volga, Dvina, via Smolensk and Polozk. Tombstones from quarries on the Finnish coast. From Russia, furs of sable wolf marten wolverine weasel ermine polecat beaver. Yarn from Stettin, woven

goods linens from Hamburg Bruges Wittstock Ratzeburg. On these broad seemingly empty waters that belonged to no one, there rode hour by hour all the valuable produce of the world, humanity's riches: salt at enormous prices to Åbo Vyborg Narva; salt from the Trave, salt from Luneburg, Oldesloe, coarse unboiled salt from Bavaria, Scottish and French salt; meat bacon malt tobacco knives playing-cards leather linen; military goods: weapons ammunition powder lead, iron balls sulphur saltpetre harness armour gun-barrels rapiers daggers battle-swords. Like slave-ships laden with oriental beauties they brought to eagerly awaiting crowds, young and old, the spirits of the earth enclosed in barrels, the scents of foreign faraway sundrenched soils: intoxicating wines, Alicante, strident Corsica, Malvasier, potent Portuguese, wines of Bordeaux, Oporto, of Picardy, of Hungary, from the Moselle, the zesty Rhine. From the colonies, confined in wooden crates, came aniseed, candied ginger, coffee, Cuba tea, cocoa, mace, cardamoms, eucalyptus, twenty or thirty kinds of sugar, dates. Aromatic oily woods for apothecaries: turpentine bloodwood brazilwood. Metals, indigo, incense, glass from Rouen, glass from Flanders, panes of English glass, Hessian glass in chests, mirrors, glazed tiles, bricks.

To the Duke there came from Prague that man of many talents, Herr von Michna, along with cool de Witte, to advise on the fundraising made necessary by the elimination of Spain from their maritime plans. They swam like fishes towards the bait that dangled on the distant seashore. They rode through Saxony and the March, drove disguised in open wagons through a throng of Friedland's lifeguards; observed with pleasure the ubiquitous imperial troops occupying and billeted in the towns. They encountered trains of beggarly peasants, burnt villages; these reduced their pleasure not a whit. Michna squinted, a twitching in his chest and stomach; what were usury and debased coinage compared to this, to war. De Witte spoke of the gratitude of the Jewish patriarch Bassevi towards the Duke, which he had undertaken to convey in Güstrow with the assurance of the boundless devotion of the Prague Jews.

In the hunting lodge at Güstrow, amid forests of oak and beech, Wallenstein stood before them gaunt, tall in a red cloak. He soothed the visitors' cautiously expressed alarm over the Restitution Edict. Escorted to the shipyard at Wismar, they observed the grey rolling sea; pennanted outriggers and privateer vessels were pointed out; the mayor of Lübeck, Heinrich Brokes, was summoned: a mildewed slit-eyed manikin who freely revealed all sorts of intelligence, even in passing that the Company of Scania Traders had created a defence fund in Lübeck against any conqueror who might come, no matter who, by means of a tax on all goods carried by axle either in or out. Not a scrap of cloth came through untaxed.

Grey sluggish water-mountain. Set on its back as on a tabletop with billowing cloth were all the heaped-up glittering riches of humanity. Here it ran through a narrow pass, seductive; they clung to a cliff above. Beyond the horizon, so many lands stretching away: Livonia Volga Smolensk Stettin Vyborg Saragossa Buda Venice, all blurred together. And yet so near, defenceless as giggling women going down to bathe and splash. It lay at the feet of the three Bohemians in their wide unplumed hats, long white cloaks, shuffling over the sand beside the gesticulating mistrustful man from Lübeck. De Witte and Michna stamped their feet, excited and almost dazed by the discussion in Friedland's quarters; the Duke, pensive before the wine-credenza, blew his cheeks, fanned his brow with a gunny-cloth. Their conclusion was that the Hansa must be secured. Their eyes sparkled behind their wine glasses as they let fancy roam.

To Lübeck in the company of Schwarzenberg, pot-bellied count from the imperial court – he pursued Hispano-German maritime strategy on his own account, and so was mistrusted by the merchants and dealers of Lübeck – now came the two gentlemen from Prague, Friedland's confidants, the ice-cold businessman and the hard shrewd Serb. They sounded out influential families – von Höveln, Brömse, Kirchring. Their courteous hosts conducted them with notable frequency to the walls, which an Italian had just recently extended from the Holsten Gate to the Burg Gate. Sturdy weapons all along. At Travemünde a stone pillbox guarded the harbour entrance, ominous bastions everywhere. Concealed trenches.

The Emperor's proposal that the Hansa should build a fleet, and submit to the admiral for defence against the Danish and Swedish menace, occasioned the convening of Lübeck's council, with attendees from Hamburg, Cologne, Bremen, Stralsund. Wallenstein's best envoys argued heatedly with the wine-lords, elders of the Companies, freightmasters, merchants, the brotherhood of the seaways. There was no uproar in the gloomy debating chamber in the Lowest Council House, rather insidious unyielding pushing and shoving, interjections, oaths. So important did the Duke consider this matter that every couple of days he sent messengers to the envoys with his personal suggestions. But the excitable grandiloquent Schwarzenberg, with his Spanish plans and fatal ineptitude, not to mention the Edict, had spoiled the air in every tavern and parlour. It became clear that the men of Lübeck, and in particular little Brokes, had long since allied themselves with the States-general, fearful of that great maritime power Spain. None in Lübeck now contemplated war for the Emperor against already defeated Denmark, but they feared Friedland's fist, and feared the Jesuits.

The honourable sagacious and prudent councillors of the Free Imperial City bowed – finally – to the representatives of Vienna and the admiral, these most gracious gentlemen, declared emphatically: There can be no question of war against the powers who control the seas and straits over which our vessels must sail every day. The proud councillors voted an honorarium of four thousand talers to the imperial envoy and compensated his expenses, before he headed, pelted with Wallenstein's vituperation, back home to Vienna.

The three Bohemians were no longer avid for money. They had grown into their wealth, were now its master. The Duke knew only the game, its seduction grew in line with the size of the stake; his concern was only with transacting, circulating, not possessing. He was merely the power that turns solids to liquid. He shuddered and bit his lip whenever anything solid appeared in his path.

26. Peace with the Danes

THE HUGE BODIES of troops did not for long remain massed in the boggy depleted coastal regions, impoverished Brandenburg. There were exact stipulations as to how much each peasant and burgher must pay, and care was taken not to extract more than would keep them alive; but in spite of the brutal field police and courts martial, looting parties proliferated among the troops, as did bold extortions by officers, peculation in the provisioning squads. Resistance grew among the contribution-payers; burning half a village and stringing up hostile peasants by the dozen from their own fruit trees helped but little; the countryside gave a

meagre yield, was hardly cultivated. Many mercenaries had deserted already, headed south, errants looking to wage war on their own account. In certain quarters in Vienna and Prague there was secret satisfaction at the Hansa's haughty antagonism; feelings were ambivalent.

The great Duke of Friedland, Bohemian of inordinate wealth, lay stretched cantankerous and brooding along the coast. He chewed on the morsels the Hansa fed him; slowly it dawned on him what had happened. The sea, this calamity: not the riches it carried but the passage it offered: the land could not be held without mastery of the grey-white shaggy foaming beast. It crashed against his defences, shook them; he had quickly taken Mecklenburg to his bosom, how could he go wandering. As if to taunt him, Danish warships burned five of his vessels in the harbour at Greifswald.

Suddenly, from the fringes of the Empire, mutterings of *Hungary! Hungary*! were heard across the hereditary lands. Every day revealed more clearly what at first had gone unnoticed – the Bavarians saw it, ill-disposed persons in Vienna, Stralendorf and his cronies, a delighted Paris, powerful Pope Urban: there by the sea Wallenstein has dug his grave, the campaign from Silesia to Jutland was no decisive victory, the climax already his downfall.

A calamity, this Hansa. Unable to yoke them in, now he can either lie on the coast and watch his army rot, or withdraw from the coast; and there again is the Dane! Christian, defeated king, already assembling a new army. Rumour had it that Count Pappenheim, at the request of the War Council in Vienna, had elaborated a war plan in which two hundred and fifty miles of German coast were deemed indefensible: however you tried it – mass the troops together, spread them out thin – the land was exposed to attack by Danes or Swedes.

The Jesuits, stung by Wallenstein's opposition in the matter of restitutions, felt obliged to stick the knife in – not hard, but just so he knew. Fanatical monks, no longer restrained by the Jesuits, sermonized in Vienna: Once again it can be seen where unbelief leads – the audacity, mixing those of the Old Faith with heretics in the same army, thinking thereby to win more than merely transient success and plunder.

Hungary! This time he'll never extricate himself from the swamp.

In Moravia and Lower Austria, Michna's agents toiled with dogged fury to amass grain for the army; harried by their master they pushed the price ever higher. Michna found sums leaving his hands in one or two weeks that had taken years to accumulate, but he hesitated not a moment to hand them over. Rogues and idiots, jealous ninnies all – their hour will come, they'll be plucked bare as never in their wildest nightmares.

At the pinnacle of the Bohemian regional assembly, and held as ever in the highest regard, stood cold pretty Slavata. The Duke had stipulated that adequate quantities of grain should be delivered from Bohemia. Malicious interests, still lacking influence, considered the moment favourable to weaken him. When Wallenstein sent a sharp rebuke from Güstrow – he had a commitment of twenty thousand bushels of Bohemian grain, only ten thimblefuls have been delivered – the assembly lied.

No matter that the Duke spoke openly of fraud, they had gained time, time to dissolve Friedland's army through hunger and disorder, as once it had dissolved in fever and thirst on the dreadful plains of Hungary.

For a long time no one learned what the Duke was doing to save his skin. Rumours made the rounds that, as always when Friedland was in danger and preparing a new stroke, the Jew Bassevi along with Michna and de Witte were conferring with him, having travelled to his residence in Güstrow under the Duke's military escort.

Then all became clear.

While the picture of military activity in the Empire remained unchanged – mobilisation accelerating month by month, new installations made ready on an increasing scale, especially in the Franconian circles – the headquarters at Güstrow initiated talks with the Danes. The fox had slipped his head from the noose. Step by step, contacts had been established between the Duke and the Danes. A tireless courier flew between Vienna and headquarters. Emperor and court were put to the test; it was now up to them to follow whatever path they wanted.

The commander in chief declared: Victory has been won, the Lower Saxon circle pacified, the Danes beaten to the ground; beyond this nothing more is possible. When counter-questions were raised, apparently in outrage, the retort came: Did they mean to do without armies now.

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In Munich the Prince-elector passed his time in calculations and whittling. He often sat at his workbench in the Neue Veste together with Father Adam Contzen, a youthful stocky little man brought to him by his old Father Confessor, the Lorrainer Vervaux. Contzen, without interrupting the prince's rasping, propounded in an insistent challenging tone the political principles which in the priest's view constituted the minimum to be demanded of a Catholic politician. The prince, fat, pale, sweating slightly, divided his attention between the rapid speech of the dialectician, and his ivory. The priest fulminated against heresy, which as he was forever warning had its roots in viciousness and atheism; prelates and princes had become infected. When the prince looked wearily up, he flung a necessity at him: The whole world agrees that vice and godlessness must be eradicated; it has been granted to him – to the priest Adam Contzen – to elucidate the link between heresy on the one hand and vice, anarchy and atheism on the other; it must, heresy must, be removed by force. People once lived in Sodom and Gomorrah. God had shown no mercy, he, the Lord Himself, had poured down fire and brimstone on the city of sinners. This example from Holy Scripture must be understood: is it for man to forgive what God has punished. Conversion or annihilation: there is no third way. And the priest, red-faced, excited, wrathful, glared at the prince, pained at his impotence in having to plead and argue when he could simply demand in the name of holiness.

"What should happen," asked Maximilian absently, rubbing a little finger along the little shaft of ivory, "if we lack the strength to destroy or convert."

"A sin," hissed the tormented priest, "yes, it is a sin to lack that strength. As long as we live we have the strength within us. Every jot of it belongs to God, not to a position, regardless of who holds it. The plague is not worse than the thought that we are incapable of serving God."

"What should be done with people who do not serve God and the Church?"

The priest, bewildered: "Kill, or convert. We have no choice."

"Would you do it yourself, Father? If you had a particular case in front of you?"

"I would." Joyfully the priest raised both black-draped arms. "I would rise to my feet and fulfil my duty. There is no greater task than to bring princes to the faith, or else kill them."

The prince whispered as he filed: "Contzen, I am grateful to you. If only everyone or many at least had a soul like yours. It is bad that we toil, must toil and yet achieve so little. Omnipotence is given only to God. If only God granted us the strength to rain down fire and brimstone, the Holy Roman Empire would long since have been cleansed of evil."

Maximilian's valet de chambre led the small unsteady figure of grey Tilly down the long carpet. Max's conversation with him was brief. Father Contzen made to withdraw, but the Prince-elector shook his head; it pleased him to have the priest there; how much better if it could be always. To the stiff-legged count, returned from Wiesbaden, he made no enquiry regarding his health. Brought him up to date on the situation as reported lately from the Weser, Elbe, Ems. Whether his Grace was aware how matters had developed with the army of his Serenity the Duke of Friedland. In short – not waiting for a response; but let the priest stay where he is, and not be vexed if we speak of military matters – in short, it would be most pertinent and to the point and much to be desired if the army of the League could somehow show that it was available. Perhaps it might before long take the place of Friedland's army. Anyway, after so much tribulation and evident misfortune, one is once more faced with opportunities. He mooted recruitment plans, hinted at the availability of funds from levies.

Suddenly he glared at the count: Does he feel well now? "You know there are plans for peace with the Danes. Have you made contact with him from Wiesbaden?" In confusion the ice-grey count turned to the priest, back to the prince. "I know you have not done so. It is not your business. The Duke of Friedland has done this, and stolen a march on you. Or on us. For we made war together with him as far as Pinneberg, and fired our artillery even in Jutland. In any case you will take part in the negotiations as my commissioner, if your health holds up." The count, reddening to the ears, declared that he felt campaign-fit, and esteemed himself fortunate to be considered worthy of such an honour.

Laying his tools on the workbench, the prince had the servant open the windows. When, after a pause, the two men made ready to go at a nod from the prince, Maximilian concluded very loudly: The count would receive further instructions. "But – you are not to argue for peace. Understand this. The priest here will explain it to you. There is neither urgency nor need to conclude peace with heretics. This is just a temporary expedient. Look to it that you make our army strong. Peace – let your Grace note this – peace is not my concern."

In Boitzenburg, on the estate of his friend Arnim, the Duke and the League general met, and in the presence of imperial legates agreed horrendous peace terms for the defeated Danes. The court in Vienna, in its overweening sense of power, had demanded that the severest conditions be imposed on the defeated enemy, which must in future abjure any interference in German affairs, renounce all claims on clerical properties in Lower Saxony, make good all war damage, compensate the Emperor for his war costs, and further relinquish the whole of Holstein, Schleswig, Dithmarschen to the Empire; must close the Oresund to enemies of the Emperor and open it to him and his friends.

Once, near Pinneberg, the hollowed-out wretched League general and the liverish bent Bohemian had met beneath the thunder of siege guns. Clanking Tilly had been carried away

by his all-consuming rage; now here they sat face to face across a table, Friedland waiting for the little man to produce his trump.

The Danish constable-general Schauenburg received the text of the treaty at Güstrow, from the Duke's own hand. Friedland had found it necessary to attach additional clauses to the imperial demands; these related to the disarming of Danish forces, an outrageous demand to hand over half the Danish navy. Wallenstein pushed it to the limit; he meant to drive Christian to despair, force the League to the seacoast, where its army would be massacred.

When the constable-general withdrew in horror, letters from the Duke to Vienna in veiled mocking tones lauded these proposals to the skies, invited triumphant Count Tilly to come and discuss with him the League's war plans and deployment to the coast. He, as he declared through quivering lips holding back a laugh, was ready to share command with the Bavarian Prince-elector and his general, and also to leave to him the division of their forces.

From Denmark they were advised by the same envoy of defeated Christian's profound dismay, and the growing passion and agitation among the common folk; the cruel measures added by Friedland were the occasion for an enormous national upwelling.

The Duke's Prague cronies were still at the little castle in Güstrow. In the small smoky dining room, in the presence of Arnim and silent officers, Friedland's loud words rang out: "The war has turned. We have won, but to conclude it I must ally myself with the toxic Danes and fall on the Emperor. My friends! Gentlemen!"

"Set the Viennese court down here, Serenity," fawned Arnim, clenching his fists and pressing them to his knees, "and it will keep butter from melting in the sun."

"I do not throw down my sword merely to please others. But friends, gentlemen! If Spain would come with us and were not minded to ruin the Empire, I could have control of the seas. Gold and silver from the Indies: within thirty years England would not stir, nor Sweden, nor the Hollanders. Nothing. Basta. They'd pay for it. I shall fight with the Danes against the Roman Emperor. I must despatch officers to Fynen to organise the Danish army. Bassevi has already let slip that he knows where to send the next lot of contributions. To Copenhagen."

Plump de Witte sighed: "For what purpose, if I may, does Your Serenity pursue the war? For the sake of the Roman Empire? When the Roman Emperor believes he has no more need of your advice, and considers you superfluous?"

"You're not far wrong, cousin," the General squinted up from his daybed; his right foot was encased in a padded iron box resting on hot bricks; "sugar-loaf from Ulm tastes better than little letters from Vienna."

De Witte sighed again, gazed at his beringed fingers: "If only I had a better idea, in your shoes. I wouldn't risk my neck. I mean, as things stand between you and the Emperor."

Now the General roared, shrilled, wheezed; froth dribbled down his beard:

"What do you know of my standing with the Emperor? Have I ever spoken of it to you? I beg you gentlemen not to stick your noses in my soup. The Emperor is the emperor and my gracious friend and master. I serve him and the Empire loyally. Let no one make mischief between him and me."

In Lübeck that winter there appeared on behalf of the Danish king the state chancellor Christian Friis, and Jacob Ulfeldt; state counsellor Albert Skeel; Levin Marschalck, chancellor of the Danish territories in Germany; Detlev and Heinrich Rantzau. From Vienna came the learned legal adviser Walmerode with some officers, among them multi-talented Aldringen and Balthasar Dietrichstein. Tilly had deputed counsellor Ruepp and his colleague Count Gronsfeld, both learned men.

The battle was won by Friedland when he escorted stiff white-bearded Walmerode through the Wallenstein encampments into boggy Dithmarschen.

The Danish delegation, strolling with the wine merchants of Lübeck, entertained by the Company of the Black Heads of Riga* and in the houses of shipping companies, respected as representatives of a mighty seafaring nation, spread rumours: alongside the rebuilding of the Danish army came growing interest and sympathy from Gustavus Adolphus for his unfortunate brethren in Denmark. An ominous scene played itself out for the whole world when the two monarchs, who normally trusted one another not an inch, came together at the vicarage in Ulfsbäck. No one learned that the young fat Swede, thirsting for honour, intended to hitch the Dane to his wagon, or that at the end, as they drank half frozen wine that chinked in the glass, the humbled Dane exclaimed: "What will my cousin do in Germany?" – consumed with jealousy that the other would undertake and succeed where he had failed. For the negotiators in Lübeck it meant the clink of coins: the Swede is conferring secretly with the Dane. Word came from frantic Christian: his commissioners must have it all quickly sewn up; if they reach a favourable peace, then good, otherwise they are to let matters lie.

The Emperor had to be woken from his dreams. Lawyer Walmerode returned to Vienna insisting on audiences with Eggenberg and Meggau. He laid out before the reluctant men the whole incomprehensible matter of the peace conditions; the army was the Emperor's, was being allowed to rot away. Meggau, more amenable than Prince Eggenberg, one afternoon during a sleigh ride declared frankly: No one in Vienna who knows the Duke believes his Jeremiad about the vanishing army; the fear is of a political manoeuvre by Friedland against the League. And this – well, the wind has turned at court; with all due respect for the Duke's genius, no one has a desire to join in such wild revolutionary experiments. Is it true, Meggau asked quite in earnest, as they jingled amid snow flurries past trees in the Prater, that the Duke spoke openly at table in Güstrow of adopting the French model: one country, one king? "How dreadful, Eggenberg, Herr Walmerode. We almost sank through the floor in shame when the envoy from Saxony asked about it. Such remarks may prove more costly for us than a lost battle. I cannot understand it."

"We're in good standing with all the Estates of the Empire," Eggenberg too thought it necessary to warn Walmerode, who asked: "How long do you think this Danish war will go on?"

"Tell his ducal Serenity: as long as his imperial Majesty can continue without detriment to his power and reputation."

Walmerode set off. He angled for talks with the Emperor's advisers in Wolkersdorf: no opportunity arose to convey the Duke's wishes to Ferdinand directly. By acquiescing in the Restitution Edict he had allowed his almost unearthly sense of power to be wrested from him; his victories over rebels in Bohemia, southern Germany, Lower Saxony, Denmark were the

pillars of his sensibility, his imperial dignity. None around him dared say: the war must be concluded at once, a bad end threatens. No one would have believed it.

Now, as mutinies occurred among starving soldiers in Holstein and Pomerania and the talks with Tilly foundered, Wallenstein himself retrenched. Something unexpected cold-blooded hostile occurred. From Jutland long lines of troops came marching inland; they gathered in Pomerania leaving behind only small garrisons. Thousands upon thousands, at their backs an abandoned smoking devastated land. Half starved, slovenly after months of idleness, they streamed into Lower Saxony, descended on Electoral Brandenburg, stood ready to overrun the Empire. The Duke, the Emperor's commander in chief and field-marshal, seemed to have lost control. The dismayed imperial legates in Lübeck heard rumours that Friedland was drawing his forces together for a new offensive.

They scurried about; couriers raced to Güstrow. There they heard: the Duke is on the road, to Berlin, Frankfurt. They could not find him. His father in law Harrach received a note in his own hand, it was read out and discussed in the Privy Council; it alluded to various private matters, and in conclusion: He is on his way to Berlin; the soldier is a wild beast when he hungers and freezes and has no coin to spend. Responsibility for what has happened and will happen rests on those who failed to heed.

This shocked them to their senses. Peace must be concluded. It was not clear if the army really was disintegrating, or what the Duke was up to. The Emperor must be informed. They turned to the Lord Chamberlain, circumvented the Empress's household. Until the Empress's Father Confessor informed Her Majesty, and she enlightened the Emperor. She took it as an unexpected piece of luck that such a task had come her way; she heard that the decision must be made, however bitter. She thought of the ecstasies and teeth-grinding that had accompanied the matter of restitutions; the Emperor must again make sacrifices.

Having timidly broached the matter, she smiled at Ferdinand. The unbelievable happened. The Emperor had heaped exorbitant burdens on the unhappy Danes; for sure, he and his Mantuan lady grazed on the torments of the defeated regions. He was deaf to anything hinting at humiliation; heard nothing, only that peace should be made. He nodded; calmly gave everything away as he had given away the clerical properties, from the fullness of his imperial power. He was encased in his own majesty. Unlike in the matter of restitutions, he would not be shaken from his daze. They nudged at him in vain, everything changed in his presence.

The Empress was a mite disappointed. She complained, in order to elicit a sign of anguish from him and prevent herself going too far: The Danish malefactors are to achieve a good peace after such atrocities and such defeats? It is so, Ferdinand judged after long reflection, his eyes dark and gentle; I am offered peace, it is in our hands. Though fully cured, he fell again into gloomy relishing bouts of drunkenness. Let the Duke get on with it, he said; he fought all the battles. From afar he recalled the business of the clerical properties; a brief delicate sorrow swirled through him; with a dreamy defensive gesture he said no, let the Duke get on with it; if I could I'd bestow even greater honours on him. And after all he should be grateful to this King Christian of Denmark, who enabled him to rise so high.

He had emerged slightly enervated and much plumper from the latest bout of sickness; the round of ceremonial dinners and banquets slowly resumed, and in extravagant dissipation he

found himself again; his inward joy in people and things was almost saturated in gratitude. He made presents, presents. Once again she saw herself, ecstatic empress Eleonore, face to face with a quite different but equally wonderful bubbling bleeding spurting flower-scented being. He prayed like a child with bright eager eyes, friendly, familiar with everyone, priest, abbot, choirboy; was led to church as docile as a beast to its manger. She was astonished, bowed her turbulent blushing head, clung to him.

King Christian and his ravening warships had left Copenhagen and entered Wismar Bay, mocking German nautical dreams. He appeared off Travemünde, not far from the negotiations in Lübeck; his representatives Jacob Ulfeldt and Levin Marschalck sailed out to meet him, and afterwards strutted all puffed up into the chamber of the Lowest Council House, the merchants bowed, the imperials tucked in their tails: the wind had backed. The Bohemian asked with cool cruelty what peace conditions he should now propose. All the Mecklenburg coast as well as a little strip of Pomerania was completely exposed, could fall to the Dane with not a shot fired, to be regained only by the strongest military force.

No one knew where Friedland was or what he intended. In Vienna people made despairing gestures. There were days when for shame the Emperor was left ignorant of events.

But Christian had no appetite at all for another war in Germany. When he thought of Mitzlaff, tears came to his eyes; he wanted to end this chapter called 'German War'. He sat in his ship with his drinking companions and lovely ladies, swept up and down the coast and harbours of the Holy Roman Empire, every day hoisted sail anew like a regretful exile seeking a nook to sleep in. The evil ambitions of the king of Sweden, the bad intentions of Gustavus, made the Holy Empire seem even dearer to him. In disbelief he read the new peace proposals, delivered to him from the Duke of Friedland by Schauenburg. He learned to his disgust that three Swedish envoys had turned up in Lübeck and were trying to insert themselves into the negotiations, perhaps with no other intention than to seek out on behalf of their sovereign an excuse for war. Clearly, clearly he had been supplanted on the German stage.

He wanted peace, wanted peace.

All his provinces were returned to him, with no demand for damages. The Bavarians were in revolt against Vienna, but feebly. They too went in no little fear of Friedland. Christian disembarked from his vessels. He wandered about fuddled and half aimlessly in Schleswig with a small company of troops that skirmished with the remnants of Wallenstein's men, and as the mood took them fell on the populace to punish their supposed disloyalty, or celebrated with them a happy reunion. Buxom Christine Munk accompanied him on a mule; she was pregnant. As he lay at the farmhouse Kaerstrup on the little island of Taasinge, in his hand the news that Denmark would allow him to retain the crown undivided – overjoyed and tearful he could only stammer in confusion: "My Denmark! My Denmark!" and Siwert Grubbe for the first time drank him under the table – strapping dark Wibeke Kruse, one of pregnant Christine's maids, could not hold back: she asked Christine's own mother to take her to the king, or else she'd murder the pregnant woman. Together with the wanton Grubbe, pregnant Christine and the Kruse woman, the king romped his way into the New Year.

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Left all alone the Elector Palatine, handsome Frederick. Once again in The Hague, finding asylum with the *praepotenses* of the States-general. The dreadful war in Germany now over. Hunger in his quarters. He himself in debt. Pride had not abandoned him, nor the passionate Elisabeth. At every hour people bowed to his Bohemian Majesty. At any sign they were falling apart, they were beset by the furious little gadfly, Rusdorf.

Slowly Frederick adapted to roaming around Europe like a sanctified relic. The world changed manically about him, pillars cried "Justice, justice!" But he had become stone, had no fight left. He was waiting for someone to take him, load him onto a cart, on to victory.

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Like a ship that raises anchor after a long tedious time in harbour, the Bohemian gathered his army and began to hurl it onto the Empire. At this moment in the Peace of Lübeck, the whole Empire looked on with bated breath.

The Bohemian had cast his chains, the Empire lay before him. His plans were quite opaque; all anyone knew was that he planned, as he put it, to set the Empire on a robust footing.

What was left of the regiments marched out of Schleswig; key points along the coast and annexed hinterland were furnished with garrisons. At the same time around fifteen thousand men under Arnim headed for Poland, to tie down the Swedish forces fighting there under dangerous Gustavus Adolphus.* By Neustettin, Arnim crossed the frontier with four regiments of foot and three thousand cavalry, fuming to have been given this task in a foreign land.

Seventeen thousand men were placed at the Infanta's disposal in Brussels, to confront the States-general.

Six thousand tramped out of Magdeburg territory. Twelve thousand covered the seacoast. Regiments in the Empire unchanged.

From Lower Saxony, more regiments heading for Franconia and Swabia.

The Duke himself lay in Mecklenburg with four companies under Merode's command. These had been diverted from Swabia.

Within a few weeks, eight new regiments were formed; at Erfurt three regiments of foot.

Winter was over, spring had come. Confiscations of fixed and mobile properties of rebels in the latest war began under imperial commissions, with the entire proceeds allocated to military action. The hand of the Finance Commission, meeting in Güstrow, was evident.

This volcanic eruption of imperial force pushed Tilly's army into a corner of East Friesia. The ready funds enjoyed by Friedland's regiments brought League officers and mercenaries flocking in; the Confiscations Edict and the army's proud bearing helped. Colonel Lorenzo del Maestro abandoned Tilly. Wallenstein promised League colonel Gallas a commission as major-general; Tilly tried to arrest him, but Gallas was not intimidated. Count Jacob von Anholt, who with his wife had looted silver beakers and gold chains in Jever and Oldenburg, needed no lengthy deliberation. Tilly and Pappenheim themselves were shamelessly drawn to the golden lure; Tilly was promised four hundred thousand talers for a decisive crossing of the Elbe; he was to merge forces with the Welf principality of Calenberg; Pappenheim with Wolfenbüttel.

Then nothing happened.... Nothing that summer, nothing the following winter.

There was Wallenstein, with the imperial army. The army changed its location, moved from unsettled to peaceful regions, from overgrazed to lush. Wonders occurred like mirages: one regiment, two regiments were dissolved, the cavalry turned up somewhere else with other regiments, doubled in size.

Wallenstein travelled to Prague, Jičin, enlarged his duchy of Friedland with the purchase of Bohemian baronies – Wildschütz, Semtschitz, half of Turnau, Forst, Chotetsch, Petzka. By imperial privilege the duchy was granted extraordinary judicial powers: constitutionally independent of the Kingdom of Bohemia, free of Ferdinand's onerous Renewed Constitution of the Hereditary Kingdom. Wallenstein began to build the framework of a separate polity. Plans were drawn up for Jičin, which was to be his capital, hordes of artisans were brought in. Construction started on monasteries, monastic schools, seminaries.

Honest Arnim had marched into Poland with some of Friedland's regiments, to tie the Swede's hands. But the Poles hated the Germans; he had gone reluctantly into this barbarian land. He resigned his commission; the Duke could not rein him in, and Arnim buried himself away growling in Boitzenburg. The regiments made their way back into the Empire, augmenting the army by fifteen thousand men. The League's troops were hemmed in.

The Swabian region was suddenly inundated by the Duke, so that the League regiments of Cronberg and Schönberg had to withdraw.

The Empire waited in silence, braced like a bull facing the pole-axe. A dictatorship had evidently been erected over the Holy Roman Empire, its face and purposes unknown.

Softly a tremor started up in the territories: districts and towns became restless as they descended into poverty, their stirring brought the need for ever more troops, pressure increased, mild clashes began between the mutually challenging powers. Cannon-foundries, arms factories rose out of the earth; frightened districts saw the face of their country changing.

They became ever bolder: officers, army officials in the towns, in mayoralties, in tax bureaus; contribution tables in hand they enquired into local revenues, calculated, entered homes to investigate, no refusal possible. They looked without asking permission into subventions to the local prince, in Brandenburg, in Swabia. The substantial collections that resulted made their way first to Friedland's headquarters, were then forwarded to the professionals in Prague, Hamburg. And then Michna, on orders from Wallenstein, recruited a number of experienced mainly Bohemian men he could trust, who rode away from home to insert themselves in the administration of some distant locality, stayed watching over the region from a secure base. The wealthy Franconian sees of Bamberg and Würzburg underwent inspection, the territory of the free imperial city of Nuremberg, Bayreuth, the principality of Ansbach, the duke of Württemberg, the archbishop of Mainz. Since the Breisgau belonged to the Austrian interest, the Rottweil district also, the hand of the Duke of Friedland lay over the whole of southern Germany, except for Bavaria. The whole of Electoral Brandenburg suffered relentless occupation, Pomerania Mecklenburg Brunswick-Luneburg Calenberg Grubenhagen Wolfenbüttel were held down.

And as the masses of troops wandered about, were augmented, reinforced, newcomers flooding in, a constitution for the army became clearer week by week in the light of maxims

issuing from the Generalissimus together with regulations for protection of the population. Edicts posted at crossroads, in marketplaces villages, promulgated the principle of Mutual Respect between the Imperial Army and the People of the German Nation; security assured for both sides, the right to life; the welfare of the threatened Holy Roman Empire is for everyone the first consideration. The burden on the population is to be kept to a sufficient minimum; colonels and intendants and the civil authorities must together agree the amounts. No compulsory investigation of local authorities; the age of untamed plunder and excesses is over.

Prague spewed out a monstrous deluge of decrees regulating the contribution system, military courts – provost-marshal, regimental marshal corporals clerks provosts – over every mustering-ground and quarters. Lorenzo del Maestro as quartermaster-general made tours of inspection, the wildest excesses were curbed. But looting continued to spread its tendrils: colonels divided their staff among three different places and exacted contributions for three full complements; officers took lodgings in two places; ever more salvaguardia, unnecessary letters of protection forced on residents for a hefty consideration in respect of every door, every cart, every flock of grazing geese. In districts where tolls were plentiful, civilians and officers encouraged smuggling, indulged in it themselves by bringing whole shiploads of grain through as supplies for the army. The Estates had not been able to bring themselves to pay taxes to the Emperor and the Empire; now they must endure in their midst, imposed over them, the officers and commissars-general of Friedland's army.

Insidious vegetation twined about this trunk. No longer the despised and despicable flotsam of Flanders Bohemia Hungary, a new kind of hard overbearing character was shown to the world by these men who rode as officers of the army through town and countryside; they yielded nothing in pride to local patricians, clearly considered burghers beneath their notice, had no respect for property. Staked their life in duels and combat; moved around as soldiers of the Duke of Friedland, who had begun as a Bohemian nobleman and now as a direct Prince of the Empire was allowed to remain covered in the presence of His Imperial Majesty. Ever more sons of patrician households and noble families streamed to him.

Rumours fermented about the Duke's plans; mad words from the mouth of such and such an officer were traded from one guildhouse to the next, in town halls, princely antechambers.

Now and then the Duke himself allowed rumours to spread among the helplessly questioning heads about the coming Turkish war. Suddenly across the weary suffering countryside there rang out cries of advances, dreadful victories by the Pasha of Ofen down in Hungary; people eyed the voracious mercenaries and officers nervously, more attentively, feared for wives and children, maybe it was for this they were feeding up the army. Then it faded away, the machine rolled ever more vigorously on.

Among the stunned muttering people, new tones were heard. Gradually fiddlers tale-tellers balladeers took up the vainglorious soldier-ditties. Sang about the bitten half-chewed rat the Dane, of Wallenstein sent by the Emperor, he rose to duke on the back of victories. Burghers flocked like mice to bacon. There were secrets to tell, conspiracies to hatch against superiors, judges, counsellors, families; corporals and cornets to regale in taverns. Rebellion fermented in the dark, floated like a cloud from district to district. What was done by helmsmiths fletchers armourers swordsmiths ring-makers needle-makers remained no secret

to potters market-inspectors game-butchers fullers gingerbread-bakers, to tanners, tailors of cloaks and jackets, in imperial free cities, bishops' sees, noble residences. At first it merely enlivened guild get-togethers, but soon became an uncertain tentative movement, its watchword as yet unspoken.

Silent apathetic mass of nobles, patricians, men of learning, Catholic and Protestant; now they bestirred themselves. Events flowed into them like an electric shock, made them twitch. The old Barbarossa dream – a great free German Empire – was revived. Some passionate souls wanted to know: has the time come. Fiddlers sang so sweetly. But the situation revealed itself. Wallenstein showed his terrible face: a unitary German Empire, obeisance to one lord only. Mercenaries swaggered down lanes, over marketplaces, drums and timbals behind them. The language of the new ruler: poverty, deprivation of rights, enslavement. The Holy Empire transformed into a cattleshed. Impotent anguish sent petitions flying to the Emperor. The cowed gentry sent trusted servants incognito into villages and occupied towns to monitor the mood, bolster courage, stir up. They found little love. Peasants toiled in the fields, descendants of those proud men who a hundred years before had been rounded up and butchered by the ancestors of these nobles now sounding them out. They found anger and fear directed at both sides, Emperor and princes. Peasants cast mistrustful brooding looks at musketeers and riders, glared suspicion at the piping pleading envoys of their masters.

Only one people tittered at the sight of Germany's gloomy suffering: the Bohemians. They saw vengeance in preparation, heard the cracking of the Emperor's bow, fragments of the shattered weapon would impale his own breast and head. They rejoiced: they and they alone would not see victory elude them. Like a symbol above the ruins: the Duke of Friedland, this plague born of their land.

27. Intercepts

ZDENKO VON LOBKOWITZ was dead; his place as Chancellor of Bohemia now taken by soft-spoken Count William Slavata. His hostility to the Duke was well known; sadly he took up this position offered him as relative and enemy of the great Duke. Slavata stopped his ears in torment when people told him of the extravagantly splendid journeys the gouty Duke made to the spa at Carlsbad. "What have the Jews paid him, how much has he extorted, what usury has he engaged in." Wallenstein was forever rousing the misanthrope from composure to hostility. He was very subtle, exchanged sceptical deliberate words with Trautmannsdorf, but unlike that hunchback count was unable merely to keep an inquisitive eye on Wallenstein's ominous experiment, or go along with the Duke out of self-interest. He never removed the mask from his face. Quietly he studied the Duke, sometimes appeared at his new palace on the Hradschin.

One day the Bavarian privy counsellor Richel received a visit from a Capuchin, who presented Bohemian credentials and a written commission: he was to beseech his Electoral Serenity Maximilian to despatch an agent to Prague on a matter of highest importance. With a shrug of the shoulders the Capuchin declined to name the writer of the letter, or to specify the matter in question, and his credentials came from the very renowned abbot of the monastery. A Bavarian secret agent, Alexander von Hales, Italian, himself a Capuchin, travelled back with

him to Prague. There the abbot extracted from him an oath not to ask the name of the person to whom he would be presented, should this person not himself divulge it; and further that he would make no written note of what transpired, at least not before he arrived back in Munich.

Then, opposite the Italian on the stove-bench in the abbot's vaulted cell, sat a gentleman masked in red, who was greeted most reverently. He wore rings and armbands, as he spoke and pondered leaned his arms on crossed knees. Slavata spoke in Italian. Would the envoy take to Munich some information concerning the nature, the activities, the plans of the presently flourishing Duke of Friedland. When the agent declared that he would interrupt only when his memory was at risk of failing, Slavata behind his mask spoke as if to himself, slowly, repeating phrases, constrained.

He compared the character of Wallenstein, with whose sign he was much occupied, to that of Attila, Theoderich, Berengar, Desiderius,* all from ducal families, all achieved kingdoms through enfeoffment, and aspired to an imperial realm. He exhibits uncommon guile and artfulness, only God can descry his thoughts, behind his gruffness he conceals far-reaching plans. His revenues in Bohemia already exceed those of His Majesty. He is by nature inclined to autocracy; he hates only the Bavarian prince, as the sole hindrance, so he believes, to his plans. He intends to destroy the Catholic League in order to stand as the sole armed force in the Empire. His game is already two-thirds won. His method is simple: bribe the Emperor's Confessor and privy counsellors, billet troops in the Emperor's hereditary lands in order to bridle the House of Austria, which has been utterly impoverished by the war. He knows no respect; he called the King of Spain a simpleton in the Spanish ambassador's hearing, the King of Poland too; no one dares repeat what faults he found in the pope; there are five and twenty cardinals in Rome who, if he had his way, would be chained to the galleys.

After these observations the red mask sat silent, turned to see if anyone else was in the room, departed with a bow, gesturing to the Capuchin to stay.

A month later the important personage spoke a second time to the Capuchin in the same room; the agent was allowed to pose a few questions; the speaker drew two draft documents from his tall white boots: a discussion of Friedland's intentions for the imperial army, and an enquiry into possibilities for countering the planned coup in the Empire. According to these drafts, on which the speaker elaborated in a low voice, the Duke plans to ensconce himself in Lower Germany; his idea is to amend the aristocratic constitution in favour of an absolute monarchy. He will reveal what strength lies immanent in Germany, should it acquire a single head. The transformation of Germany, according to the enquiry, can be countered only by a mighty League army, led by a prince unafraid of violence. Wallenstein reckons on the pacific inclinations of the Bavarian prince and Tilly; frankly, he's gambling on their cluelessness.

Asked about the Emperor's stance, the personage replied: Ferdinand lets nothing come to him, and what does come he shakes off in order not to be shocked out of his complacency. Nothing can be expected from the Emperor, he will persist in his irresolution.

As Alexander von Hales was about to leave Prague he was detained by the Spanish ambassador to the imperial court, who by chance was looking for the Duke. This very haughty man wanted recommendations and letters taken to his acquaintances in Munich; dripping with vanity he revealed by and by that matters in the Holy Empire were heating up furiously;

he was delighted that people were thinking of the old relationship with Spain; Friedland understood the times, he had mentioned how Count Slavata had advised him in confidence, should his plans meet with opposition, or in any future change of thrones, to think first of Spain; the old blessed alliance would be restored.

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Three hours ride from Munich, in Schleissheim, the Bavarian lodged in his summer residence amid cow-meadows; the little Mosach trickled through a courtyard, turned a mill-wheel; through another courtyard the little gossipy waters of the Würm. Wide lowing cattlesheds, gently sloping meadows, fields of crops, millers, herdsmen from Switzerland and the Allgäu.

Saint Urban's Day:* under a grey rainy sky village children constructed a little wooden effigy of the pope. In the innermost courtyard of the residence, the spring rain beat on the wooden roof of a little theatre hall; within, crowded on benches behind the freezing Prince-elector – his blue satin cloak reached to the yellow half-shoes, blue unpinned satin hat with a band of pearls, old slack wrinkled face – sat the obese popeyed ponderous Prince Hohenzollern, president of his privy council; the strict very learned Bartholomew Richel, lord chamberlain and privy counsellor; the ancient goatee'd privy purse Kurz von Senftenau; Marquis Pallavicino, Jesuit knight and Maximilian's treasurer; Signor Cavalchino; tall willowy Count Maximilian Fugger; Johann Verdunk, his curator of curiosities; the private secretaries Rampeck and Schlegel; war commissars, sculptors. They sat in silence facing the low narrow wooden stage with carpeted boards, on which two men stripped to the waist were boxing, springing back and forth in the gloomy afternoon light.

Along both sides of the hall, two lines of helmeted lifeguards with halberds and swords stood straddle-legged.

One of the boxers, black-haired, broad, chin thrust forward, pranced madly around at the back of the stage with a twisted nervous smile, came bleating behind the motionless brown other, paced across the forestage, squinted back, squinted ahead, bowed to the hall with open arms. He waited in a corner stage-front, wheeled his arms in mockery, aped the motionless brown man. With a cheeky grin he advanced three paces. His right knee touched the other's extended knee, pushed, pressed against it. He pushed, the other pushed. Each drew up his other leg. The slim brown man, a head taller than his black-haired opponent, awoke from his dream, his face flushed, he gave a sudden hard shove with his sharply bent knee so that they tumbled past each other and the black-haired man fell on all fours. As he stood and turned, a hellish blow on the temple made him see stars, so that he sat down, seemed stunned, head drooping. As he tried to rise to his feet directing a mocking confidential smile at the hall, the brown man planted a foot on his bare shoulder and lightly tipped him over. His expression changed as he scuttled swiftly aside, stood pale and breathless, extended an arm, beckoned: "Come on, little fellow, keep coming. I'll pay."

The brown man raised a teasing foot. "Come on then, I'll pay for every blow. On you." Muttering he approached the brown man, dribbled, eyes wide; but before he could bite him in the leg as planned, the other landed two heavy blows on his shoulders; he twisted aside, lurched left, lurched right like a sack-laden porter, turned stage front, crouched to step down from the podium. Four lifeguards stepped forward clattering, halberds at the ready.

The short fellow gave a loud laugh, stood there swaying: “I challenge you, young man. Think you can win with your clumsy blows. Here I am. Hit me. I won’t stop you. I’ll have you soon enough.” The brown man up against him with thick bony fists. “I’ll have you. You’ll pay for every blow, you won’t get away.” Mild shoving, tussling. The dark man was suddenly afflicted by a multi-coloured buzzing droning; half unconscious he leaned against the wall, mumbled: “Think what you’re about. You’re heading for a fall.” Essayed a smile after a dreadful blow to the upper lip. “I don’t know how you’ll keep it up. It’s – haha – it’s atrocious. It’s deadly. You’re an assassin.” His arms waved aimlessly like hammers about his head as he dragged himself towards the retreating brown man. “My god,” he whined at the back wall, unaware he could see from only one eye, “I’d no idea who I was dealing with. Phooey, that’s you. You had to be unmasked before the world. They’re all witnesses, these noble lords. You’ll see no mercy.”

The slim brown man shouted angrily: “You slandering me? D’you want to fight or not, you blackguard?”

“You won’t spit on me. I’m waiting for you to dash yourself to pieces here. Let’s all see how far you can go.” The tall man clung to him, like a beast intent on congress with the swaying head-protecting body beneath; sobs and gulps came during pauses from the one below: “Man. Man. Yes. Keep hitting. Twenty. When you’re ready we’ll settle the account. I’ll repay every blow. Enough talk; just keep hitting. We’ll see how you escape vengeance.” The brown man grasped the other curled up on the floor by the hips, lifted him, swung him. Once, twice the black-haired man whirled floundering, head down. Crashing to the floor he spat blood, rolled over, staggered up blind, groggy: “Haha. Keep going. Twenty.” Five oar-strokes through the air; collapsed at the very front of the stage. Raised his head after a while, his swollen mouth lisped: “Hey you. Arrogant rooster. To work. Twenty. Not yet done. Let’s see when he’s had enough.”

The other screamed as if bitten, knelt by the prone body, and screwing up his eyes, tensing all the muscles of his face he smashed throttled kneaded rolled scrunched the limp figure. Which rose once to its feet, blue, jabbering, tried to open its eyes, vomited a stream of blood, fell on its side. The brown man, still kneeling, grabbed the other by the throat with both fists, dragged him upright by the slack neck, let the body drop face down. He spat angrily into a bloodstained palm. The spectators below laughed at his evil expression.

The pot-bellied Prince Hohenzollern exchanged a few words with the Prince-elector, who had stood up. The lifeguards formed a cordon. Maximilian, animated, spoke to Richel. They left the hall. Pages brought rushlights into the house.

In the little songbird-room Maximilian remarked, without looking at the Jesuit Contzen or at Richel: “In any case the musketeer should be rewarded, and all the patrol that seized the messenger. It was a satisfaction to me to receive this enlightening news.” Richel on a stool: “It is alas not apparent from Meggau’s letter how long the court has been receiving money for the Emperor out of the contributions. Or whether it was a one-off.”

“Dotting the i’s? It’s enough for me.”

Richel, swollen index finger at his nose: This letter is worth a battle won. Maximilian’s face kept changing hue; he had undone the buttons of his leather waistcoat, breathed heavily,

overcome with heat. Nothing must be said of this, I shall discuss it with the Emperor personally and alone. There was no further discussion. The gentlemen understood that this was a matter between princes. Richel was dismissed.

Eyes blazing, Maximilian asked the Jesuit: what loyalty does a Prince-elector owe his Emperor. Contzen leapt at it: "To the Emperor, every loyalty. To a non-emperor, none." To a further question: Ferdinand the Other, especially after the proceedings just discovered, is Emperor in name only. He has abdicated the exercise of power to his General. So there is no Emperor whom one can betray, and one cannot commit treason against a Duke of Friedland. There are two possibilities: either the Emperor has endorsed Friedland of his own free will, or he is under compulsion. Either he has surrendered his attributes of sovereignty, or else he is Wallenstein's slave. Given his Christian piety, we must assume the latter case. Treason has been committed. In which case we must support him, as Emperor. He concluded: As matters stand after the Capuchin's report and the intercepted letter from Meggau, it is the duty of every German, in particular every prince, to liberate the Emperor from his despoiler. Maximilian asked softly: "Even if liberation requires support from other, foreign, powers?" No need for Contzen to reply at once; let him take time to think.

For which, came the reply, we have the example of the holy Church; whether it makes distinctions between nations, or whether the only matter at hand is the Church itself. Max, observing him a long while from cold sad eyes: "If my subjects were unhappy with my rule and invited Turks or Swedes into my realm to depose me, would they be right to do so?"

"They would do wrong only to the extent that, in inviting a Turkish invasion, they would probably be cutting off their nose to spite their face; for the rest –"

The Prince, still looking fixedly at the Jesuit: "I may invite the Turk into my realm or the Empire, if by so doing I set the Empire back on its feet?"

"No question." Contzen stood up, concluded with a smile: It probably won't be the Turks.

Like a hunter whistling to his hound, gentle Cardinal Richelieu had given the signal to his people: Habsburg! German and Spanish blood enticed, its scent came wafting across. Waltz in, hurl ourselves at it, forget our disunity! "We must reinforce Metz," he sang to them, "we must advance to Strasbourg, open a door into Germany. Patience, patience! I shall not allow you to be impaled. Give me time, be tender with me, I shall proceed with a sweet open demeanour." The cogs of his wheel meshed with Wallenstein's wheel. Seductive words and gold pieces had rolled to the Hansa, to the Danes, Sweden, to the States-general, their chinking ever louder in the Empire, from west and south.

Ambassadors received instructions from the Cardinal: "Habsburg's power is the Duke of Friedland; the opposing power, the Electoral Princes. They are contending for the Holy Empire. We must let them contend until they open the Empire to us. Now, since Habsburg is the stronger, let us strengthen the princes." Like a gentle inspiration, broad-wheeled carriages bearing elegant M. Marcheville with his big eyes, the resolute soldier Charnacé, sabre across his knees, glided across the hilly imperial frontier, across the Rhine into the Holy Empire. Hardly noticed amid all the marching soldiery, they turned in polite silence south and east. Marcheville approached the town of Mainz, where Anselm Casimir ruled, the territory of

Philipp Christoph of Trier, Cologne under Prince-elector Ferdinand, brother of Max; in Dresden he presented himself to Johann Georg.

The Marquis de Charnacé had been on his way from Fontainebleau when Maximilian expressed a desire to speak with a confidential emissary of King Louis. In Fontainebleau they left nothing to chance: Charnacé was furnished with instructions.

The Bavarian sat beneath a baldachin in the refectory of the Neue Veste, at a long bare wooden table on which at Contzen's side the most learned gentleman Bartholomew Richel wrote and riffled through fascicles, when Charnacé, an unsightly ugly man, red-faced cockeyed, was led in by the noble Prince Hohenzollern. The conversation, during which Charnacé repeatedly declined to be seated in the presence of his Electoral Serenity, was almost entirely between the Bavarian Prince and the marquis; later the counsellors called documents in aid, a secretary the French had left outside in the antechamber was admitted to hand to the emissary his accreditation for submission to the Prince, as well as a great blank declaration bearing the signature of his Most Catholic Majesty. The Prince asked Charnacé about his withered arm; he spoke modestly of exploits in Poland; then: He had come from La Rochelle.* Details of those events he declined to offer, despite Maximilian's urging. He declared with emphasis that the Huguenot affair was a family quarrel of the French, all settled now. It would be a most particular joy and satisfaction to the newly strengthened Gallic nation to secure an opportunity to demonstrate outwardly its power and unity under the leadership of the glorious thirteenth Louis. He expressed the joy of his sovereign that the discussions with Bavaria, aimed at ending the terrible bloody war in Germany, should now attain a faster tempo.

"Earlier," whispered Maximilian, who all through the meeting toyed wearily with his hat, "I asked M. de Marcheville what are the goals France pursues in Germany. Pray answer me this."

Charnacé, left hand grasping his sword, eyes on the carpet: The goal of my sovereign is to see conditions in the Empire settled in accordance with the fundamental laws of the Empire, Golden Bulls, the Electoral Capitulation; he desires no revolutionary neighbours; in the wider spreading of the current violent events in Germany he perceives a threat to France's frontiers.

After muttering a few words, Maximilian whispered: "Go on."

"We have an interest in knowing there is such a power as the League in the Empire, and a Prince such as your Serenity of Bavaria to guarantee the Empire's status. We are therefore ready to defend the League by all conceivable means against violent and illegal subversion – as far as anyone may desire this of us. If I may speak more precisely, in so doing we should be waging a preventive war against the Empire. His Most Christian Majesty therefore acknowledges unconditionally the Electoral dignity of the present Prince of Bavaria."

Charnacé stopped suddenly, under the Prince's searching gaze felt disinclined to proceed. Richel scraped back his stool, stepped towards the Prince with a note, pointed to a particular place. Without looking, Maximilian took the note in his left hand, covered mouth and chin with his right, eyes fixed all the while on the quietly waiting envoy. Then Maximilian, very decisive, not raising his voice in the least:

"You, sir, understand relationships within the Empire. The report of the Capuchin Alexander from Prague, I am informed, was made known to you. Because of these

circumstances which threaten to overwhelm us, I took his Most Christian Majesty into my confidence, and instructed my ambassador in Paris to engage assiduously in correspondence with royal officials. The League, whose commander in chief I am, has no interest, given its most loyal disposition towards the Emperor, in accepting or even furthering these circumstances. The League desires the elimination of burdensome dissidents. This, sir, you know." The envoy bowed. "I will only suggest," Maximilian clarified, "what paths might be followed in concert. It is sufficient for the declared position of the League to stay neutral in the Emperor's coming offensive wars, but in preserving its neutrality, in the worst most serious case, to be certain of France."

His agreement to this, the envoy declared having regained his voice, is within his plenipotentiary powers and explicit instructions. The purpose of his Most Christian Majesty is to place their goal of peace, which will bring such blessings to humankind and Catholic Christendom, on the soundest of footings. There will be joy in France, at the royal court most of all, in having formed a Catholic phalanx with the German League, which can induce thoughts of peace and render orthodoxy unassailable.

"In that case," repeated Maximilian after a lengthy pause, "I shall press home the neutrality of the League in any further offensive by the Emperor. The Bavarian intent is furthermore: defence against insurgencies in the Empire; defence of the imperial Constitution; defence of the holy Church. The intent of France must at no point run counter to this."

When Charnacé uttered the word "alliance" Maximilian warded him off with both hands: "Let no one come at me like a woodcutter." The situation in the Empire was dire; he had no reason to conceal this from such a shrewd emissary. Yet he was a German Prince-elector, and would never be browbeaten into deviating from sworn allegiance to his Roman Majesty. Come what may, the unshakeable point was not to prejudice Empire Emperor or Electoral College.

The counsellors looked up; Maximilian was glowing, teeth clenched, as if embarrassed; Charnacé leafed calmly through his papers: Your Serenity will have a free hand to make whatever use he wishes of the assistance provided by his Most Christian Majesty; given the sincerity of the feelings of Louis and Richelieu towards the thousand bleeding wounds of Germany, no misuse of an alliance is possible. Peace, peace the common watchword, born in consideration of humanity Christian faith and self-preservation.

Softly Maximilian slipped into the cramped quarters of his father the duke, in the Wilhelmine wing of the Residence. The old man, in a black woollen gown by the stove, rubbed his big son's hand. They sat hunched together through the noontime. Maximilian hurled bitter words at Emperor Ferdinand. A Satan had sent him this Wallenstein. And now the House of Habsburg is in the ascendant, flinging out chains and henchmen; it neighs with joy like a mare in heat, and he, the Wittelsbacher, must acquiesce. The shame, the shame: he, a German, must ally himself with the French king. He is driven with teeth and claws and roaring candour to fall on that beast, that devil. The Empire, the Holy Empire that he loves he must now destroy, because Habsburg, the mad joker, wants him to. Now all that matters is Habsburg and Wittelsbach! Masks, for so long worn so tight: away with them at last, at last! The Roman Empire trampled. No more Emperor, no more Electors, into the abyss with it all.

The little grey man paced up and down with him by the stove, meekly stroked his distraught son's hand, silently thanked God. Let the Holy Roman Empire take the blame, foamed the corpse-pale Prince pounding the table, when it lies prostrate, when the deluge of heresy grows, when the frontiers are violated. It must come to pass. Protector of the Empire, Defender of the holy Church, Enlarger of the Empire: for shame, for shame.

He dealt with crosseyed patient Charnacé in his own quarters, threw his swordbelt to the floor with some violence. An end to this talk of a mighty united victorious France. He is a German Prince-elector, Bavaria and the League are strong, he should go to The Hague, let the Palatines sing to him there. What are the French up to in Alsace, what mischief are they hatching in Strasbourg; the Bishop of Strasbourg is a member of the League, he'll tolerate no attack or invasion there. He was embittered and scornful. Let no one think to make use of the crisis in Germany to go fishing in troubled waters. What does France intend in Holland, what plans with the States-general? No, no, France and its most Christian king have misunderstood him, the Bavarian, entirely. He is not the foolish lad who leaves the door of his house unlocked at night so that robbers can break in. Let no one dare approach him on such a basis. The Bohemian scoundrel would be preferable to that.

Charnacé parried with assurance. He sensed that the Prince wanted to be led by him through all the difficulties. Murky points were left in the dark, clear points highlighted. Towards the end Maximilian grew calm. They came so far as to negotiate the numbers of mercenaries to be recruited on both sides. The treaty document, in accordance with Maximilian's wish, said nothing of the neutrality of Bavaria and the League; that would be established by separate letters. In silence, none too graciously: Charnacé was free to go.

Maximilian took a coach and six to the hilltop monastery of Andechs. The Saviour wore the miraculous crown of St Mechtild. Pilgrims joined his train, processions of children with painted crosses, scourges and spears. Huge arm-thick candles were carried outside; little bells on garish banners. The pillar with the statue of Mary outside the church was surrounded by the sick and frail; they lay at its foot attended by priests, convulsing. Mothers hoisted children high before the statue, massaged the sore place, sang all the while. Some crashed through like logs to reach a free spot, tumbled over one another; cowled figures exorcised evil spirits.

Maximilian blissful: Habsburg, not he, had destroyed the Roman Empire.

To increase the power of the holy Church: this was the destiny granted him by Heaven, him and his line. He would not be found wanting.

28. In Blooming Lombardy

WITHDRAWN FROM THE GREY windswept coast to defensive positions inland, the main part of the army moved in growing strength into central Germany and on to the south. It laid a heavy pall over the Emperor's hereditary lands, climbed into the hilly frontier regions.

As princes and Estates began to sound each other out, and protests against the presence and unbounded extortions of the military colossus shrilled from every little district, a small spark down in the south flared suddenly into a blaze. An imperial fief across the Alps, Mantua, fell vacant on the death of its lord, the succession was contested. The young Duke of Nevers,

the deceased's great-nephew, saw no need for enfeoffment by the Emperor, or for adjudication. Whereupon the Roman Emperor Ferdinand the Other sequestered Mantua and its other territory Montferrat; Count Johann of Nassau, colonel of an infantry regiment, was despatched as sequestration commissioner. Egged on by Richelieu, who was eager to pounce on Lombardy, the young duke refused to obey him. At this point the Emperor asked the Generalissimus whether he was prepared to take a force into Upper Italy to bring Mantua to heel.

An army was formed. A swollen stream marched from the Prague quarters out across the Empire. Lamentations steamed like a meadow in the light of dawn: it's war, keep calm everyone, Emperor and Empire have been insulted. The old army grew again; the Duke needed two armies, one to fight, one to gather contributions. Regiments from Swabia marched south, occupied passes in the Graubunden Alps, loomed like a thundercloud over Italy. No sea here, the Alps no barrier. As young Nevers vacillated, Louis the French king himself appeared with a strong army, and coming to the frontier town of Susa occupied it. This new force crossed the bridge over the Dora; Richelieu, slender goatee'd monk acclaimed by every branch of the military, allowed his harnessed steed to prance at the bridgehead in bright March sunshine; brace of pistols at his saddle, long battle-sword at his side, blue plumed hat waving.

Pinerolo fell, the Alpine passes were open, the army surged down ten thousand strong, driven by their marshals Créqui, Schomberg, La Force. The imperials under Count Collalto were cast adrift to fend for themselves. "You must gather your own men, brother," wrote the Bohemian; "the Empire has enough of them, I cannot manage all that come to me. The more strong men I take on, the more securely will resistance in the land melt away. Old women and the rabble may grumble and nag; it doesn't bother me."

Whole companies of mercenaries were swallowed up in the first skirmishes. War commissars – Metzger and the cavalryman Neumann – sped down from Wallenstein's quarters; a new song was starting. Vigorously they urged the battle-thirsty strategist Collalto to the attack; slyly held back artillery and armour. With treacherous reports they incited the French to attack, whereupon German losses grew. And Louis: how he crowed over those stupid so famous Wallensteiners. He took it on himself to eradicate them from Italy root and branch, within five months.

Certain of his cause, the anxious young Duke of Nevers lowered the imperial flag at Casale. Friedland's regiments, despite dreadful losses, failed to mutiny; the countryside was still blooming, town after town lay at their mercy for rapacious plunder of goods and people, in fury and in sated torpor.

Wallenstein cradled himself in Prague. From his chancellery patents flew for new bodies of troops; he ordered them to slacken the reins in the Empire for a few months, the Emperor needs an army, the war in Italy is consuming huge numbers, more and more must be lured in. Recruiters criss-crossed the countryside with shrilling fife and battle-drum, hauled wagons laden with good coin, tracked down refugee hideouts in the forest; merry music, bright scarves, extravagant hats, power over men and women: which of you ne'erdowells wants to stay in poverty and serfdom. The war in the Italian plain was a maw, devouring, spitting in the grave.

Bassevi came to the hard Duke. Who replied: "No complaints, Bassevi. You have no reason to lament these deaths, when no German would lift a finger if your whole tribe were swept

away in a day. It's beside the point. Or do you have doubts?" The whitehaired Jew shook his head, eyes wide: "I don't doubt that certain further successes remain to the Duke of Friedland. I don't doubt it. I believe that, if the Duke of Friedland were a Jew, the entire wretched Jewish people could migrate tomorrow to Palestine and establish anew Solomon's kingdom." Wallenstein hooted laughter: "I could take you there for sure; but the sultan in Constantinople would eat you up. No bad thought for a Christian, taking you there." The Jew frowned: "God preserve me. I am content that you are well-disposed towards us."

Friedland strolled with his pretty wife past his clean shiny aviaries and fishponds, enjoying the mild winter weather. His cousin, thickset colonel Max Wallenstein, had a little Bolognese dog on a leash at the duchess's side. Friedland stood on the gravel, jabbed his cane in the ground: "I'd never have believed this Mantua business could take such a turn. The Emperor's people are struck speechless. Find me men, Max, the Germans belong in Italy. Have you seen what France is up to. He wants to be Germany's enemy. He! Richelieu, over-subtle fellow, thinks he has us in his pocket. His Father Joseph, the Capuchin, he and the fool Louis have us already. What joy! He fells our enemies, every day a hundred more; how well people adapt to serve us. As for us – every day our cares shrink a little."

The duchess, vexed, whistled to her lapdog; even Count Max looked down disconcerted at his sable coat. Wallenstein bragged, gesticulated wildly with a bony hand: "We grow stronger; but he won't bring down the Emperor. Let him try as he will, the besotted silkworm, he's doing us a favour. The French, Max – it was them I lacked." He spoke coarsely, not sparing the ears of the blanching duchess, of the delightful French sickness that had ravaged his army. He drew his sullen wife jovially to him by the arm.

In the little astronomical cabinet in a wing of his palace, the Padovan astronomer Argoli and his meek unctuous pupil John Baptist Senno had to calculate prospects for the campaign, by candlelight. He laid plan after plan before them, they must identify auspicious days. The immensity of night peeped in at them. Muttering agitated to himself, Friedland paced past the bronze tablet on which his own horoscope was engraved: "Saturn makes contemplative melancholy thoughts, human commandments are disdained. Jupiter follows. The Moon stands in the sign of depravity."

Friedland took up position beside Argoli's telescope, grunting, emitting barks of laughter: "I'm a pious Christian, Argoli. You know what donations I have made. None shall think me diabolical just because you show me God's secrets."

The unstoppable horde descending on Lombardy spread out. From the Swiss frontier one blooming region after another: Duchy of Savoy, Piedmont, Spanish Milan, the great Venetian Republic, from Bergamo to Belluno, Gradisca. Whatever was inclined to rebellion rebelled. To the south, ruling from Civitavecchia to Castelfranco, powerful Pope Urban. He had looked on phlegmatically as war raged in Germany; now he ranted about the influx of men from that cursed land, the birthplace of heresy, now flourishing. Gasparo Borgia, brutish Spanish envoy, came in his puffed-up arrogance for an audience with the Holy Father, who would not admit him. But his nephew, secretary of state Cardinal Francesco Barberini, solemnly hauled the Bavarian creature Crivelli from his quarters to see the pope.

The pope snorted at him: The House of Austria has grown disloyal to the Church, until no prince respects it. Boundlessly mischievous, it interferes in Italy's relations, flings the dross of every nation over the blooming fields of Lombardy; God's chastisement will not be long in coming; the just man is repelled by such arrogance. In a voice of thunder he warned against incursions into his domain; the pope was elevated to his throne by the Holy Ghost itself; he is duty bound to defend God's privileges. The criminals will drive it to the point where a Brief of Condemnation will be nailed to every church door, and he must call on every creature to rise up against them.

The envoy from the Viennese court dared to register a protest at the Vatican. The eighth Urban, hulking peasant greybeard on his throne in a white silk soutane, red broad-brimmed felt hat on his sweaty head, poured words of acid onto him: "The highest judicial power rests with the Emperor. But how can I judge, do not my office and my judgements come from God? How can I offer violence in return, how could I do that to God's creatures? For these people may be imperial subjects or feudatories of the Emperor, but they are also God's creatures. And of course we know that at the last moment we are all equal in the eyes of the Lord in Heaven, judges and judged alike. Neither will escape easily. Let the lords of this world have a care that they take on not too many burdens! The triumph of righteousness will not be long in coming."

He turned shuddering in disgust to the cardinals standing around, not favouring the envoy with another glance: "There are men who mask their lust for power in the most shameless most deeply insulting way. They dare to wrap themselves in a semblance of piety. It is hard to understand how these people, in making their judgements, can be distinguished from murderers and thieves, robbers. The soil of Lombardy shall bear witness. I'll speak no more of this. It is a sad fate that this should erupt in the time of our vicariate."

As he turned with strangled curses, made haste to strengthen his northern frontier, recruit mercenaries, a high-handed wish rang out from Vienna: the Emperor Ferdinand the Other, beloved son of the Church, wishes to be crowned by the Holy Father; let Urban come to meet him in Bologna or Ferrara. At the same time the Emperor's feudal rights over Montefeltro and Urbino can be explored. The most menacing threat the Vatican had feared now came from the headquarters of the over-mighty Bohemian: Italy should not hem us in; Rome was plundered once a hundred years ago, has meanwhile grown much richer.

And as the northern and eastern frontiers of the Empire remained quiet, the army lying over Germany like a net of iron, Italy fermenting, the castle in Vienna gave a triumphant reception to the ancient Carmelite Dominicus à Jesu Maria, who in the decisive battle at White Mountain had inspired the will to victory among the League troops. He intended to deliver a reminder that all the Emperor's power and supremacy had been achieved through the Church, through the advocacy of its prayers. The Emperor should show reverence, and desist from a murderous onslaught on the Holy Mother. A few days later the frail monk fell ill, weakened by his long journey, and died as Ferdinand looked on. That evening the funeral procession wended its way from the castle to the Carmelite monastery under the tolling of every bell. Ferdinand and his family waited in the Carmelite chapel.

That same evening, for the first time in a long while, the Emperor descended to the long underground passage to seek out Prince Eggenberg in his house. He declared: With this

overwhelming turn of events, this evident anointing of the House of Habsburg by God and the most blessed Virgin, it is necessary to think of securing what has been achieved. I am a man, frail. I would see my son at my side. Let Eggenberg set in motion the question of succession, his election as King of the Romans.*

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In every European land were countless orders of men and women united by the miracle of Jesus of Nazareth. The renewed ancient orders of Dominicans, Franciscans, Benedictines, Capuchins, Theatines, the Soldiers of the Company of Jesus. The Feuillantines, women who lay under such boundless penances that they wasted away in droves and the pope had to intervene; nuns and monks who imposed on themselves wakefulness by day and night, silence, unceasing worship of the mysteries of the Eucharist. The Nuns of Golgotha, Place of Skulls, who observed the Benedictine rule: by means of incessant prayers at the foot of the Cross to atone for the injuries done to the Saviour, and if possible expunge them. The Order of the Visitation, founded by Francis de Sales and Saint Jeanne de Fontal, warned against ecstasy, one must pray through one's work. The Ursulines, the male congregation of Saint Maurus.

From all came roars of outrage, provoked by princely adherents of the Barberinis on the Tiber and by the people of Rome, at rumours that the German Emperor meant to fight his way through to Rome to be anointed by the pope, while a new Ferdinand would become King of Germany; cries of "Ghibellines! Emperor-lovers!" at the wall of Hadrian, the plain of Nero, the new wall built by Urban, at the Capitol, Lateran, at the Baths of Diocletian and Caracalla, from the Holy Stairs, at the Palazzo Caffarelli, Massimo, Farnese. Turmoil in every limb of the Church: they mean to bring down the pope, attack the Vatican. Outbreaks of rage from the goaded Urban, transmuted into anxious laments about the condition of the Church.

The theft from Mantua, with Urban's approval, of the ashes of the great Countess Mathilde of Canossa, who was a friend of Gregory in his struggle with the Salian Emperor Henry IV,* was a beacon of hope: we shall defend ourselves, we'll not be squashed. And hatred from a thousand springs poured into Germany.

Wallenstein despatched troops through Graubünden, had heavy siege guns dragged by mules over the mountains. One day in Rome, monks and laity cried something known already by everyone in Prague and Vienna: the Duke of Friedland will place himself at the head of the army, to enforce imperial supremacy in Italy. Frantic screeching in Rome: "The barbarians are coming! Goths!" Volunteers offered their services to the furious sombre pope, for defensive works cannon-casting ball-casting. He travelled with his secretary of state and the Venetian ambassador to the northern frontier of his territory. A hundred Roman nobles in light steel armour, on horses protected by clinking scales, rode ahead of his carriage; a strong detachment of Swiss Guards, blue jacket, pike, blue iron helmet with the flared rim, round about them officers splendid in red satin. Outside Rome the pope leaped onto his huge black steed, loomed in a gold-studded steel cap, black shirt of mail with satin collar and mail leggings, bronze plates at the vaulted chest, spiked plates at the knees; his voice raged, he plunged forward. French officers from Grenoble met up with them.

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They crept out of burrows in the earth, mud-brown men, frightened squinting faces, grubby peasant smocks, their blinking eyes scanned the plain that fell away in front of them, the windbreak of green bushes; they signalled, whistled behind them. Children clambered up flinching at the light, afraid. Women with long braids, sand in their bonnets, shook dun skirts in the grey-white light of morning. The tall forest edge came alive; the undergrowth among firs and beeches was broken through; low whistles. A double row of tiny white tents down on the plain, slender tall lances looming over low village houses; the stone cross at the foot of the slope overturned; horses neighing, a shot now and then; over a few shingled roofs a layer of dark smoke unmoving; at the other end of the village, little barrows moved slowly up the lane. To the left on the horizon, the church tower of Zittau. They were in the very farthest corner of Saxony, on the Bohemian border. The men dragged spades and pickaxes out of the forest, dug an open grave, deeper, wider, bending mutely to the task extended it in a zigzag along the slope, hour by hour. In the forest cattle lowed, women washing, cooking at a fire; the smoke rose as scattered wisps dispersed by big cowhides stretched high in the treetops. Small bands of men slipped separately down the slope in the middle of the day, crept around the village, fell from both sides on solitary carts, struck down mercenaries, carried sacks to nearby hiding places, at evening slipped back up.

Trees felled, palisades erected. Cave dwellings, forest dwellings in Lausitz. Communities attacked by vengeful troops, killed, those who could flee crept among other refugee groups. From Lausitz into Bohemia wandering gypsy-like bands gathered, climbed scouting along the hilly country beside the Elbe, past vineyards, blooming fields of hops, rapeseed, beets. Open towns were unsettled; orchards plundered near Leitmeritz; on the meadowlands by Melnik lay the corpses of people dead of hunger; many women children stayed behind in the villages. They thronged the gloomy valley of the Moldau, aimless, driven on by misery.

Three thousand massed outside the gates of Prague. No one knew what they wanted. The mayors of the Old and New Towns sent them baskets of bread, and directions out of Bohemia. The throng stayed put, wanted to enter Prague; they were convinced the Emperor was there. Since traffic at the gates was severely obstructed, and the queue of boats waiting to unload at the island stretched as far as the great bridge, the colonel of the garrison ordered them dispersed. The refugees had increased their number with women and children; they were scattered by whips halberds salvos of hot lead. Fleeing helplessly headlong with no idea where, the mass of people evaporated; two days later no trace could be found around Prague. In the Jewish quarter some rejoiced at the gunfire – we are well defended! – but most shut themselves up in their homes, many covered tearful faces.

One wave receded, another came. They begged for rescue by the Emperor. Gangs roamed hungry through the countryside from the Harz down to Swabia; some tramped dully on, others fell victim to idolatry, fled despairing to the spirits of forest and field, goblins, village sybils, poachers, tree-sprites, crept timorously past roadside crosses. When the rabble forced its way into a town, it was swiftly whipped back out. With them came rumours of crucifix-smashing, the casting of deadly evil spells; it gave them a bad name; in some towns they were closely watched, surrounded, after a brief interrogation strung up, even broken on the wheel. Like an accusing chorus, ever more crowds appeared at the gates of bigger towns, behind them

rode agents of their overlord – bishop count prince – threatening: They must return to their work, to the field, the mill, the mine; warnings against vagrancy. Always they wanted the Emperor, knew not why. The Emperor was powerful, his army powerful, he should make peace. Along the road they gave voice to their oppressions: the war-burden on their shoulders, harvest levies, levies on dead wood, pig-oats, capons, small livestock, the third penny from communal firewood, the small tithe, salt tax, bread-oven, mill, road tolls, hunting fees, market fees, stamp duty, marriage levy. They laughed: The Emperor's powerful, he can do more than this. In Brandenburg territory they appeared with banners, soon a thousand strong, humble in their respectability, jurymen, councillors, judges begging for food, please don't harm us, we're on our way to the Roman Emperor with petitions. They were given food, urged fearfully on. Many died by the roadside. As they neared the Bavarian frontier, the Prince-elector sent war commissioners to ask if they would enlist in the peasant militia, the posse comitatus. Their answer: we have come precisely on account of the war, its ending is our dearest wish, we must make so many contributions to friend and foe, including the big tithe, small tithe, pig-oats, salt tax, bread-oven, road tolls, small livestock, capons. Whereupon they were scattered with ease by a small squad of mercenaries and fifty horse, captured, chased into scrub. Many found sanctuary in monasteries. There they learned that the Emperor means to conquer and crush everything, Emperor and Friedland are one and the same, even the pope wants rid of them, you must pray to the Virgin in Heaven for the pope to gain the upper hand, along with the loyal princes of the Empire.

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The Empress was a relation of the rebellious Duke of Nevers.* On the matter of restoring church lands she had gone at Ferdinand like a flame to tinder, fluttered tirelessly about him. Now she was scared, a secret dagger-blow, every day a little deeper. She had to step back. What had she done, how had she lived. To what ruin was the man at her side driving her, meddling in Italy with his brooding obsession. She was nothing to him. He had no feeling for Mantua. She woke gasping from sleep, in horror of men in black rushing at her in their great capes, popping up behind her bed with knives and plumed hats. The ecstatic woman was suddenly torn out of her fever. Cooled by unfathomable dread that the hordes of the butcher Friedland might fall on her own sweet homeland. Memories of her sunny childhood brought comfort; a view through the bars of a darkened room. Reluctantly she circled Ferdinand, came closer to him. She refrained from begging on behalf of cousin Nevers and her native place. She knelt attentively before Ferdinand, the gloomy man, in torment felt her way to him. The question was not Mantua, but he himself.

Ferdinand in his sacred placidity understood nothing. He hovered brazenly lofty over the cliques around him, looked greyly down on their squabbles, mistrustful, insensate. He made presents, presents. What came to the Jesuits stupefied even them. Like Caesar he tolerated no thanks. To his Mantuan lady he spoke stiffly: The young duke shall come into his rights, once his claim has prevailed and no sooner; enfeoffment will follow. She pleaded, kissing his brown slack hand: "You have given so much to the Fathers, your counsellors are richer than I am."

"Have the Fathers and counsellors had presents from me? I know nothing of it. Let them not presume." She looked up at him, Golden Fleece at his breast, grey quivering beard, heard

the rasping murmur. This is the incomprehensible barbarian for whom gallant Eggenberg fetched me out of Lombardy. Into her head, she knew not how, strayed a sudden obstinate memory of a curious conversation outside her window: “If you like me, dance with me tomorrow night.” Lusty cavaliers with their ladies conversing; why did their tender whispers affect her so. Distressed she left the snuffling Emperor, who stared after her like a pagoda.

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Beside a raucous aviary, near the well-house of her Schönbrunn Palace, Eleonore sat in a rose bower; two Italian ladies in cloaks and black veils walked up and down nearby. To old Eggenburg she said: I trust you; and begged him for the love of God to pursue a noble peace to the best of his ability. Standing facing her, listening with respectful sympathy, he asked: what were her instructions.

– Why he is so seldom seen, never at the quintain, never in the riding hall, or out hunting; he seems to have some distaste for her or the Emperor.

– Ah, he has been ill.

– He must not speak so; can she still have trust in him. She is fearful for her home town; an unjust war has been drummed up, young Nevers has been led astray by France; ah Saviour, it cannot be that Italy will be laid waste, just like Lower Saxony and Bohemia; one cannot wage war on the whole world, on the Holy Father; so why, really, why.

There by a post in the bower’s shade, Hans Ulrich Eggenberg, hand resting on his cane, holding a blue satin hat; above the stiff white ruff his white-bearded head rolled as if on a platter; the Golden Fleece of Spain flashed in the dappled sunlight; he smiled to himself, looked down at his cane:

– Never in his life has he engaged in dangerous military activities; affairs take their own weighty course; they are not easily entreated.

She sat erect on her seat, eyes flashing; her black hair, parted in the middle, fell behind her neck to a bun from which a huge heron’s feather rose vertically and drooped forward. The hands in white riding gloves were clenched on tight-pressed knees; the yellow gown fell in loose folds around her:

– He it was who fetched her from Mantua, it was to him as representative of the Emperor she made her vow. She relies on him. Can one have faith and yet doubt in justice and luck; something must be done to stop the town of her birth from becoming a rubble heap; she cannot allow it, and if....

She bent over, raised a hand to her face, quickly straightened, gazed blindly into a corner. As if she were a child Eggenberg studied her face, the froward feather bobbing over the helpless tormented trembling features; swiftly, in a businesslike tone he declared: It is through no fault of the Emperor that it has come to this war; no Habsburg has ever undertaken wanton acts. Bad though it is that young Nevers allowed himself to be enticed by France into a disrespectful demeanour, still there is perhaps a possibility of drawing him away from France.

She had no wish to speak of guilt and innocence, she said; just let them not take from her the town of her birth. She burst out: How much has she sacrificed in leaving Italy; will no one

think of her. Stood, held out to him – he let his hat fall to the ground – an icy hand, stood facing him. He gave a cordial smile, reciprocated the squeeze of her hand: It is hard to give rash binding promises, everyone in the realm suffers to see the Holy Father stand against them. "As God is my witness I shall pursue a noble peace with all my might; there must be peace, Christendom is raging so terribly against itself, perhaps all are working for no one but the Grand Turk in Stamboul."

She was pleased, squeezed his hand harder. "All I can do," she whispered, gathering her skirts, "is express to you my wishes."

29. Battle in the Heavens

THE IMPLICATIONS of the Emperor's wish to have his son crowned King of the Romans were discussed in the High Council.

All sat under the Duke of Friedland's spell, and laughed. Leave the Duke to it, they said, and the pope and France; that's the best course for the Privy Council at present; the game goes splendidly; it's to our advantage that we stand apart from the parties, can intervene when it suits us. As for how matters in Germany will develop through him – the prospects are quite marvellous, yes, marvellous.

Their opinions were an echo chamber. Misshapen Count Trautmannsdorf, yellow-white his complexion, fingers playing in his armchair, smiled a superior smile, yawned often: the election of the King of the Romans would fall their way like a ripe fruit. Tall Stralendorf, with a nod to the count, alluded to the turn away at court from attachment to Friedland; that coach had left, he'd had enough of rebelling against it; declined any responsibility.

"For what? For what?" asked the hunchback, slightly mocking; "for a Habsburg victory?" The stiff smooth-shaven man flung himself brusquely back in his chair.

In a cloak of violet silk, grave olive-hued face with strong eyebrows resting on a beringed white hand, Slavata gazed towards the chimney corner, which was hung with a blue-green Gobelin. His blue eyes scrutinised Trautmannsdorf, who sank deeper into his chair; often looked away. He was of another view; there was no prospect of fulfilling the Emperor's wish via a legal determination of the succession, given the bitterness of the Electors over the violence in the Empire, the penury, the upheavals that threaten. Yet the succession must be secured. Hence even the Electors must be won round.

Stralendorf, slightly mocking: "But how, my lord?"

"By the same force that occasioned their bitterness."

At this the hunchback, with a nod to the Bohemian, clapped his hands.

No doubt that's the best way, Stralendorf continued, still mocking; from another angle too: it will bring clarity to power relations in the Empire; for example in Pomerania, Brandenburg, in the many circles with a minor local prince. It will reveal who really rules.

Trautmannsdorf was almost jubilant: Indeed so, one can push it to riveting extremes; consequence after consequence can be adduced: such as – he stretched his arms out to the company – the necessity of not interfering, in order not to spoil or complicate matters; best

would be, simply to throw this question of the succession out there for public discussion, it will suit us well to divert the quarrel onto this point, we shall have the bone of contention in its most concentrated form, every power will be aroused and, well – then we shall see.

Speaking for himself – Stralendorf clamped his sword haughtily between his knees – he lacked the courage and the levity to treat the affairs of the imperial House in such a manner.

Slavata lifted his dark-blond hair back from his shoulders as if to cool his neck; looked pensively from one speaker to the next, intent on the conversation: "Yet the loyalty and love one cherishes for the Emperor is the same for all; let no one have to split himself in two to show loyalty. I propose," he said in a muted tone, "an Electoral Convention to elect the king. For the rest, leave the Duke a free hand as hitherto. If the Electors decline to elect young Ferdinand, the Emperor will take note, as he takes note of any other matter. And ignore it."

"My dear fellow," submitted Trautmannsdorf, "how will you achieve your goal. Young Ferdinand may be King of Hungary, but he won't become heir apparent by ignoring him."

Quietly Slavata laid both hands in his lap, looked down, his tan had paled, his eyes blazed a moment before they focused on his fingers; he forced syllables through clenched teeth to pose a counter-question to the assembled counsellers: What will in all likelihood happen if the Emperor allows Friedland the same free hand, and the Electors decline to elect the king. The esteemed Electors may bark and howl, but their fangs will have been drawn! Slavata turned with a strange smile to Trautmannsdorf: This is the crux of the quarrel, and – a whisper – the crux of a Habsburg victory. Perhaps then the Emperor will *appoint* the new king.

Stralendorf banged his fist on the table, he was trembling from head to toe, his twisted face glared horribly at the Bohemian count; the hunchback flung himself amazed head-shaking from side to side in his chair; fat Questenberg, grimacing like an ogre, blew blithely through his shaggy moustache, sat swelling, popeyed at the short cross-table as if someone were stroking him. Stralendorf yelped: "That's the X and Y of Friedland's ABC; we are still in the middle. Electors with no power of election – this is by far not the last of it; he can produce a Roman king from his sleeves as easily as he chased away the Dukes of Mecklenburg; then it comes to – the Emperor himself. Who will then be Elector, as the only remaining electoral prince – Wallenstein! Count Slavata, once you thought differently of your cousin. Then swords will be at the Privy Council's throat, and the ABC will be at an end."

Questenberg snapped back: "Anyone tries to ruin our soup, they'll not succeed. Once his sword is lifted against us, it won't care whose neck it meets."

"It will meet them, my lord Questenberg, yours and mine, as the sun shines alike on the just and the unjust."

Very quietly Eggenberg slid back his chair; without a sound he tucked his fascicle of loose papers under his arm, tiptoed behind the line of chairs. When Trautmannsdorf turned to stare, took hold of his hand, he fended him off. He managed to go on until the fallen timber of Questenberg's thick short arms barred the way. Eggenberg seemed to set aside his anger; he pleaded: "My dear man, let me go."

They stood about him, he remained silent, wanted to leave. On the little landing they crowded around the amiable serene prince, who shook his head:

“We must all put on our thinking caps. We shall present our written opinions. Time is pressing. The Emperor will have to seek advice from higher authority. That is all.”

Which Trautmannsdorf, never able to hold back his thoughts, found not at all risky: It is always best on every occasion as a last resort to seek advice from almighty God; we – his smile was almost frivolous – are not obliged as privy counsellors to render Heaven superfluous. “What say you, Slavata?”

Eggenberg tried with little nods to take his leave, but Questenberg pushed him onto a chair, sat beside him. “Woe to our imperial liege,” groaned Eggenberg, pulling himself together. “He will see himself abandoned by us all. May the tutelary spirit of the House of Habsburg not forsake him.” And overcome by his feelings he knelt, placed hat and fascicle on the floor before him, and the others listened with bowed heads as he recited the rosary prayer. They crossed themselves, stood about. Eggenberg on the little staircase: “Habsburg faces a heavy hour. What spirit it was that caused our gracious sovereign to think of his end, designate an heir, I do not know. I cannot keep company with you, my dear grave colleagues.”

Slavata, alone with Trautmannsdorf and Questenberg, mocked in a low voice: “The Emperor protects himself from his friends. Some would deprive him of victory, of the sincerest most righteous symbol of victory.”

They left. Trautmannsdorf placed a hand on flinching Slavata’s waist: “So, Herr Slavata has swung away from his blasphemous hatred and into the Friedland camp. I hear fifes and flutes.”

“Fifes and flutes. Even merrier, even more lavish. Why should I deny it. I don’t know if I love him. But it annoys me when I see how people try to annoy and obstruct him.”

Breathing heavily, barely tolerating Trautmannsdorf’s hand, he went on with the other two as they chatted. He meant to challenge Friedland to the limit, to draw him in and share the fate that was unfolding. As obscure as a miracle, half joy, half dread, the emotions surged within him, rising, ebbing, fading. He pushed them away, hid them from himself. Sometimes they spilled over his lips and drove him to act. He felt he was approaching a maelstrom, but he could only follow this secret, this yearning for Wallenstein.

The path taken by Prince Eggenberg in the matter of the religious foundations must be taken further. Ferdinand transient, Friedland transient. Habsburg eternal. In his library Eggenberg took in his hands a colourful chronicle, a book he loved; read of the Staufer emperors, of Barbarossa, how their world expanded on a colossal scale and sank away again along with them. Useless wars with the pope. Ecclesia triumphans. Imperceptibly, with sure steps, Habsburg had extended itself. Riches came as if to a child at play.

The Emperor, puffed up with power. He could tumble the House into the abyss. Eggenberg rocked the old book on his knees. Push back at the Emperor.

The Emperor read through the opinions, and summoned Prince Eggenberg. Who took it as a sign from heaven that, despite the unanimity of opinions, it was he that the Emperor summoned. There was no possibility of moving the Emperor to back down. Eggenberg saw that the man facing him was impervious to argument. And with a visionary clarity, suddenly Eggenberg himself conceded: let the Regensburg convention take place.

But when Ferdinand placed a friendly hand on the old man's arm, drew him close, all the while praising him and brushing away the projected defeat, the prince had to pull back with a sigh. He was filled with shame. He was a traitor, a poisonous Judas. For the Emperor is heading to the slaughtering block. He will enjoy no triumph. He will have to decide it all himself, the monstrous decision in the struggle between the Electoral Princes and Friedland; and he will – yield. As he had yielded to the Bavarian all those years ago in Munich. To old Eggenberg as he stared fixedly at the smiling Emperor, his friend, this much was clear.

The Electoral Princes will come, the old Empire will have to be destroyed: he will be unable to give the order.

Friedland will hurl himself at the princes, the Emperor will stand with the princes.

Eggenberg had to take hasty leave of the Emperor, who was amiably proffering comfits.

Jubilation in the Privy Council.

A brief bad-tempered meeting of the League took place in Mergentheim. The lords and their envoys, after day-long furious complaints about the ruination of the Empire, found confronting them an imperial representative who demanded the convoking and furnishing of an Electoral Convention for the purpose of electing a King of the Romans. They screamed at him their No and their despair. They screamed about the war in Italy, embarked on unilaterally, its boundless sacrifices of men and money. France was stirred up, and would make itself known in the west of Germany.

Until all at once they fell silent. The notion had sprung up: accept the Emperor's invitation, then not accede to his wish for the election of a Habsburg. "Trap the Emperor, counter-attack." As they made their farewells, they knew: either we meet again at the Convention as victors, or this has been our final meeting.

No such sombre mood infected Munich. The Bavarian relished the moment. "The Emperor means to impress the seal of his power on his adversaries in the Empire; one hour more and he'll have no further need of the august Electors." Maximilian, tense in his chair facing Richel, put a hand to his eyes: "I thank the heavenly Virgin for this mercy now and forever, she will restore our freedom, make our decisions easier." Then: "Now this you must understand, Richel, now the Emperor has delivered himself into our hands. He urges himself on to the place of his judgement. For we shall not elect his son. Not until we are certain he will climb down."

As Richel, after a silent pause, was about to utter the name Wallenstein, Maximilian stood up. And Richel recognised this man. He saw in the marble face the same demonic expression it had assumed when Emperor Ferdinand, in Munich on the way back from his coronation in Frankfurt, had stepped from the pretty ornate chapel at Maximilian's side; in an almost silent tussle the leadership in the coming war had been wrested from the Emperor. And when the Emperor had made his signature, it was on a Monday, the day the Duke set aside for hearing cases, the Emperor had sat a whole hour closeted with Max in the summerhouse. The Habsburg's whispering imploring voice, Maximilian's curt imperious phrases; a sword clattered. Sudden departure of the broken Emperor.

Flunkies were despatched to the French mission. Charnacé appeared. In the greatest secrecy, in constant correspondence with Fontainebleau, agreements were concluded.

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In the days that followed, a solemn agitation took hold of the entire populace, the summoning of an Electoral Convocation in Regensburg the central topic of conversation. Professors at the University of Tübingen observed each night the order of battle in the heavens, described the martial tumult, heard the jangle of leaping cuirassiers. Peasants spread rumours that they had seen battles in the skies among various German lineages and princes, wagons laden with staves driven along, scaling ladders thrown up. In Dillingen a Bachelor of Laws proclaimed his dream-vision: the Emperor slain by Wallenstein's Croats.

The Emperor imposed on the arch-chancellor of the Empire, the archbishop of Mainz, the duty of issuing the formal notice of an Electoral Convocation in Regensburg. The Bavarian travelled again to the sacred hilltop at Andechs, his excitement unconstrained. Prostrating himself on the bare altar steps, he prayed in a frantic emotional turmoil; he thought of the sweat on Christ's brow at the Mount of Olives, the thorns around His sacred head, the blows He endured from scourging whips, the hot tears that flowed, the sighs He emitted, the sweet roses of His five thousand wounds. He entreated, followed helpless and confused along the tracks of the prayer: Lord Jesus, through the whispering pearling curling streams that well so abundantly from thy sacred wounds, deign to restore to life this poor thirsting soul.

Dark in the shadowed side altar, the man-high crucifix with the expiring Saviour: see his wounded heart, struggle for salvation; see the right hand that brings sins to light; see the left, the right foot, compassion, atonement, righteousness. "Mercy, Lord Jesus!" Maximilian's steeds raced back down to Munich. He sat groaning before the Jesuit Contzen, wiped sweat from his brow, could not be calmed. And as Contzen lauded his decision to draw the French to him, the thought flashed through the prince: enter into alliance with Wallenstein himself! In the final decisive moment draw Wallenstein away from the Emperor, recognise Mecklenburg and whatever else of his. Acknowledge him as a direct Prince of the Empire!

Bring Wallenstein over to him!

From where this madness!

From where this imperative, this urge!

Maximilian turned pale under the onslaught of these thoughts. They were insane; his eyes darkened. Half fainting he sank aslant over the arm of his chair. And then, as the anxious Jesuit righted him, the distraught prince grabbed his wrist, let Contzen pull him to his feet, and as he stood on uncertain lame feet he fell against Contzen, clung to him whimpering, trembling in every limb. Step by step Contzen led the wildly staring prince into the next chamber, the little altar of Mary. There he calmed down, his valet de chambre could be called, and Contzen dismissed with an inscrutable smile. The prince limped to his bedchamber.

That same night Maximilian spoke with the priest in deepest confidence of this necessity. Contzen listened astonished, enthralled as the Bavarian outlined his plans. "Reverend Father, you will speak softly to the Bohemian. He is swift to anger. You will wait for a good calm day. You will assure his Serenity the Duke of my affection and favourable intentions. Whatever errors and disputes may have arisen in the past between our two armies will in future easily be smoothed over. You may speak openly of approaches made to me by the Frenchie. The

Friedland party will shortly be lost. We both have power, I and the Bohemian. It will not be to his disadvantage if we maintain a common stance within the empire."

Not until early morning, at the rattle of the departing Jesuit's coach, did Maximilian return to his bed. He fell almost at once into a deep sleep, as if drugged. He did not even have time to put down the rosary; it clattered to the floor beside the bed.

So joyful, beatific, blithe the prince in the long days that followed; as fidgety as a bridegroom in irrepressible restlessness. He left his rasps and burins lying, thought of a long-ago journey to Italy; it drove him out of the city. He joined once again the solemn Thursday procession, bareheaded holding a burning candle in sight of the entire court; then Alexander Abondius, the Florentine sculptor, was summoned, the prince rode with him away into the countryside, the curator of antiquities Verdunk followed with a handful of horseguards. In Nuremberg stood the new Peller-Haus,* four ornate storeys, windows everywhere, high gable façades, galleried courtyards, pillared corridors. They rode under the hot August sun accompanied by counsellors down long alleys, across market places and squares. Carpets hung from brightly painted balconies, storey after storey jutting out above to overshadow the lower windows; crenellated roofs, protruding corner turrets. The Nassauer-Haus.* Young Abondius praised the Fountain of Hercules in Augsburg, its nymphs, gargoyles. The Bavarian enquired about couriers, hastened back filled with sweetness and dread.

When they appeared at the Isar Gate, the gatekeeper informed them that five imperial colonels had arrived the night before; they had been received by the most noble stern and learned gentleman Bartholomew Richel and taken to lodgings at the Golden Cross. Maximilian was astonished to find himself next morning in his audience chamber turning in his hands diplomatic gifts from the Duke of Friedland, feeling over the metal beakers and the little jug, putting them down, grasping them by the neck. As the officers took their leave he kept one arm over the dome of the metal lid, two fingers in the hollow space within; he seemed, hovering between horror and laughter, to be conversing with Wallenstein.

And in a strange way it seemed to him unreal to be alive here, sitting here; something must have bewitched him, he felt a twinge of disquiet: if only the game were at an end. And when the doors opened, valets and chamberlains entering to dress him and lead him to Mass, it happened that he stood there vacantly, had no idea what he was thinking, nor even what was happening. Sat spellbound in his Residence, in shame incapable of walking across to see his father; idled many hours each day, none knew why. Despatches arrived. Contzen reported the General's overdone friendliness, along with his total disinclination to understand Maximilian's plan in the slightest. He, Contzen, had naturally exercised utmost caution, and refrained from explicit clarity; the Duke was charmed by the support offered in the Mecklenburg business, but so far no possibility had arisen of even hinting at the Bavarian plan; but he would not despair yet of this most particularly loyal servant of the Emperor.

Immediately after this, two officers from Friedland's headquarters rode in; they were to engage in confidential discussion of relations between the armies, the extent to which the League intended to disarm. The officers were very cheerful, seemed to bring from Jičin the notion that the Electoral Princes were taking the first steps to their own subjection. Richel worked them cunningly, dared to parry them by speaking of a turn by Friedland away from

Habsburg, now that he was a Prince of the Empire and would sit with the others on the princes' bench, and like them must protect his interest.

Deaf ears, indignation at the inept example. Richel bemused before his own prince: he is faced with a riddle; some might call it loyalty, others mere narrow-mindedness. Or Friedland is aiming higher, perhaps against the Emperor.

It slid softly from Maximilian, he kept only the sad eyes, dull slack face. Sleepy words of thanks to Richel: you need do no more in this matter. For one, two hours he sat on the same chair alone in his darkening room; snared in helplessness, lolling sighing. Yes, now he is home, returned from the journey. On the table lay a scroll from Torquato Tasso:* the poet had dedicated it to him from Italy. New letters from his relations in the Empire, archbishop of Cologne, bishop of Bamberg, they need help; the old burden, the old chains. A burning ache flooded pitiless in his breast, anger, profound aversion. When he thought of Friedland and the Emperor he clenched his fists in pain, stiffened in his chair, forced himself to calm down.

Maximilian let Wallenstein's officers know that he must consult with his colleagues in the Empire on the points raised; in his old icy tone he tasked Richel to dismiss the officers with presents. They rode off cursing: The Bavarians wanted merely to sound us out.

Vervaux, Maximilian's Father Confessor, was out in the country; fast messengers had to fetch him back. Old Duke William, Maximilian, Vervaux sat together at table, silent, tense; they followed the prince to chapel. The prince spoke in a tender voice that sounded grotesque from the lifeless seated body; he invited them both to question him. His manner of answering was changed: usually he let the words gather in his mouth until they were frozen to ice, now he pounced on every question, replies flowed blind and avid like a psalm. At first he had not known what he wanted of Friedland, seemed irritated by the memory, then said he had laid himself open to a despicable man, a knave, a dead bondsman of the Emperor; a diabolical urge had impelled him suddenly, he was powerless against it. He seemed to be asking their approval. He was filled visibly with disgust at himself, as if he had touched something profoundly nasty. He was seeking punishment. Vervaux talked to him.

The priest and the old duke bowed to one another, the duke wept tears of joy for his son. Prince Max stood snorting in his bedchamber, had shutters and curtains closed. A single wall-candle burned by the door. The chamberlain removed the silent prince's sidearms belt biretta overgown cloak; two valets fiddled with the doublet, drew it up; pulled off shoes hose linen stockings as he sat on the cushioned chest; they slipped quietly out with the things. The chamberlain fussed whispering about him, pulled the nightshirt down over his blinking eyes. Silk slippers. He shook his head when the barber came to rub him down with towels.

Motionless and alone, the bearded man stood a long while in the empty room in his shirt, looked from bed to floor, floor to bed. Let the nightshirt fall over his hips, hugged the sleeves. On the little polished bedside table stood a square black box. With cold calm fingers, as he began to breathe again humming, almost sobbing, he drew out the little key he carried in a silken pouch at his throat. He grasped a spiked leather girdle by the ends, fastened it about his waist, forced, forced his burning eyes to the image of Mary beneath the candle. Breathed heavily, groaned, mouth wide open. He could not inflict enough. Eyes blind, dead, he pulled the girdle tight. Trembling felt for the little whip with the steel weights, teeth clenched;

blackness shrouded him. The whip cracked onto his back. And as he lashed, tears flowed from the eye-hollows down over the mouth onto the carpet. Blood trickled from the flanks. It seemed to be someone else whipping him, this stranger's arms were violent pitiless implacable tools beneath which his suffering body bent in pain. He groaned, writhed, braced himself, cringed, stepped back, the arms were unrelenting, had no feeling. And now the hand stayed paralysed in the air, the whip suddenly dropped, lay there; he started back, started, shuddered; and before he became chilled he writhed on the slippery carpet until his fingers touched the long slender poisoned stiletto in its sheath, the stiletto he always sought out in the despair of his scourging, at the peak, to avert ruination, to calm himself, bring himself back to his senses.

He turned it, the sheath fell away, he turned it, tried to see it through his tears, turned it. Held it tenderly to his breast, pressed it to his bare throat, the frizzled whiskers of his beard; lay groaning, snorting, writhing on the floor; the spiked belt came loose, bitter spasms wracked his body. Then snuffling, ravaged, besmeared, suppressing a whimper, he clambered to his knees, stood, rocked red-eyed on a stool. After a while rang for wine.

30. To Regensburg

STOUT RAMBOLD von Collalto, lord of the confiscated Bohemian estates Pirnitz, Rudolec, Czerna, was blockading Mantua. Heedless of his laryngeal consumption, he lay in Marignano feasting, while his subordinate generals Gallas and Aldringen commanded the army. The Spanish field marshal Ambrosius Spinola, an old man, came to Montferrat, chased away the French, boxed them in at Casale. The war blossomed. French marshals brought fresh troops.

Then to the Duke of Friedland, who was taking the cure at Carlsbad, news was brought from Vienna: an Electoral Convention would take place in Regensburg, where His Imperial Majesty would pursue the election of his son as king of Germany. In his refectory Friedland tore off his hat, trampled it: Bowing at the feet of the electoral princes! Summoning them to a convention! The traitors should be whipped and scattered. He was in a fury. They had to despatch couriers to him from Vienna; the summons should be delayed, no one was inclined to push the matter. He wrote to Ferdinand, twice, with the utmost urgency, achieved nothing but a smiling remark from the Emperor: "That warrior! All he wants is soldiers and battles. It upsets him just to see the rest of us come together in peace and good kinship."

Friedland cut short his Carlsbad cure, raged at the imperial counsellors. "Not yet stuffed with enough ducats, those fine lords. Blackguards, drunken mountebanks. King of Germany! They send him begging to those penny-pinchers. But I'll cook their goose, the lot of them." He swore, despite the Emperor and his counsellors, to spoil the game for those scoundrels, make them sigh, shed big tears. For the moment he marked out Memmingen, south of the Danube, not far from Ulm and not all that far from Regensburg, as his headquarters and mustering ground. All available regiments in Swabia and Franconia were to strike camp and assemble there with utmost despatch. Transports to Lombardy were recalled; he sent orders for them to remain available in some central location against French aspirations in Alsace, and as a reserve for Collalto's Italian forces. He lost no time setting out from Carlsbad to take matters in hand. The Italian war all at once held no interest for him. He was deeply agitated.

Seventeen coaches-and-six accompanied him, twenty-seven calèches drawn by a pair or a four, sixty baggage wagons, a hundred and fifty mounted troops; up ahead his chancellor Elz with a hundred and twenty of his personal steeds, twenty-six coaches-and-six and a baggage train. Funds for the journey were raised by contributions in Mecklenburg. The Duke rested in Nuremberg, where he brushed aside pleas from the magistrate for a reduction in the monthly levy of twenty thousand guilders. In Ulm he received gifts of honour: a silver goblet, a silk purse full of gold coins, a silver ewer and handbasin, along with a cartload of wine and forty-eight sacks of oats. His quartermaster imposed substantial levies for the daily requirements of the ducal court: countless loaves of bread, of course, then eggs by the gross, wheaten flour, rye flour, two good oxen, twenty wethers, ten lambs, four calves, a pig, two sides of bacon, a ton of butter, fifteen old hens and forty pullets, and then Rhine wine, French wine, schnapps with caraway, coriander, cinnamon, aniseed, ginger. Arquebusiers scouted ahead as they approached Memmingen; they drove all lowing and bleating livestock away from the town, shot clucking hens and songbirds, set limed twigs for sparrows; tied the bells in every church tower. The Duke pulled in with his ducal court, lifeguards, cannon, astrological apparatus.

Couriers raced; the Duke learned the mood of the court in Vienna, of the Emperor himself. Through de Witte large sums were offered to the Emperor, to the abbot of Krems-minster, and others. In all stealth a large army gathered in the countryside around Memmingen.

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Towards the middle of the year, Emperor Ferdinand gave orders to prepare for the departure to Regensburg. The Duke of Friedland, the Estates of Lower Austria, the archbishop of Salzburg, Bohemia were all prevailed on to provide loans; droves of oxen, calves, lambs, pigs set out from Hungary. Ferdinand took along his lady of Mantua and his son, the pale ambitious King of Hungary, who was jealous of Wallenstein.

He went like a reaper, the Emperor, intent on bringing home the harvest. Eleonore had to come, because an Emperor travels with his Empress – and she was enormously glowering and magnificent, would put all the princes to shame; he wanted to show her at his side, a daughter of the land on whose behalf he was waging war.

She joined him under duress in the imperial barge, her face closed but on blithe nimble limbs; she thought to present the silent man at her side with a serious defeat in Regensburg. Her hopes rested on Eggenberg. She had heard how the Electors resented Friedland. Her confessor had stiffened her resolve. Behind them, mingled with the merry excited travelling court, mounted, riding in carriages, towed in barges, the privy councillors with their troubled sighs, oppressed by all this good cheer and pomp; they took refuge in each other, murmured together, more despondent by the hour.

The Emperor had never stopped talking of the Regensburg Convention, his son would be elected, nothing could prevent it, even though the urgings and threats of the Electors showed why they meant to come: not to elect his son, but to hold him, the Emperor himself, to account, secure the dismissal of the Duke of Friedland; they were determined on a reckoning. And what to expect of Wallenstein; how would the furious Bohemian conduct himself; already disquieting reports came of his activities in Memmingen. Wine-red little Eggenberg himself – what a victory for Slavata and Trautmannsdorf – had cleared all obstacles on the path to the

Convention. He had given in. No one knew what he was up to, Slavata and Trautmannsdorf any more than Ferdinand. When the Electors and Estates accepted so readily the invitations to Regensburg, Eggenberg knew he had seen clearly. And he did not flinch. He would lead the Emperor to the slaughtering block.

Once Eggenberg had seen the Emperor safely on board the barge to Regensburg, he broke down. Already on the journey he had begun to suffer serious physical ailments and fainting fits. This deed surpassed his powers. He took his leave of Ferdinand, returned to Vienna with a sense of dread. The empty city did not revive him. Gasping for air he travelled on. To Krumau, his estate of Orlik. Growing alarm at what was to come. To hide himself away he travelled to Duino in Istria. It was far away, couriers would not find him. Must not find him.

Amid huge herds of cattle, wagons laden with beer and wine, marching companies of mercenaries, the cavalcade approached Regensburg, the pit of Hell. The town was still complaining even at this late stage: it had heard unsettling rumours of unusual activity around Memmingen; it pleaded its lamentable condition, its poverty, such a splendid great gathering could not be accommodated within its bounds. Emperor implacable; Electors implacable.

The Emperor and his enormous retinue entered the danger zone. There was a long wait for the Electors. They turned up at the Convention like condemned innocents, intent on shaming the judge before the eyes of the world. And even if he should throttle them or break them on the wheel, they would not make it easy for him. They had heard with outrage, and then with angry glee, how Wallenstein was arming himself in response; they spread it about, the Empire's crisis exposed for all to see. One after another in the blooming June days they arrived with a minimal entourage, ugly and desperate as hungry wolves; would devour or be devoured.

Prince-elector Archbishop Ferdinand, younger brother of the Bavarian, rode in, small, thin, sly-eyed, with a glutton's lips and sagging wobbly jowls. In a covered travelling coach-and-eight the Imperial Chancellor Anselm Casimir, archbishop of Mainz, a bent grey-faced little man, tight wide thin-lipped mouth, hard chin, heavy hooded eyelids. Amaranth-red skullcap far back on the bald unpitying skull. Beside him, hulking on the coach seat under his bishop's mitre, gold threads in the tassels dangling from the rim, the phlegmatic elector of Trier, Philipp Christoph, popeyed, huge rolls of fat at the throat, wide sash across the swelling stomach; legs stretched stiffly out, an imperturbable ponderous body.

The Bavarian arrived. Against the tearful entreaties of his father he had insisted on coming. Around him a strong contingent of lifeguards; for weeks Bavarian regiments had been on a war footing at Kehlheim Fürth Cham Rain, ready to march. A sealed agreement guaranteed that at his call five thousand French would march in support. Tilly came, his field-marshal and deputy; his officers scouted the terrain; the white-bearded dwarf was indestructible.

To Chancellor Casimir's quarters, where the League brotherhood had gathered, were led the eight emissaries of the Electors of Brandenburg and Saxony. These gentlemen explained placidly: Our masters will not attend, the exigencies of war do not permit them to leave their territories; we have instructions to take part in the proceedings.

In response to a direct question from Maximilian, it transpired they were not empowered to agree to Wallenstein's dismissal; they complained too of impositions on the Protestant

Estates by the League army; they were to protest the confiscations of evangelical properties. The Bavarian turned abruptly to the lords spiritual: “You see how we must pick their chestnuts from the fire. – And if the gauntlet is thrown down in the matter of Electoral crowns?”

“The Protestant faith will not submit. We shall find help.”

Max scoffed after they left, lifted his hands to their lordships: “They look for help from the Swede. The devil take these heretics.”

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With great formality Ferdinand, in the presence of the aforementioned Electoral princes and representatives in the refectory of the bishop’s palace, passed the sealed propositions to Mainz as arch-chancellor of the Empire. He was saddened by the absence of the Saxon Elector, with whom he had hoped to chat about hunting; he had been obliged for so long to abstain from the chase. He spoke to each one individually as they walked up and down, heads still covered, on the soft red carpet beside the oaken table. There was mockery of the Swede, of whose bold desire for invasion they had heard.

A brass band blared below during the conversations; the Emperor relished their lordships’ surprise; he had brought his Kapellmeister Valentini along; some sat down again, some stepped to the window, listened in silence. Wondering whispers; at the window Ferdinand stood beside the Bavarian, laid a friendly white arm on flinching Wittelsbach’s shoulder. Private secretary Dr Frey, at a glance from the Emperor, opened the door to an antechamber. Ferdinand accompanied the princes, joined by the chancellors, past the long glinting honour guard to the steps, where they listened to the band for a while, and felt the warm breezes.

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They had not yet found their feet from this welcoming ceremony when Mainz in his quarters read out the propositions. The Emperor made no mention of the election of a king, asked what should finally be done about the fugitive Palatine outlaw Frederick, and then how should Holland Sweden France be dissuaded from interfering, and finally at the fifth place arrived at the lack of resources for war: all should offer their ideas on how and in what form better arrangements could be devised.

As soon as he finished, red-eyed Cologne, flicking his knee with his little skullcap, blurted out: “Cleverly contrived! The Friedland fellow has concealed himself most gallantly.” Fat-cheeked Philipp Christoph of Trier groaned: “We have nothing to bring against the Emperor. We have no army.”

“No,” Maximilian barked a laugh. The arch-chancellor, mildly: “We shall bring our complaints before him. We shall not let up. He is a man, a pious Catholic Christian, its workings in him will not fail us.”

“The Lutherans sing ‘A mighty fortress is our God’,” scoffed Maximilian.

Mainz, calmly: “Our prayers will be heard, Serenity.”

In the face of hesitations and remonstrations from Mainz, who wanted to remain conciliatory, the decision was made to complete the whole process in two steps. They saw themselves atop a volcano, Friedland’s army at Memmingen was growing. They declared:

"The inordinate recruitment of troops in the Empire, demobilisation pay campaign pay repatriation pay contributions billeting, have undermined the Empire's welfare. The resources of the Holy Empire, the strength and power by means of which its lofty stance and Christian faith have been enabled, above all the kingdoms of the Earth, to prevail against Turk and Heathen are now all frittered away and ruined, its possessions carried off to foreign lands; stately territories and provinces that once were the adornment and first bastion of the Empire now lie ravaged. The Princes-elector and Princes, utterly shorn of all esteem, must submit to imperial commanders whose status in no way measures up to theirs, and must suffer in silence as countless indignities pour down upon them. The College of Princes, by virtue of the unanimous collegial decisions that it may conclude, wishes for this reason not only from a loyal heart to advise Your Imperial Majesty, but also most humbly and earnestly to entreat that here improvements may be devised; that over the imperial armada such a head be appointed as will sit in the Empire, constitute a respectable element of the Empire, and be so esteemed and acknowledged by the other Estates, and enjoy the good dependable confidence of the Electoral Princes and Estates. Let this Field-marshal be admonished, in all important matters that may arise, to deal with and conduct himself in relation to the Electoral Princes in loyal accord with the Imperial Constitution, and refrain from arrogating to himself a dominant role within the Empire, such being counter to convention and impermissible."

But if His Imperial Majesty wished to maintain a particular army in his hereditary lands and territories, none would seek to hinder this or impose limits, as long as it would bring no danger or injury to the Electoral Princes and Estates, nor any encroachment on their rights. Contributions should no longer be exacted directly, but raised only through the decisions of properly convened imperial and regional assemblies; transits and mustering grounds to require their cooperation approval and support.

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While German knights frequented the riding arena in the jousting-ground beside the Discalced, and counsellors provosts deans chancellors called silently in at the postmaster's to put up a lottery stake – chalked in Italian on the wall the maxim 'He who puts no value on his clothes will outlive the clothes'; – while the Estates gathered at the bishop's palace and were led to an antechamber, already foreign figures of evident wealth appeared in the streets. They brought an enormous retinue, stood drowning in the finery they hauled along, so much sable on trimmings cuffs points edgings, the flared gaiters swordbelts scarves. It rustled crackled on them, their pokered curls hid under a cape or blew free and fragrant in the wind. Women came too, riding in cosy carriages, rain-cloak on head and shoulders, a little flat hat at the brow from which the dust-veil blew back. When the weather was clear and warm they walked scarcely veiled in the meadows by the Grieb – the Ditch, shoulders bare, as natural as if they had just climbed from the water with smooth hair clinging to the throat; overgowns gleamed white and pink, outer garments slid back from knees; gold-threaded flowery underskirts tautened with every movement; they stepped lightly and oh so gracefully in white shoes. They spoke French, had left Grenoble three weeks ago, travelled here via Solothurn, Constance, Ulm and then by boat. They found lodgings by the Grieb. Their leader was M. de Brulart. The baggy brown Capuchin who accompanied them, narrow-shouldered, short-sighted, pale, with

a strong nose, was Father Joseph, François le Clerc du Tremblay, Cardinal Richelieu's soul. They mingled with the attendees. Cavaliers and ladies kissed when they met, on the lips. They had much contact with the Bavarian court, but also with the four Saxon representatives and their attendants.

Trautmannsdorf quizzed Brulart about the true extent of unity in the French nation, what clans the cavaliers he had brought belonged to. The Frenchman was astonished by the questions: "A nation has no place in our kingdom. The French are those who are subjects of our most Christian King Louis. No act of government has hitherto acknowledged the words 'nation' or 'people'. And I would not know how to begin if I am supposed to talk of French 'people' or 'clans'. With the words 'King Louis', everything is said."

"Here in the Empire there would be objections, the German would suspect the loss of his freedoms."

"Nothing is more honourable," the Frenchman's eyebrows rose high, "than to be the King's bondsman. When the sun shines in the sky, everything partakes joyfully of the sun's brightness and colour; the French are royalist; everyone senses the eye of the King upon him, so he strives to be pleasing. He sees the clothing, the costumes of the court, hears the tone of discourse. Has this damaged him? It seems that foreign people like to emulate our ways."

"Oh, they do keep an eye on your cavaliers and ladies. I fear they'll have to keep a still sharper lookout." The Frenchman disengaged haughtily: "Everywhere people keep an eye on Louis' style. Everywhere his envoys will be greeted with joy."

Brulart and Father Joseph were received by the Emperor in the affair of Mantua; although their accreditation was not entirely in order, the Emperor wished to treat them with the greatest respect. Father Joseph was allowed, in the presence of Lamormaini, to speak to him at length of spiritual matters. They discussed the mystery of apotheosis; père Joseph gushed, completely in his element. He insisted on the unity of the soul with God, its immersion and purling in God, all earthly passions that interpose themselves between ourselves and God must be set aside, love must instruct the understanding, hold it fettered in obedience and the humility of faith, love must compel the understanding to believe what it cannot see, to marvel at what it does not comprehend. "One must constantly think of the Saviour's deeds, see His divinity shining through, embrace Him in his essence. One must not hold the mouth crudely open as if intending to eat, must not resemble one who runs long and swiftly after a goal that he strives to attain, and is quite out of breath. Not open the mouth as if to eat, in order to receive inner sweetness, not seek to restore oneself through inner breathlessness – to do so would be needy, compelled, and thus not the consummate love of God. One must expel from one's being the life of the individual soul. One placed with the other, the mouth of God and our mouth, so that the soul may flow over the royal threshold of the lips." Often he repeated in response to Lamormaini's questions: "To slumber in the obscurity of spirit and of Nature."

Ferdinand kept Lamormaini close: What does he think of the Capuchin; Ferdinand must confess himself a dolt, for he has so little understanding that no compulsion is needed to make him believe. How great must Father Joseph's understanding be that he requires such violence; perhaps the père is actually akin to an unbeliever. "What a thing to believe," he would then add in astonishment, "the mouth of God – preposterous enthusiasm!"

Eleonore was summoned; at first she sat frostily at the little table in the severe formal dress she always wore in Regensburg. Then she listened, asked absently of whom were they speaking, desired, in a livelier tone and casting a dark look, to know more of the Frenchman. Ferdinand smiled wearily: "You'll see, he can talk the thoughts out of your head; it's best not to listen to him too often."

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In the lodgings of ailing Count Stralendorf– young King Ferdinand was among those present – discussion of the Electors' demands was invested with a most solemn character by the unheralded appearance and participation of His Majesty. The pointed Saxon document, full of laments. Dreadful inventory, read out amid complete silence by Dr Frey, from Duke Bogeslav of Pomerania, fifty-four horrors itemised for the attention of the Enlarger of the Empire: parents devouring their children's flesh, corpses strewn about the land, raw grass in their mouths. From Electoral Brandenburg: twenty million guilders extorted from his land. The League document concluded: "Following the defeat of enemies of the Empire – the Count Palatine, Mansfeld, the Halberstadter, Baden-Durlach – and the scattering of the Danish fleet, with almost no further enemy in sight there was imposed upon the Empire without notice, without consent of the Estates and with no monetary provision, a field-marshal of such unrestrained absolute power that he now arranges all matters to suit his own interest."

The young king: "If it is true, as asserted in one document, that Friedland has raised two hundred and forty million imperial talers in contributions, then an accounting must be sought from the Duke. What was the source of these sums? Were they really employed only for the necessary maintenance of the army and the colonels, and who profited from them?"

Embarrassed silence. Stralendorf: "The danger in proceeding down that road lies in an alliance of the Catholic Electors with the Protestant."

The Emperor: "They come at me with matters on which every elected Roman Emperor has to chew. The Empire conducts war, yet is granted no means. The outlaw Frederick attacked the Empire, I was presented with no resources to counter him. What the Duke takes is mine to demand. If there have been derelictions, I shall punish them."

Trautmannsdorf: "The Empire is striving to bring itself to order. It is foolish to present phrases like 'contributions only via the Circles'. The war would collapse."

The Emperor reached for the cited document, flung it to the floor. "They scarcely want an Empire. Complaining for appearance's sake. They do not want the Empire."

Young Ferdinand: "So why do they elect an Emperor?"

The Emperor: "They do it today and tomorrow. One day they'll attempt not to do it."

Trautmannsdorf, softly: "Perhaps the Duke of Friedland has acted too vigorously. Let him be instructed to proceed with more circumspection." Count Stralendorf, observing Ferdinand's bitterness, cautiously raised again the matter of princely liberties, warned against allowing the entire body of the Empire to become united against its supreme head. The question was no longer confined to the election of young Ferdinand; the risk now was the defection of all Electoral princes from the Empire. He thought to delve into history, quoted emperors deposed or abdicated: Charles III, Henry IV, Wenceslas.

Ferdinand sitting at the table, alternately bored and menacing: “I do not intend to dismiss the General. Whatever pressures are applied, I will not be flustered on this matter.”

Trautmannsdorf: “Then a rift is probable.” The Emperor’s eyes brightened, he smiled warmly at the count.

The private secretary: “What replies should be drafted for the formal response to the Electoral princes?”

Let the gentlemen speak.

Stralendorf: “Stall for time. Since the Emperor’s position remains as it is, try to coerce the princes, point out the impossibility of their demands, pledge to do whatever is possible.”

Trautmannsdorf: “His Majesty will refrain from interfering with their pre-eminence and authority. Blame for any rift must at once be placed on the Prince-electors’ intemperance.”

The Emperor thanked them. After long apparent consideration, he thanked them again; it would be better not to respond formally. He would not reply. He would give their Serenities the princes, who had acted in a fit of anger, time to reflect.

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To the Carthusian refectory, one rainy evening, Father Joseph was summoned; a lofty personage wished to speak with him. Two ladies, veiled, dressed in the German manner, sat there. One addressed him in Italian: the Empress. She would hear him speak of his Order.

And when he had finished her eyes glowed behind the veil; Countess Khevenhüller stepped to the window, behind a pillar.

She was overjoyed to hear a voice of such divine passion, one notices it so seldom in this country. Whether he knows Italy. And then suddenly, barely suppressing a sob: It has come to this, with no sense of decency they besiege my home town. He said soothingly: That’s German politics for you. “Please help,” she begged, “I have letters from my friends, my sisters; whatever I can offer you, you shall have.”

“If our armies are victorious.”

“Speak to the Emperor, to Lamormaini. I am a woman; no one pays attention to a woman’s heart. Here I am nothing!”

Joseph shook his head. “It’s not the Emperor, nor Lamormaini. It’s the Duke of Friedland.”

She hissed: “Send him away, I hate him. His name is repugnant to me, the false Bohemian.”

“They can’t send him away. Easier for him to be rid of all of us.”

She raged, fists at her veil: “This I have heard. It is unspeakable: we are his prisoners. They must dismiss him.”

“Who is Collalto at Mantua? His puppet. The Duke is the highest court of the land. Here we play in his shadow. The Emperor does not feel it.”

She stared at him, eyes wide: “And it is true, the Duke does with us what he wants?”

Joseph smiled sadly: “It is no novelty, Your Majesty. Ask your serene cousin in Bavaria.”

The Empress stood: “I shall quiz the Emperor, he must hear what people are saying.”

“Go rather to the Duke. He is at present at Memmingen, not far from Ulm. He’ll help you if you implore him forcefully about Mantua. But don’t speak of me to the Emperor. The Germans love nothing foreign.”

“Oh, that is so true, Reverence! I thank you.”

“No thanks needed, Majesty. My country too is suffering. The Duke of Nevers is French.”

Ferdinand had never before experienced such disagreement with the lady from Mantua. She was implacable, bitter, contemptuous. She had believed herself Empress. She was Italian. If such matters are tolerated in Germany, then that is German custom. She assumes she was not brought here to be a vassal of the upstart Friedland.

“To eat from his money, live behind his back, this I cannot accept. I remain the daughter of the duke of Mantua.”

His only astonishment was: What fool has put this into her head? Something like hate has bubbled up in her.

“Fool? As truly as I myself am a fool are they fools, who put this in my head. You are asleep, you dream. My eyes are opened. This von Wallenstein must begone.”

“I dream, I am enraptured. He serves me, in a way that is almost more than human. They are jealous that I have him, and are jealous of him because I elevated him.”

“That venom-spitting monster, that demon. That blessed gift to you, von Wallenstein.”

“You envy him, as they envy me.”

“No one except the Devil will sit at our table. The holy Father will proclaim his curse on us.”

“You are afraid for Mantua.”

She shrieked: “Yes, afraid for Mantua! And I will have it commanded that I should have no cause to be afraid for Mantua! I am the Empress, it is my home town. No dog should go there and tear it to pieces.” She flung herself into a chair: “I shall not live if this happens.”

He had loved this woman, once.

31. A Burning

AN INCONSPICUOUS note was handed to the Emperor on the way to Mass, in which Wallenstein informed him of the forces assembled at the Emperor’s immediate disposal between Memmingen and Regensburg.

Suddenly Ferdinand realised: the decision lay entirely with him. He might let one torpid day after another slip by, but reality couldn’t be slept away. No clique of high counsellors pestered him; they’d withdrawn into the background, dared no throw of the dice. Brave good Eggenberg lay indisposed somewhere in Istria. He felt, when he sat up at night, that he’d had enough, whichever side he turned to would be the right side, regardless. It was in his power to choose, there was no way it could go wrong. And then he lay back down and fell asleep again.

By day he was beset by dark thoughts. He would not see the lady from Mantua; he was pleased: so she wants her toy.

Mainz and Maximilian sat with him at table, silent and to all appearances respectful. They observed their sovereign with big eyes, immersed in thought.

Brulart sat thinking only of how to drive the Spanish from Italy.

The Duke of Doria, envoy of Spanish Philip, sat thinking only of how to drive the French from Italy.

Arrived via Memmingen, where Wallenstein had accorded him a glittering reception, Cardinal Rocci, papal legate.

So Ferdinand, a feeling of contempt welling up from deep within him, considered it timely to burn two condemned Jews. This he ordered, and his eyes feasted on the sight.

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A Jew, baptised, had been caught with three others stealing, whereupon these others accused him of a pretended conversion, of insulting the Host on many occasions by dropping it into a stinking place. The consecrated body of Christ, wrapped in sackcloth, was fished by the beadle from a slop-bucket in his dwelling. The malefactor was condemned to death. When they approached the stocks to collect the Jew, along with the other three for whom the noose awaited, it happened that not he but his wife was found there, offering herself for the penalty. Upon cross-examination and flogging, she revealed the condemned man's whereabouts; he was hauled from his hiding place in the town, in a cooper's garb.

The executioner conducted to the Town Hall square a calfskin hauled by two Moravians on which lay a puny man, shirt and hose in tatters, hands bound over his head and secured by thongs and an ox-tail to the Moravians' bridles. He flung himself on his face his back under the rain of stones. Six executioner's lads, clad like their master in scarlet, rode ahead, blew on shawms, beat at the calfskin. Untied, pulled to his feet by the lads, the fallen conical hat shoved back on his head, the frail blinking wretch was chivvied up the steps to the scaffold.

Riding backwards on a mule behind him, almost falling off, who is this splendid creature! The wife with her understated southern allure, cheeks bronze-brown, iron-black hair tumbling over her little shells of ears; her demure gaze followed the stumbling felon; her tender body shook as she stood clutching the grey mule's neck, teeth chattering.

The scaffold was draped in red cloth. There sat the town executioner holding a naked blade; the felon knelt by the steps between lads pointing spears. A voice droned over the raucous marketplace, was swallowed by the din of thronging spectators, lads dragging faggots, the scraping neighing stamping of the imperial horses that ringed the scaffold. The crime proclaimed, sentence proclaimed, a black staff broken over the Jew, thrown aside. The magistrate mounted his horse.

She clutched the little mule's neck, mute, eyebrows raised, deep lines of grief about the tight mouth, turned to face the thousand-eyed crowd jostling thronging, monks priests Jesuits soldiers children students noble ladies artisans beggars Frenchmen; her arms dropped, she looked at her yellow shoes. She wore, as was proper to her station, a black loose high-laced gown of silk sewn with pearls, sleeves swelling to the elbow. A transparent veil of black silk brought from behind over her head was knotted under the chin. Above the blazing staring eyes, a brooch with stones of green and blue. She wore it because her husband liked her best

in this. Her sash had the same green blue stones, little chains of baby-teeth hung from it. She moved, swayed, showed it off to him, made it lively.

He mounted the wide wooden stage. They tied him to a stake; to a stake at the other end of the platform they tied her.

The executioner ripped away doublet and shirt, bound the trousers with rope. Three lads dragged a pan of smoking coals, the executioner grasped a white-hot pincers by the handle. He let the open jaws kiss the whimpering wretch's upper arm, squeezed; the acrid smell rose high, black-red the hole in the flesh. Squeezed, did not let go. The tormented man's mouth opened wide, strained towards the arm, he bent back his head, bellowed as the bound feet tried to scrabble up the stake. The pincers came free, the executioner took up another, wiped his nose; impishly let the glowing iron play up and down the arm before setting to. The robber's hair was glued with sweat; the spider bit, sucked sucked sucked – it ran from his head, out of the eyes, the mouth, away to her, away to her. Out of the knees, out of the ears, clouds, bluegrey sky. Muttering marketplace. The sticky tongs came free, clattered into the pan.

The throats below lifted, noses snuffled attentively. A third pincers. In one movement lifted, swung, applied. Slammed savagely into the other arm, pressed into the sizzling sticky blistering flesh. And as the pincers leapt, the malefactor leapt to meet it, writhed, strained, twitched about, face pale, white drooling lips, devouring himself, tumbled in a maelstrom, helpless blind deaf foaming.

Until a small black point in the sky grew bigger, circles formed, bigger ones swirled in, whitened.

The final pincers: impassioned teeth-grinding raving reunion, sauntering skidding right, left, breathless shudders wheezing, cheeks blowing, shrill whistling from the deepest air pipes.

Head lolled at the breast. The triumphant executioner stood aside. A lad splashed the moaning man from a tub. The head lifted uncertainly, drooped to a shoulder, lifted again as more water splashed.

The executioner drew a short knife from his leather belt, whetted it on the sole of a shoe. The felon's head swayed gently like a delicate flower. Quick as a flash the executioner sliced two wide strips from the chest, swish, swash, pulled them aslant across the body, another two long wide strips from the back. Hoisted them, bloody white thongs, to show the hardly breathing crowd, handed them to his assistant, who whirled the bundle three times grinning before flinging it into the tub.

She screamed in fear.

The crowd quiet as mice. He left the man standing there, approached her.

She followed him with darting eyes, pupils wide, seemingly curious. Then her eyes lit on the bleeding felon, lost in dreams. She screamed again, head against the stake. The executioner, bending low over the tub, washed his hands in front of her. Suddenly with a wide lunge he dashed the back of his dripping hand into her face. Her mouth stayed open, a thin stream of blood trickled over her chin; with an upwards blow he smashed the teeth together. She stared wildly at him, her knees shook violently, legs tramping on the spot.

For a moment he ogled the brooch at her forehead, lifted it carefully, the silk headscarf was still attached. Pursing his lips he pressed the brooch into the hand of one of the lads, then undid the pretty belt, pulled it free, weighed it in his hand.

Under a canvas awning, fifty black-robed novices from the Jesuit college stood behind their provost. Telling their rosary, these scholars and Fathers followed the executioner's movements with scientific coolness, checking, reflecting, considering. A Father knelt by a scholar who had fainted into the mud, they stared at one another in silence, the pallid young theologian hid his face in shame. After a pause the priest said: "You must think of God, Jesus and Mary. You were thinking of mortals, were you not?"

"Yes," he whispered, "I felt sick. I was thinking of mortals."

"The Saviour was God, and that lot in their wickedness nailed him to a cross. Desecrated his holy body, his blessed mother, source of our life; for that they must pay and go on paying. What is a body, what are a thousand mortal bodies! The Jews should be grateful we do not slay them one and all. Who knows if we do well to tolerate them; if we sin against the Saviour."

Burghers, guildsmen, master craftsmen crowded around the well by the Hering-haus, many on their knees. Threats against the two Jews rang out across the marketplace, held in check by the shouts and spears of the executioner's lads. Women clustered in narrow dark Linen Lane by the sign of the Silver Leveret, observed the criminals with disgust and aversion, children hid among their skirts. At every bite of the pincers, every slash, they set up a wailing, tears ran down their cheeks, some vomited, some trembled mutely, unable to move.

Nuns, brown Minorites, white-cowled Dominicans lay prostrate on the pavement, motionless for hours, lips to the little crucifix, shuddering at the incomprehensible crime against the body of Jesus; pleading for mercy, forgiveness, endless struggling contrition.

The imperial court on fly-plagued mounts, noblemen below the railing of the town scaffold, grave weary solemn silk-clad men, contemptuous glares at the delinquents; some stirred up the crowd, on tiptoe among awed faces.

Ferdinand on the town judge's balcony, on a raised dais, at his side the Father Confessor in black Jesuit robes; they sat unmoved, half turned from the stage. The Emperor lent a distracted ear to the old man's teaching. How did it all come: Digby occurred to him, the boar chase at Begelhof, Count Paar. Where was Digby? Overtired, the Emperor yawned, clenched his jaw against the sour taste from his stomach.

The scholars began to sing a hymn in Latin.

The executioner pawed the woman's supple body, she shrank away, whispered something; he bent an ear to her mouth; she pleaded like a child: "Enough now? Enough now?"

Meanwhile the blood-soaked burned felon had woken from his faint; forcing his head up he crowed, his bound limbs writhed. Shouts of laughter among the guildsmen spread to the court, women shook themselves in ecstasy, exchanged overdone delighted cries, kissed children, ruffled their skirts. Crowing from Hen Lane, at the well. The marketplace seethed a little. The armed lads shoved, the wave lurched this way and that between arquebuses and staves. As the women's tender fear grew, unable to hold back amid the din they shoved in among the men. Nuns and monks lay like tombstones on the paving, dreadfully still,.

Executioner and lads piled faggots in a wide semicircle around the man's stake. His bonds were loosened, little bags of salt and pepper were shaken from a distance over his wounds, he dragged the iron chain around the post, the chain wound shorter and shorter; unwound it, rubbed his wounds against the post, covered his arms, spat drool on his chest. The woman ran to him, was pulled short by her chain, stood arms stretched, shook the chinking baby-teeth, called tender garbled words, advanced unseen, tottered this way that way on dainty feet accompanied by her own cooing and twittering. She lifted her arms, in modesty adjusted the atlas-silk dress, her eyes as she coughed and choked for air fixed on him there, on the other side, in the flames, cheeks wet with tears, now a melting smile, now turned to stone.

The encroaching throng was pushed back. Smoke drifted from the burning pile. When after some minutes the smoke cleared, the felon was upright against the stake, blue-red bloated face with tight-shut eyelids faced the square, the jaws gaped, nostrils flared pulsing as if he wanted to sneeze, knees crossed, stomach pulled in. Suddenly he blew out air, opened his arms, breathed, gulped greedily. Slowly the air began to quiver around him, became visible in little trembling motions, little whorls rising, the scene behind grew crooked, distorted. He danced, jumped back, to the side. His arms were free, he held them like feelers ahead of him, pulled them back in. Little streams of liquid dribbled from his wounds, pumped from his chest into the flames. Those below who saw it shouted "Wretch! Wretch! He's trying to put it out!" Then a barely visible lick of flame, blue in white, looming from behind. He whirled around, tumbled down, clambered up, his rags ablaze, he accepted the challenge, was almost naked. He tried to pull the last scraps from his belly, his loins, they were glued there, baked black, stuck to his skin, he scraped with his elbows. On his head was no hair, but round clumps of charcoal rolled down; he smeared them on his face, over the big bursting blisters. He blew on his palms, chest, ashes thickened, the scraps of cloth crumbled. He strained up on his toes, body stretched, gulped down passionate drafts of air with full bellows-cheeks. Black-red, holed, inflated he ran searching around the post, hindered by the chain he dived to the floor, sucked air from the heated planks. Bubbling pale blue air swooped thick over him.

She saw it, covered her face. Suddenly he cried out; there was a glowing pincers, fallen from the pan. The executioner saw it, roared: "Pincers here! Throw down the pincers, dog!" Raged at his assistants, hurled a log, roared: "Pincers!" The felon slipped aside. The executioner flung pail after pail onto the flames, lunged, tried to hook the pincers. The man saw the black hook, he grabbed for it, tumbled over at a kick, crawled back. Between him and the people a thin veil of flame. And when the veil dropped the people exulted to see him, the wild dancing creature hopping, ever more like Satan black and red. He breathed, ran as far as the chain allowed, hairless, silent, naked. Billows of flame leaped behind him, the red-white glowing curtain sheer before him.

Shrill screams, three, four, five, cudgelling screams, another! Scream after scream! Abrupt silence. Thin black smoke. Furious crackling popping.

Now the flames licked harmlessly about him, like a miracle there lay something in human form, head lolling against the stake, surrounded by fire. Little flames played about the skull, stroked the body. A brownblack skin spread rapidly over him, as if dressing him in leather. Steam from the neck region. Calmly he let the heat envelop him. Tipped over. Legs tucked in

he rolled onto his back; the legs curled tighter under the body amid the crackle and swirl of flames, while close to could be heard a gentle puffing like beans popping, and little streams and trickles forming at his side.

He curled up black, shrank.

She no longer looked his way.

Her beloved was gone.

Stared a few moments lost in thought. The hair on her own head began to burn. She screamed, ducked. Ran to the stake, clung to it as if welded. The clothes flamed up around her, she cowered back, bent over her knees, a spurned puppy. For a moment you could see amid the raging whirl of flames her dark red lifted face staring deadeyed over the marketplace. The charred stake crashed onto her, the scaffold with the two corpses collapsed.

The Emperor had left some time ago, with the court.

32. The Necessity of Obedience

FATHER MUTIUS VITELLESCHI, general of the Jesuit Order, had to make a journey through baking Campagna. Urban had rejected his plea of frailty. In Castelfranco the blackbearded man had told him in a soldier's tent: "This boozer, this Collalto, is making astonishing advances on Mantua. We are powerless against the deluge of men the Emperor flings at us across the Alps." He hurled horrible curses at Ferdinand, whom he called only The Idiot, and at Wallenstein, on whose head he had set a price of millions: priests should poison him or stab him to death wherever they find him.

The pale general made halting mention of the Emperor's submissiveness, Wallenstein's generosity. The pope tugged at his beard, eyes wild: the Emperor submits to the Jesuits, Wallenstein's generous to the Jesuits; does everyone think to replace the ancient holy Church with this newfangled Society of Jesus? No generosity comes my way from Emperor or field-marshal; all they do is beg, and seek to shrink my German revenues. And now they break in on Italy, so the Spaniard can plant his foot on us.

With the greatest rigour he laid out for the general – who kept silent - the facts of the matter: Throughout this endless war raging among mankind in Europe, the holy Church is the only force that keeps the cause of humanity in view. The continent of Europe offers a glimpse of the Pit of Hell. And this because the sovereignty of Rome has long since been superseded by such and such a figure bolstered by whatever violent means and accident of birth, for example Philip, Ferdinand the Other, Wallenstein. To say nothing of heretics.

"In so far as humanity has any value, it must be lifted out of the dungheap into which it has stumbled through rampaging worldliness, mad violence, and heresy. It may come in these days that We, the representative of Christ on Earth, lose the last of Our miserable powers; We cannot rule over humanity, cannot lift it, call it to its senses, but must disappear without a trace and leave salvation to the miracle of God. We who administer the sweet holy word of Christ give way to jackals, monsters; the beauty, purity, glory of a human face will be known only from pious pictures. Despair with me of a thousand years of the Church Triumphant."

Vitelleschi asked leave to speak: Pray forgive him for believing his frailty a reason to delay his journey; the extent of the calamity had not at first been apparent to him. To the north of the Alps is a country that has often cast the Church into deepest gloom; it is hard to bring the rude people there to behave tolerably. In that land was the Luther fellow born, of whom his own contemporaries said: he is no man, but the Devil himself in human guise.

The pope burst out: "We shall not submit without a fight. We saw in good time that our independence from worldly powers is a precondition for the efficacy of God's word. We have a country in which we reside and with which we show to the blind powers of nature what power inheres in the idea of God. Every penny that comes to us is used for nothing else but making of our land a land of iron, an unshatterable wall. We are not fantasists. We are not poets. We were placed on our throne for the world, no one shall blow us into the air. You understand?"

And then Urban –an artillery officer's report will be dealt with later – pointed the Jesuit general, who should be mindful of his vow of obedience, to the ready sources of power in Germany: teachers provosts and scholars of all grades, who have authority over the people and when necessary should call them to defiance; and principally the Confessors to the princes.

Father Lessius,* just then in Rome, was ordered by Vitelleschi to betake himself to Germany. He was bold enough to travel via Memmingen, and, having broken through the frenetic military girdle around the town, penetrated to the deathly quiet centre, every street decked in straw ankle-deep. The Duke received him amid a constant to and fro of military men and couriers. The Jesuit marvelled to hear from the Duke the same train of thought he was tasked to broach in Regensburg: the war of Christian against Christian must end, they should hurl themselves at Constantinople. Wallenstein struck him as a cunning dangerous antagonist; he treated his guest with attentive graciousness, inscrutably wished him well with his task in Regensburg, being so pressed for time he was unable to make the journey.

In a cell in the Carthusian monastery outside town, Lamormaini was lectured by Lessius. A princely Confessor, in taking upon himself the spiritual wellbeing of his penitent, without further ado also bears on his shoulders the welfare of the Church. What counts as the welfare of the Church is for the pope to decide. The Confessor should not meddle in political matters. But if the princely penitent has interests that impinge on those of the pope, then the penitent should be guided along the appropriate papal path. This was self-evident.

It weighed heavily on the Luxemburger, the news that the pope was bent on a life-and-death struggle against the Emperor, that the holy Church was threatened by Wallenstein, over-mighty and protected by Spain. The Church stood once again at a fateful hour. The Luxemburger began to argue quietly that the pope's concern was without foundation; Lessius was deaf to him. They came to the theme: to what extent should the pope acquire worldly power, and should he measure himself against other worldly powers. The answer: the pope by virtue of his office is the leader of humanity, hence the highest king on earth, able to destroy cities and states. The sword must either submit to him, or serve him.

Lamormaini asked, inclining his head: how long would Lessius stay in Regensburg. – Until Lamormaini completes the task imposed on him.

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Their Majesties rode high-stepping steeds slowly along the grassy banks of wide swift-flowing Danube, not conversing. The bank became more rocky, narrower. Hills rose gently left and right. Soon the way was strewn with little boulders, stone cliffs plunged to the river. They turned uphill along woodland paths. The Mantuan lady, in hunting clothes of white and green, clinging to her grey as her husband clung to his, waved her gold crop: "What lovely country."

"It is lovely. We should come often here."

"I want to go home."

"Where, Eleonore?" – "To Vienna."

"I'd like to come with you."

"Come then, do me this favour. The country is so lovely. To Laxenburg, or Wolkersdorf."

"I'll not stay here much longer, Eleonore. The Convention will soon be concluded. There's nothing to keep me here."

"In Vienna the Capuchins have dug our graves. I should like to see where I shall be buried."

"The things you say!"

"Regensburg poisons my blood, Ferdinand. People look at me as if they know something."

And although he understood what she was saying, nothing stirred in him. Now and then she turned her stern tremulous face to him; she pulled the white hat-brim down over her eyes, this man could make her die of horror. He seemed absorbed. He looked at her so strangely. This man is dead, she thought. He whipped his horse on.

Behind them rode the Duke of Doria, special envoy of Spain, and Count Trautmannsdorf. The duke laughed a lot, it echoed among the trees: Weather's lovely, nice wide path, shady trees to rest in comfort under; wonderful terrain for soldiering, cavalry could go wherever they want.

Trautmannsdorf: "What cavalry do you mean, sir?"

"We shall not come riding or strolling here much longer. Wallenstein is already wound tight as a ballista. Old wood bursts when it's maltreated too long."

"You think. I've long abandoned hope of seeing the Duke of Friedland on the warpath anywhere near me."

"Patience, little gourmand. The cat will come when the milk has cooled. Then a slurping will begin that will be heard in Munich and Paris."

"The Emperor is taking his time to consider. Friedland waits and waits." At this the Duke of Doria, fat-bellied on his steed, roared such a laugh that those up ahead turned their heads and had to skip sideways. "Little gourmand, just wait a while. Be so kind. Don't kill yourself for greed. Curiosa from Regensburg. Wallenstein will leap north, south, west; will he leap on Italy, or Alsace, or Regensburg? Mantua is ready to fall, Casale too. The Electoral princes will pull in their tails then. It will go ill with them. They will plead in Regensburg."

"We shall see."

"So we shall, little gourmand."

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When even Empress Eleonore learned from her Italian attendants that Mantua was about to be taken, she prostrated herself before Father Joseph in the Carthusian monastery, and begged him for help and protection. She was not properly attired; her lady in waiting came behind and stood face averted at the door. The soft-spoken Frenchman half-closed the blinds at the windows, so the Empress would not suddenly become ashamed of her condition in the glare of day. Her sobs dampened the floor at his feet. She stammered, whimpered: “Mantua gone, Mantua gone;” could say no more. And he wondered, as he sat talking to her, what she had to do with Mantua, she could not mean Mantua. When he spoke of the Emperor, she rustled to her feet like a maenad, angrily smacked her fists together, rasped only “him, him, him,” looked away as if broken.

He advised her, stroking her head, to quit Regensburg for a while. At last she grew calmer, turned, still on her knees, to her maid, gestured curtly for her to leave. She dried her tears, he was surprised when she went to the window, asked him to open it. Now she breathed calmly. She was quite the Empress Eleonore, seemed to feel no embarrassment at her condition, gently and reverently weighed up the situation with him. In silent delight the Frenchman relished her transparent poise, she moved chastely in his gaze as if he were water in which she bathed. She should leave Regensburg and the Emperor, until he renounces his sinful schemes. Without grief, her steps sure, eyes cast down, she took her leave of the priest, who made the sign of the cross over her.

Four days later Ferdinand was informed, having sent for her, that she and her maids were nowhere to be found. In her empty reception room filled with the smoke of tall candles burned down to the stub, he saw, carefully arranged across the small credenza in the corner, the sash embroidered with his signature that he had presented to her before the wedding. And understood: she has slipped away to a quiet place, away from the momentary pressure of events. She will try to pray for peace, and for his soul.

Gazing at the sash he thought of their first meeting in the court church at Innsbruck. Before the altar they had looked on one another for the first time, each led forward by a priest. He, fresh from the choking aggression of Bavarian Max, grief-addled, desperate for help beneath the cumbersome ceremonial robes, the buckles points edgings, a puffy ancient creature tucked into its shell, mistrustful, suffering. She in a crimson gown; the crown of pearls on the brown stiff coiffure held no more colour than her little face with the funny thick eyebrows and undeveloped mouth. How his heart had tightened slightly in hatred at the sight of her. Of Eleonore. The Virgin there beneath the monstrance, and angels singing. Now the child, denied her toy, has run from him. Because of some insignificant town, a monastery, she has run off crying, thinks to hurt him. Hurt *him*.

He stood frowning before the credenza. The Jew and his wife had just now been burned. Like a spark on a roof the memory landed in him, and winked out. The more he gazed at the sash, the more her sweet enchantment captured him. His fingers tenderly lifted the ends. What a lovely purple, the thought came to him; there are things in this world of great beauty, and things of lesser beauty. He tied the sash gently, almost coquettishly, around his hips, over the silver sword-belt. The maids peeped impishly at the Emperor under his white hat with the

egret's feather; is it not a splendid piece, this sash. A pretty stroke of the Empress, to display it here. Sash tied over the sword-belt, pull the cloak together, invite the ladies to a grotesque merry-go-round.

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Tedious jostling among the parties. Tedious steadfast patience of the Electoral archbishops. Succumbing ever more to the confusions and fears of the situation, the imperial counsellors dragged unwilling to Regensburg. Already when embarking at Vienna they had felt themselves caught between two fires; either bend or break, they really should force a decision, but held back in wrenching pain and frustration. Their disgust at Eggenberg's 'illness': a kind of revenge on the old prince's part, forcing them to sup the dish of poisoned soup they themselves had prepared. Letters were sent, couriers to Eggenberg, he had warned in Vienna of the looming dreadful trial of strength, he was their head, the Emperor's favourite. Now ambiguous Gauls and Jesuits pushed to fill his place. Eggenberg was nowhere to be found – travelling, it was said. Wherever officials gathered they had to eavesdrop, pay spies in the imperial chancellery.

Forgotten now, the splendid plan to elect a king. The hour must come when – unthinkable – they would capitulate to the Electoral princes; or else – none could screw up the courage – summon Croats to dissolve the convention, arrest the Electors. They wailed and cursed. The Bavarian kept the Electors on a tight leash; they must stay, every day he sent the Brabanter Tilly to check on them. The lords spiritual noticed, without saying as much to one another, that they had a choice: be either the Emperor's prisoner, or Wittelsbach's. To free themselves from their situation they spoke with the papal legate Rocci, who responded with the utmost assurance that soon, really very soon, everything would turn out for the best. Individually and as a group they enquired in their distress as to the attitude of France. Brulart assured them of the most heartfelt interest of the French king, who everywhere takes the part of the oppressed, as is his Christian duty. In greatest secrecy they implored: Can they depend on his help.

Brulart meanwhile had acquired another guest: the Palatine envoy Rusdorf had turned up with a small retinue. Rusdorf observed the scene with eager curiosity, was amazed to hear friendly words from the hated Bavarians. He attached himself to the Gallic opposition. Marquis de Brulart and Father Joseph briefed him on the disorder in the German camp; then glad Rusdorf whispered confidential news of the Swede: "Don't drive them away, Excellency. Let them squabble. Why cast off Wallenstein? Let Wallenstein and Tilly crack heads. As they do so, the Swede will show up." Rusdorf wrote happily to The Hague about the delicious situation in Germany: vultures are fighting over the prey, each has the other by the throat. He is comfortably ensconced with the French in between; scolding to the left, whining to the right, they set up such a mutual baiting that Satan looks on and snorts.

No one noticed the arrival of the Jesuit envoy Lessius.

Lanes and squares were thronged at all hours with devotions markets trials theatricals. In the arcades fronting the single-storey houses hawkers loitered beside their displays, waylaid passers-by. Speculators who had bought up all the produce from peasants outside the gates were moved on by beadles. Amid the to and fro of bustling foreigners at the inns, town authorities enforced the law with visitations and inquisitions. The lifeguards of the great princes patrolled around their lodgings with halberds, drove cripples and beggars away. Every

morning the nobility proceeded very slowly to church in sumptuous carriages drawn by six or ten horses, guards with spears rode ahead and behind. The Emperor to the parish church of Our Beloved Lady, where a treasure glittered on the richly ornate altar: a statue of the Virgin in gold, at her breast a carved heart of rubies. Other Majesties and Serenities and their retinues to the Augustines, Discalced, the Hospitalers. Alongside the carriages, men of the cloth trudged through deep muck, avoided clucking hens, occasional droves of cattle. Bishops, canons, chaplains, vicars, black tassel-swinging silk hats, purple hats. Priests chatting in black cassock or white choir-surplice, on each bowed head the little cap of a sodality. Swarms of hurrying choirboys in white smocks, clacking rosaries. Now and then through the cries of sugar-bakers tinkers chimney-sweeps, an open sedan chair carries a black-eyed cardinal, his flat wide-brimmed galero with heavy tassels borne ahead by servants; he in a purple cassock, blinking about him from a frowning face.

They slipped Lessius into the bishop's palace, the Jesuits, Dominicans, French, Spanish.

Through a huge change in the Emperor, life at court took on a loud glorious air. As if to show who he was he shook off the oppression that had lain on him and those around, began to treat Regensburg as his residence, as if he meant to stay for years. The hordes of servants were augmented by master-builders paper-hangers masons cabinet-makers and other artisans summoned from Lower Austria; neighbouring houses rented to his court by the magistracy were converted to his purposes as picture gallery, cabinet of curiosities, astrological studio. He had his bird collection brought in. Foundations were dug for a huge aquarium, a theatre. Alchemists were invited from Vienna; the old Polish conjurer and alchemist Sendiwoj von Skorsko, a favourite of Emperor Rudolf, breezed in. Banquets grew ever livelier. And only now came the pageantry of official feasts, laid on by the town in the bishop's palace and the Carthusian monastery in suburban Prüll. A blaring orchestra rode ahead of the courtly train. The princes, invited one by one, turned up in challenging mood and slovenly attire. Ferdinand caroused with them before the entire court, ignored their stiff truculent manner.

And after long effort and innumerable special couriers, he succeeded in drawing the Duke of Friedland to Regensburg, his new residence. The town was agog as it awaited the Field-marshal's arrival. Two hundred lifeguards armed to the teeth escorted him. The route swarmed with Croatian light cavalry; an empty imperial state carriage met him at the gate. The town quiescent; the clerical Electors close in their quarters, scoffing laughter from the Gauls. The Friedland party entered like conquerors; the visit lasted half a day. Ferdinand showed the Duke his buildings, feasted with him. To Wallenstein's left sat the fat exulting Duke of Doria.

The Jesuits bearded the Emperor in the bishop's palace. To their surprise he welcomed them with open arms; they had thought him depressed because the Mantuan lady had absconded. He let them regale him for hours on any topic, their conversation relaxed him. They found him untroubled by any matter they raised. He seemed to stretch out sated and grateful under their words, rose stronger and calmer from the discussions.

Then slowly, almost hopelessly, big Lamormaini set himself in motion. Unthinkable that he would renounce his obedience; the world might end, still he must follow orders. As he stood, square biretta in hand, rigid before Ferdinand, his eyes did not see Emperor Ferdinand,

pope, Father Lamormaini; he had made his four vows, must fulfill his mission, this apparatus of hardest iron. Bitterly he had drawn near again in his aimless strolling to the dust of the pealing jubilant town, passed by the summer tents of servants, little bivouacs of troops, the herds of livestock, haywains. Bitterly he drew near the tightly cordoned bishop's palace. At the first sentry's cry he exhaled, it was as if a capsule in him sprang open and closed again; he stood even stiffer, stretched himself into his huge body.

In the confessional he tested the Emperor, whose pride was intact; venial sins came to light. He imposed nightly penances. Ferdinand, still frail from his sickness, asked for lenience; the priest rejected the plea. When after a few days Ferdinand, paler than usual, but upright, mentioned with a smile that he had a great task to accomplish at this Convention and feared he was not up to it, the priest asked: Does he mean that tasks directed at Heaven may be set aside, that duty to the Convention is more urgent than duty to God. He saw to his surprise that although the Emperor found it hard to complete the penances, he entered into them humble and acquiescent, indeed mastered them, and was in no way demeaned thereby. Lamormaini, as he tested the Emperor, found himself facing a man other than the one who had submitted to him following the calamity in Munich. His astonishment at this man was such that he felt uneasy, often felt an urge to discuss the dreadful situation with shrewd Lessius; but it would shame him, and he knew he would merely be exhorted to do his duty.

In the Jesuit church and in the monastery, no one at this time was seen sitting and praying at such length as grey huge Father Lamormaini. Like a child returned after a long absence all grown up and clever and surprising; or like a cherry tree that suddenly after a May shower transforms itself into a lovely white cloud of blossom – such was Habsburg now; and yet weapons were being readied against this tenderness. The priest was glad to submit to the necessity of obedience. He went to see Lessius: It would be well, should he succeed in this godly work, to request that he be relieved of his office at the Emperor's side. Black Lessius was unmoved: That's a matter for General Vitelleschi.

Prince-elector Maximilian and Father Joseph heard via gossipy Cardinal Rocci that the Jesuits had joined their party; they cheered: The Jesuits are powerful, they'll break Ferdinand entirely. Brulart reported to Paris: the German Emperor is like a boar beset by hounds; France too has a part in the chase, as will be reported at first only by mouth. And spies carried this dangerous news to Memmingen.

Father Lamormaini fussed around Ferdinand like a doctor with a child he wishes to spare pain during the necessary operation: gently and evasively. He handled the Emperor so lovingly that Ferdinand accepted as his own will whatever the priest brought to him, believed he would by himself discover everything and follow of his own volition the path he was forced to take. Lamormaini, a little eager but incapable of casting off the task imposed on him, sincerely wanted to negate the triumph of his penitent's enemies, leave everything unchanged.

A little note was brought to him from Vitelleschi:

"Pope Urban does not favour us. Think on this, Brother Lamormaini, you pious Christian."

Like Jack o' Lanterns across his daily path to the Emperor, French cavaliers flashed in gaudy cloaks, evil silent figures; he shrank from them.

He devoted himself to the Emperor. But morning and evening a pupil read the note out to him: “Pope Urban does not favour us. Think on it, Brother Lamormaini, you pious Christian.”

33. He Delighted in his Blindness

FEAST OF THE Assumption. Behind banners and gay effigies, white flocks of children carried to church baskets piled with fruit and herbs; many held twigs of apple and pear on which little wooden birds perched. Cavaliers rode bareheaded alongside their lady’s chair. Eager students rode on baggage carts down lanes, across marketplaces, past the striding lifeguards of His Roman Majesty and the prince-bishops. Fifes and flutes among them, blaring down now left, now right. Fan-waving Gauls emerged from their quarters, shrank back when the students hooted at them and swung their heavy sabres.

For a great distance around the bishop’s palace, all traffic had been barred ever since the advisers had prompted the Emperor to a decision. He seldom lingered in the big living and reception rooms. During the day he was to be found in the little music-room overlooking the garden. Plain bare floorboards, but the room was plastered in ornate squiggly decorations. Repeated wheels of flame in red and yellow painted on the walls, their axles streaming out rays, rays streaming from ever more garish wheels all around the walls. Then, providing respite in the middle of the long wall, a rectangle of gold in severe Byzantine style; huge Gothic letters a ruddy reminder of the peace of the heavenly kingdom. Above it a black cross, ebony figures of Mary and John at its foot. A single huge window broke through the thick masonry of the wall opposite. Beneath the crucifix a wide upholstered rug-strewn bench, a carved chest by the door. In this vaulted space, its walls inset with gemstones, voices were muffled.

It was a cordial reception Lamormaini found one hot day; Ferdinand earnestly drew him close. “It is not possible,” he said, “in matters of such importance to rely solely on worldly understanding. With such monstrous and grave matters in play, I must pray to the Saviour and the Virgin to aid my decision.”

They chatted about Ferdinand’s college days in Ingolstadt and his teachers, the famed Gregor of Valencia, the historian Gretser.* Ferdinand’s mouth dreamily formed an oval: finding the right path had been easy for him, his mother had been strong in her faith; he recalled her often saying how Khevenhüller, the ambassador to Madrid, always impressed on her that a child’s wellbeing, in both this world and the next, depends on those entrusted with its education; they must be irreproachable Catholics inwardly and outwardly. “I was lucky to have Gregor and Gretser as my guides, then Father Becanus,* my esteemed confessor now passed away, Dominicus à Jesu Maria, who is now also resting in God. And you, Father Lamormaini. I see at every turn how God blesses me.”

Lamormaini stretched his lame leg, sat hunched and troubled on the chest. The trilling of students, shouts of lifeguards floated in. Quietly he revealed that he had only with reluctance taken on the role of Confessor to the Emperor. In more peaceful times he had conducted excavations in the catacombs of the blessed Callixtus,* had gathered the bones of saints which then became a protection and a blessing for the College of Jesuits. At the conclusion of his time in Rome, where he spoke with Urban the Eighth, whom he had known before as Cardinal

Barberini, he had completed the eight spiritual exercises in order to devote himself to the study and teaching of syntax and rhetoric; and then Father Vitelleschi had nominated him Father Confessor: a great distinction and a weighty task, to be the spiritual guide of a prince; a task hardly to be mastered. Take the pious Father Claudius, fifth General of the Society of Jesus, who composed, out of the urgings of his heart and his solicitude, a *Guide to the Spiritual** for those clergy who attend princes, and yet in the end bore the whole burden on his shoulders. For how should anyone separate the political from the spiritual in the life of a ruler.

Ferdinand, half prone, head on crossed arms, listened attentively. He spoke, pausing often with a smile to await a response from the priest. Perhaps they were not inapt, the exhortations in that *Guide to the Spiritual*; he regretted never having had access to such an interesting book; but for sure there are plenty of cruel selfish princes; they remind him of the Fool who clothes one leg in normal hose and the other in chicken feathers and claws. He is no longer young enough for such games or so-called strict separation; indeed he is glad that Lamormaini acknowledges how hard it is to keep politics apart from the spiritual realm. “For instance, Father Lamormaini, why did we spend so many long years in Ingolstadt, and why did they shield us so resolutely from contagion by heresy? Just to make sure we go like good dutiful lads to Mass, Vespers, confession? No great labour was needed for that. As Emperor I am not like those furious Salians of the eleventh century, you know, who hurled themselves against the popes. What really does one want. To permeate the substance of our life, including political life, with the spirit of the Christian church: I can think of no greater task.”

“Your Majesty has never made my task difficult.”

Ferdinand sat up, pointed a finger at Lamormaini, whispered gravely: “Father, I must reveal to you what has come into my dreams now and then, quite recently. That we are rivals in love, the pope and I. But not as one normally understands it. I mean spiritually. I am not his protector, his sword. I don’t want the Church at my side, and so I summon Jesuits, as many should come as are produced. They are better for me than soldiers. The Holy Empire must itself be a great Church.”

“The Holy Father will rejoice to hear of such a pious notion from you. He knows what help Providence has provided to him, in you.”

“And you, Father, what do you think of these uncertain times? You hold yourself back. Do you mistrust me, even now?” Ferdinand smiled. Lamormaini lowered his head. Ferdinand softly, almost tender: “I owe you so much.”

“There is fear or consternation in seeing oneself on a path, and not knowing if it is the right one.”

Ferdinand turned to face him, arms anxiously raised: “I know no paths that I may follow but you may not. I have told you. I do not want to know of any such.”

“Why do you need to listen to me?”

“Father Lamormaini, I will not do myself an injustice. I need you not because I am uncertain or fearful. But I – have you here, your voice to me is that of a father. Please do not hold back, do not fail me. It is a boon to observe how your soul touches on these matters.”

“I know my duty is to guide your soul. If I held my tongue, it was so as not to distress you.”

The Emperor invited him to continue. The priest composed himself, made a start. His mouth opened, and he purred. How the words sounded. He listened as if to a stranger speaking. He felt ashamed, would not lift his gaze. Such a burden on him. – There is not much to say. This dreadful devastation in Germany, these horrors that dance across the Alps, quarrels in the Empire, the Emperor isolated; who would not become distressed when thinking of a Christian peace.

"So advise me, Father. I have never seen the times as a cause for laughter."

"Peace, peace. The Saviour, when he walked the earth, said: Render unto God that which is God's. Too often people say: Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. The streets and squares are filled with it. He who listens to the clamour of the world probably thinks: So much ripe grain, so few peasants; pray the Lord for a harvest, that he send peasants for the reaping."*

The wrinkles at the corners of Ferdinand's eyes twitched, he pressed his palms together, perched on the edge of the bench: "Advice, Father."

"You madman," the priest screamed to himself, *"you wicked man. You cannot dishonour yourself so. Brother Lamormaini, the Holy Father thinks ill of us."*

"Tell me, Majesty, your own thoughts on this matter."

Now Ferdinand, having stared for a while into the dazzling wheels reflected in the Confessor's lenses, became uneasy, stood up: "I told you, no one should decry me as a bloody tyrant and a Roman Caesar."

If you do not mean to be a bloody tyrant, then matters have gone bitterly for you, for all the world misprises you as such and sees you as nothing else, nothing else. And if you wish to found a worldly papacy, you may well bethink that at present the world sees matters very differently: from eyes full of dread. How can you reconcile this: to stand there so mighty that everyone must truly call you Emperor, and so little able to achieve what you want – less, in fact, than the rulers who preceded you, who were so much weaker. All this must Lamormaini speak out and lay before him.

"Father, the Saviour indeed preached as you said. But He also said, as you yourself have taught us in your sermons, that He came to us not just to bring peace on earth, but to arouse fathers, sons, mothers, daughters and cousins against one another."

"True, Luke said so: discord. In order to hurl heavenly fire down on the earth."

Ferdinand half-settled back on the bench, said nothing. Lamormaini, after a long pause: "Your Majesty stays silent."

Toneless: "You see I am silent."

When Ferdinand had settled himself back among the rugs, his flat low voice trickled: "What is our way out?"

"It seems as if you have erred in your thinking up till now. You believed –"

"What, was I not a Christian?"

For a long moment the priest found no answer to this white face, this slow distressing voice. Then he imbued his tone with much warmth and cordiality and had to struggle not to

allow himself to be completely overcome: “You were my confessant over many long years, Majesty. You were a good Catholic Christian. When I carried out the wishes of your late consort, the blessed Maria Anna, regarding the Church, I was your follower in the fear of God.”

“Yes, look at Anna Maria. Could I have lived so many happy years with her, had I not the right faith?”

“You were pious.”

“Then what is it?”

“I make no reproach of the man Ferdinand of Habsburg. The Roman Emperor, king of Germany, Ferdinand the Other thought to swell himself up to rival the pope. But meanwhile no one believes it, no one sees it. Even the Catholic Electors oppose him.”

He laid it all out as a question. A puff of wind could have struck him dumb. But Ferdinand persevered, still mild. After settling himself firmly against the back of the bench, he crossed his arms over his breast with a tender expression, frowned at the wall opposite: “Because this office fell to me I took it on, determined to pursue the business of the Holy Empire in all good conscience. That is my Bible, always in my hand. At my side the *capitulatio caesarea* – my Electoral Charter; the Imperial Constitution, the Golden Bull. I was placed in this role, entrusted with it. The rest comes from me, power and responsibility.”

Ruddy evening light flickered through the rapidly darkening room. The big Luxemburger stood by the chest, head on his breast, hands folded. So this is where we are, not as the talk was earlier; where now is talk of Christendom. Then, as Ferdinand’s swaying face maintained its confident assured expression: Let the Emperor reflect on where matters stand with him.

After he was gone, the Emperor sat gazing with the same steadfast expression at the red radiant wall with its rampaging garish wheels of flame.

And the same clear confident face encountered Lamormaini next morning immediately after Mass. Ferdinand, his colour better than before, regretted that yesterday’s conversation had broken off, he could not yet dispense with the priest’s help on this topic. He shook him by the hand, invited him to sit. Of course he must reflect on where matters stand with him. But the priest too must reflect. He gazed searchingly into Lamormaini’s face: “I continue to maintain, Magnificence, dear Father, that the Bull, the Constitution, and the Electoral Charter are all I have. You think that as Emperor I neglect the Christian path. So, help me.”

The Luxemburger bowed, profoundly joyful, his voice full of reverence. He has been waiting for this invitation, this plea; he knows the Emperor cannot carry the burden alone; but first the Emperor had to acknowledge it to himself.

The Emperor, slow, thoughtful: “Last night I wondered again at it, Father. I won’t conceal it from you. Emperor and Church govern at cross purposes. The Emperor has his palace, his castle, and nobles, councillors, officers, armies. The pope has the clergy, the Vatican, St Peter’s, a myriad chapels, monasteries and churches. The pope lays down the law, as do I, and my princes of the realm. We govern the same people. And – we have no point of contact. Only now, in this unique moment, do we come together. With mutual reproaches. Not a healthy relationship.” And now Ferdinand laid out frankly and confidentially the circumstances that had led to this Electoral Convention, the dangerous situation that had been conjured up. “And

the decision rests with me. If I shrug it off, do you know what will happen? As if an arrow takes aim, my Field-marshal shoots from the southwest and strikes down the Electoral princes: the Empire has a new face. I admit to you, I am not afraid, I haven't the slightest care. It is the princes in the Empire who must have a care; I can squash them whenever I want. I can bind them as tight as if their arms and legs lay in irons. I have the power."

"What will you decide?"

"Nothing, not yet. I leave their lordships waiting. I can decide either way, uncompelled. I won't do them an injustice. I shall take counsel entirely of myself. And wait for the moment."

"What a great power the Lord of Heaven has granted you. Whenever a common person, a nobleman takes counsel of himself, he can retreat into a corner, or to a church; the conversation between him and God is all he brings from it. You have enough freedom that, by taking counsel of yourself, you dispose of millions of souls."

"I would not dare to do so, were I not a Christian."

"Majesty, my pupil in penitence, I am here with you at this moment. I am glad you summoned me. Are you afraid or nervous about dismissing the Duke?"

"No. I am grateful to him. But he serves at my pleasure."

"Will you feel bad about squashing the princes?"

"No injustice should be done to them. They shall not cause me through their attitude to act unjustly. If needs must, they shall be removed."

"They are pious men, some are bishops of the Church."

"My Field-marshal has restored to me my ancestral kingdoms and lands. He has extended the Holy Roman Empire and made it powerful – unlike any of these princes."

"So let him march in, and drive the princes away or lay them in irons."

"If such action is merited, it shall be made ready for the princes."

The priest shook his head slowly and for a long while, studied his palms, rubbed his temple; suddenly he brought his hands together. Now, thought the priest, I am all set to shame the Emperor. Now I can shatter all to pieces. Ferdinand is defenceless. I can ruin that pure face.

And suddenly there came into his soul: why not tempt Fate. He had prayed that he be preserved from sin. But he was already on that path, without a guide. And as he trembled it emerged from him: "I cannot find the right perspective." And at once felt, his head lowered, brow drenched by a damp shower, that he stood at a crisis point and nothing else was left to him. He prayed and sinned in the same breath.

The Emperor's face brightened in a smile, he held out his arms: "Well then, dear Father Lamormaini, it seems that I shall not be able to commit any great sin."

"Speak up," the other hissed in torment, "do not hold back. Out with it."

It welled up in Ferdinand, his gaunt cheeks quivered, his eyes hardened: "You try to tempt me. I have nothing against Wallenstein and nothing against the princes. Let neither side presume I shall do them injustice. My decision will be reached as calmly as a dice-thrower tips

his cup and counts the points. Do you know –" his voice dropped to a whisper – "why I can do so? Because I have power. I can wait for the moment. That will not be taken from me."

It was as if the priest's body were being dragged through a bath of torment. He could not move, screamed silently for release.

"You see, Father, I feel myself so unconstrained in the matter that I am tempted to leave the decision to a childish game: I shall summon my valet, and if his left foot steps first across the threshold, then Wallenstein has won; if the right foot, the princes."

Lamormaini resurfaced, dimly heard himself sigh: "Blasphemy."

Ferdinand stepped slowly up to him, gripped his hand and drew it to his breast, squeezed it: "You are my friend. You will not betray my intentions. It will soon enough become common knowledge; I would like to keep it to myself a little while. Do you know why? To savour it. For as soon as I proclaim it, they will all pass it around and explain it and my decision will be buried under a heap of stupidities and coarseness. I shall keep it to myself a few days. You will concede I have good reason. You should share my pleasure, dear friend."

The Emperor seemed delirious. His breast heaved. He seemed to be using the priest's hand to comfort himself. His gaze flitted here and there, never resting on any point. His mouth opened and shut wordlessly, the lips drooling, his knee kept clicking. A murky feeling in him: I follow, I follow, I do not hold back.

The Jesuit groaning, sore afraid: "Whatever your eventual decision, I beg you not to make it at this moment. I beg you, Your Majesty."

Crying, laughing, the burden dancing from him, the Emperor: "You must not forbid me to speak at this moment. When should I come to a decision, if not now. How would it look, how could I declare any decision other than what I have in me now."

"I will not hear it. Stop now."

"But you must hear it, Father, you must. You must tell me what you think. You alone can share it with me, and cannot seal yourself off from me."

The big man wrestled with the Emperor, tried to pull him to the bench. The flitting eyes would not alight on his face. "What are you doing, Father."

"Sit down. Pull yourself together. Will you drink wine?"

"Listen to me. Let go my jerkin. Dearest Father."

"I will not listen, Majesty."

Ferdinand sank onto the bench, stared wordlessly at the black robe, chin sternly raised; he was trembling. An uncertain ambiguous quizzical smile hovered, he sighed: "What's happened? Have I done something wrong?"

"Satan has entered you."

"I know everything that is to come."

"Silence! Lord, lead us not into temptation."

"Father, truly, I see it there before me as real as you are."

"Lord, lead us not into temptation. Close your eyes, stop staring around. Pray with me."

After some murmuring, Ferdinand's bright gaze fixed on the Jesuit's brow: "It's all the same as before. I can hardly restrain myself from talking to you."

Lamormaini, dreadfully frightened about what he must evoke, knelt cradling his crucifix, pressed it to his lips. Punishment looming over him. Ferdinand very gently touched his shoulder: "I know, you have a hard task. You are in torment. I shall obey you. What must I do?"

Now, in bitter desperation, the priest uttered in a roar: "You must dismiss the Duke, must not retain him."

The Emperor leaned forward over the kneeling man, naïve and astonished, stroked his arm. Yes, this is his decision; did the pope perhaps want a different one? And when Lamormaini swung round in a rage, Ferdinand murmured, arms crossed: The priest had said what he, the Emperor, was not allowed to say.

"You will forego the Duke's services? The war over Mantua will end?"

"See how you know it all! And now you say it all."

"My Saviour – you! you! How the Holy Father will praise you, the princes will praise you."

"You see," Ferdinand smiled, quite calm and as happily proud as a little girl with a present. "And why should I not have said it?"

Around noon the Luxemburger, still grinding his teeth in shock and bemusement, entered the bishop's music room. He told the Emperor he had come to savour his decision. "Careful," warned the Emperor. Ferdinand leaned over the window sill. Chirping from below, where pheasants strutted on sand. Yes, there is reason for contentment, this is now a pillar in him, not to be overturned. "I am glad you wanted to hear me out, Father. This has come about through my endless love for both parties, the Duke and the princes. I have done both a favour. Each party led to its rightful place."

The Jesuit sat baffled by these mysterious words. "You wanted to avert disaster?" he asked in torment. He could hardly listen, had been driven here by his confusion, to calm himself. What will happen to me, he wondered. His face twisted: "I rejoice with you." He tried to elicit a friendly word from the Emperor, would Ferdinand look at him, acknowledge him, help him.

The Emperor remained silent. His expression was mild and thoughtful, his head inclined a little to his shoulder. "They meant to incite me with their accusations, the Empress is cross with me, she's away weeping somewhere. The Duke was all ready to spring, waiting only for my signal. What was it all for. Everything has its time." His bright placid gaze turned on the seated Father; he smiled: "Be glad the responsibility is not yours. You wouldn't have been able to move for the violence they would do you."

He took the priest's hands, pulled him to his feet, linked his arm to the priest's: "You're agitated, Lamormaini, seem quite distraught! Let it go. Just let it drop. There, it's gone. Come."

They went into the garden. Lamormaini let himself be led like a sick child. He was chilled, was humbled, and felt he would be forgiven.

They walked among the flowerbeds. The ruler blinked at mignonettes, pheasants. He delighted in his blindness.

34. Dismissed with Honour

THE EMPEROR allowed four days to elapse, during which he consorted with himself and his decision before again exposing himself to the theatre of recriminations, stipulations, rancour and truculence. He did this to serve as yet another check on himself. When he observed no trace of malice within him, he deemed it good to summon his counsellors. Although the invitations were delivered in the greatest secrecy, whispers soon spread through the town. Excitement in the quarter where the princes and foreigners lodged grew to a fever pitch. Outside the house of Count Tilly ten riders were stationed day and night; they took their meals in the saddle; he never left the house. As a precaution light cannon and artillerymen had been concealed near the town, along the Danube bank; it was evident that, before even the slightest hostile move, the town would fall into the hands of the League. Frenchmen went hither and thither dispensing advice. People flocked about Father Joseph, the Jesuits, Cardinal Rocci. The Father Confessor was nowhere to be seen.

At the meeting in the bishop's refectory, in the presence of Lamormaini and the young King of Bohemia – clad in white, slender, he sat sullen and haughty beside his jovial father – the continuing parlous state of affairs was summarised by Count Stralendorf. Then the Emperor spoke: it was not strange to him that the Princes were inclined to take matters to the extreme; they would perceive even a decision to yield to them as a sign of weakness. Which would be bad. But for him the most important point was to take forward, with sensitivity, a matter essential to the restoration of peace in the Empire: the dismissal of the Duke of Friedland. It must be made absolutely clear that he was not, as the blind might think, offered as a sacrifice to the Princes; rather, the interests of the Empire required of him this sacrifice. In retiring he would provide the Empire a service no less significant than a battle won. The Empire would owe him enduring gratitude. The young king confined himself to a few banalities. He was clearly ill at ease with the Emperor's decision, though he too had demanded Wallenstein's dismissal. The atmosphere among the entire Privy Council was one of astonishment: here was the decision they themselves had been unable to reach, but which at all events had to be made.

Lamormaini sat by himself. No one looked at him. He had won. The Jesuits ruled.

Stralendorf asked what would be done if the Duke refused to resign his command. The others kept silent; the Emperor found the question irrelevant.

The little abbot of Krems-minster at once dragged Trautmannsdorf back to his lodging; said: "We are beaten. Eggenberg has won, even from distant Istria. Eggenberg has his way. What will Slavata say. Should we resign our offices." The abbot more agitated by the minute: such enormous debts owed by the court to Wallenstein, it is unthinkable, the decision must be rescinded. The hunchbacked count, still sunk in bemusement, confessed that the Emperor astonished him. "Not the same man he was in Munich. He's not even afraid of us."

The abbot shouted: Wallenstein must not give way.

"Reverence," the count waggled his head, "the Emperor knows what he's doing. The Duke will give way."

“He won’t. You’ll see.”

Trautmannsdorf still thoroughly put out: “So Eggenberg was right all along. The Emperor no longer wants the Duke’s support. But what is his plan?”

The little abbot, deathly pale and beside himself: “This Convention is all our fault. It’s all gone wrong. We’re worse off now than before the treaty with Munich.”

Until Trautmannsdorf, after lurking for some while behind a harp, said: “Now the time has come for us to act again. Really I feel like a dupe. We were in such a flutter on the way to the Convention. The Emperor must pay off all the debts we have incurred. Damnable logic. It wasn’t for this we freed him from the Bavarian’s clutches. We must keep the Duke of Friedland on side. For now my hands will not be tied. We won’t let him go.”

Meanwhile Lamormaini had gloomily taken himself off to Lessius at the Carthusians. He sat silent for a while across from him; the papal envoy feared a bad outcome, refrained from questions, preserved a cold demeanour. His mistrust did not entirely evaporate when the priest reported on the meeting. He asked if the priest was bothered by any private care; was there something he needed to say. Lamormaini, unable to match that placid voice, burst out: This business has cost me much effort. The envoy’s smile was sympathetic, almost dismissive: Clearly the matter lay in the hands of God. There came a knock at the cell next door; Lessius stood; a conversation in French started up, with exclamations of delight. Unrestrained groans escaped Lamormaini, rasped in his throat as at Lessius’ side he overheard the Gallic emissary report on the outcome of the quarrels.

That afternoon visitors streamed to his lodging opposite the bishop’s palace. Cardinal Rocci embraced him crowing like a cockerel; finally little Father Joseph came fussing around. Reluctantly Lamormaini let fly: He had had no hand in it, Ferdinand’s mind was already made up. At which Joseph stepped back with a cry of joy; being shortsighted he collided with the door: But this is wonderful, it means the Emperor has of his own volition leaned to the French.

Lamormaini went to the Jesuits for confession; he was consumed by fire. He took leave of the Emperor in order to follow his urge to seek out sickly Prince Eggenberg, who was now in Göppingen, to bestir his soul with news of Ferdinand’s decision. Eggenberg had moved to Göppingen – not that far from Memmingen – having tired of Istria’s deadly torpor; for weeks now, plagued by impatience, sorrow, even regret, he had forced himself back towards Regensburg. When Lamormaini came to him he was busy with travel preparations. So deeply did the priest’s news affect the morose old man that he wept. He praised the fate of Habsburg, the genius of the House had not deserted it, but had touched the Emperor. Only after prayers would he listen to more from Lamormaini; he spluttered in joy at the averted danger to the ancestral House, kept falling to his knees, prayed, rejoiced, hugged the silent priest. “I dared to do it. God was with me.” Soon now a noble peace would come to all, a peace so longed for by the imperial House, the princes and, by no means least, the poor exhausted Empire.

Only in the next few days did Prince Eggenberg notice that the old Jesuit was more distracted and unsettled than usual, was seeking consolation from him. And on long walks to the spring and across fields the prince understood: stammering Lamormaini was afraid for himself. Groaning like some animal, one evening Lamormaini burst out that he could never

forget the benign submissive face of the Emperor, so conscious of his power; and his own efforts to lead him astray. The Emperor had shamed him, cast him aside in contempt. He, Lamormaini, now felt ashamed. The Emperor had looked on him, the sinner, like one blessed.

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The hilly forested roads along the Danube swarmed with Isolani's Croats. From Regensburg the call had come, banners waving, endless drumming. At first a few solitary scouts patrolling, then came squadrons, half a company drawn along behind. All shouting to one another, hand signals waving. Move! Baggage dumped on the ground, hayricks fired to alert scattered forage teams. In their wake a barrage of dust and desolation. The swarm curled like a hedgehog, tumbled south. They left behind cowed silent empty villages, campfires smouldering, livestock bellowing, haltered, grazing. They flew past merchants' carts, peddlers, travellers making for Regensburg; the neighing, whip-cracks, clank of steel swept by and vanished in a moment.

Away to Augsburg.

In a tavern nestled at the forest edge close by the gates of Augsburg, Colonel Max Wallenstein, the Duke's cousin. Everything converged madly on the forest. Isolani, face dripping and ravaged, pushed through to him. The colonel lay unbooted and drunk in his room, he gurgled, drooled at the Croat, then sober all of a sudden clapped a hand to his brow and chest. Jumping up he grabbed Isolani's writing-tablet, hung it about his own neck. To the Croat and his lieutenant: We'll ride together; if I don't make it through, you'll bring the tablet to the Duke, leave me lying where I am, even in a muddy puddle. Boots on, hat and swordbelt, into the saddle.

Max bobbed on horseback left, right, high in the air like a cork in boiling water, soon only in a glimmer of consciousness; his lips repeated: It's over, we're done for. Morning still, and through the wide noisy assemblage of troops into Memmingen. Taken to the Duke: "It's over. We're done for." Max collapsed snoring after handing over the tablet. Isolani groaned: should they dismount. Now the Duke noticed the colonel, screamed: "Out!" He was carried off.

For seven days Wallenstein left all his work lying. Arms and legs lame with rage. He should have been ready for anything; Senno had cast just this outcome but he had refused to believe it. And when Senno came bringing another calculation, the Duke fired a pistol after him. Now he did not merely trample his hat, he tore it to pieces. He was quite blind. Hurl his troops at Regensburg, arrest the Electors, depose the Emperor. He made a few half-hearted preparations with Neumann and Max. Until he himself swept the table bare, chased the others away, unable to cope with these sinister too-sudden thoughts. They had him. For the second, third time. After he'd put their Empire back on its feet. At the cost of his own ruined bones and entrails.

There had never been anything personal in his relations with the Emperor. It was the elected ruler of the Holy Roman Empire that he served. Now he was pierced, the dam broken through; the Emperor was the entity assailing him. He could not fathom it. If he meant to survive he must, he must strike down the Emperor, and the whole pack.

And as he sat in his room not stirring, as he pulled himself together the thought howled in him: the hundreds of thousands, the millions they owe him. He gnawed at it. Millions. They're not rid of me yet. They'll not escape so easily.

Or could they, would they dare. He ground his teeth. Yes, it was the best course, he'd do the same in their shoes. Shove a gag in the enemy's mouth. Make him pay for everything.

Would they? Would they?

And as they came one by one to his headquarters, the Trčkas, Bassevi, Michna, de Witte, his tender wife, he learned that the bitter tussle in Regensburg from which he had been excluded was not over; the princes were pushing for his expulsion from Mecklenburg, demanded compensation, a full accounting. Memmingen town lay silent, but Wallenstein rang out like a church bell. His condition was critical, blood-letting against the dreadful congestion had no effect, no one could stay more than half an hour at the bedside where his wife Isabella sat meekly, not daring to weep. He must take on the Emperor; but the monstrous thought is beyond him. The long lean Duke between his sheets and compresses was a dying beast, he tried to conjure Death, wanted to tear to pieces the Bavarian, the Emperor, the Jesuits, the French. Gouty pustules erupted on his thin shanks; they provided relief; his eyes swelled red and rheumy, stood out like boils in his fleshless cheeks, beside the high nose. He tossed and turned: "They have me spitted, they'll burn me like a Jew."

When the decision reached him – he was dismissed with honour from his command, a deputation would be despatched to him from the Viennese court – he sat up, half-dead as he was, dragged himself outside, was at once carried fainting back upstairs. Next day he again rose from his bed, paced about on canes, then hung on the shoulders of two guards. "Even the lecher Mansfeld did not die abed. And I'm not dead yet."

Trautmannsdorf and Questenberg arrived from the court at Regensburg. They had accepted this mission to calm his rage; they brought gracious letters from Ferdinand. The conversation was amicable: he presented Trautmannsdorf with two teams of coach horses, each of six, and Questenberg a Neapolitan destrier. Friedland saw, and was meant to see, that there were men of his party at court. They were the losers; distress showed in their faces.

And now the Duke emerged from the dreadful assault they had ventured against him, and shook himself. They were stupid, they had let him live, had plucked not a feather from him.

For many weeks he never ventured out of Memmingen. Deliveries continued from the Empire of all that was his due, onerous contributions squeezed from every region. Daily he conferred with Michna and de Witte, the tabulations were exact, he needled them: let nothing go astray. They must stand by him, not abandon him before receiving full satisfaction. They pressed him; he kept them close. Michna and de Witte began to suspect the Duke would not go easily, would attempt some unimaginable stroke. Bassevi remarked sceptically that Friedland was ill, one or two months more and he'll be happy to have brought in his harvest. When Count Trčka expressed pleasure at the delay in acknowledging the dismissal – a salutary shock for the Emperor! – it gave Friedland pause for a moment's dark thought: A salutary shock for the Bavarian; he has not yet dared send his troops home. His militia can't bring in the harvest; a hungry year for Bavaria. But he suppressed inflammatory talk, had no patience for childish games. It'll soon be time. He'll go off to Prague. Let the Bavarian take over the army, or old Tilly. Wallenstein stood, glared angry and menacing: He leaves behind a superb army; now let them wage a merry war; perhaps the Jesuits will bring peace down from Heaven.

Autumn had already come before he wrote to the court. He hands the business over to Count Tilly, will remove himself to Prague.

He departed from Memmingen through an army loud with dismay. Mile after mile of famed regiments with their colours and formation drills and guards of honour. The Duke sat sombre in a red cloak; now and then raised his hat to a colonel who rode up, waved to one or another, offered his hand. On and on in icy satisfaction: he had brought these regiments together, in other hands they will fall apart. His way led past Ulm, into open country; he was headed not home to Jičin, but to Prague. And all those riding with him were filled with a great joy: the Duke lives, means to go on living. This is no funeral march.

Past Nuremberg; four hundred men of his lifeguard, endless wagons and horses. So great was the consternation in the town at news of his dismissal and his approach that the Grand Council hastily convened and gathered presents which they despatched to meet him at the Ansbach Gate, a decision that later caused them to scratch their heads. By the time Friedland entered Bayreuth territory, the events in Regensburg were common knowledge; deep disquiet and fear had spread far and wide.

Only a few thousand people witnessed the stately silent procession making its ponderous way past fields and woods, but the eyes of the entire Holy Empire were fixed on its progress. Everyone saw how a dreadful incomprehensible turn in the Empire had brought it to the point where this dragon, this Duke of Friedland, this Wallenstein, was retreating under the most public gaze back into his lair to hide away and – ghastly fate hanging over peaceful landscapes – to await his moment.

Even the tiniest hamlets squeezed out a deputation to plead for protection; they sprinkled his road; he merely snarled at the rabble blocking the way. His bodyguard had no need to go foraging; amid a flood of furtive declarations there came ten times more provisions for man and horse than requisitions ever yielded. Among the troops, the field officers, an inclination arose to take advantage of the fear and grovelling on all sides; they were brutally reined in; Wallenstein in retreat was still as strangely prim as other influential men had found him.

It all changed as they approached the town of Eger, crossed the frontier into Bohemia. Here lay the dark ruined land from which he had emerged. He was back. World-famous, richest man in Europe, returned from Memmingen. Dismissed from office. In myth-swathed Blanik Mountain slept the knights of Wenceslas; one day, said the legend, would come the roll of drums, clash of arms, trees would catch fire, springs would become rivers, blood would flow from Strahov monastery to the Prague bridge; Wenceslas would smite his enemies every one.

The land absorbed him. The peaty Eger twisted and turned on its way to the Elbe; they traversed moorland meadows, beyond them snowy peaks of the Riesengebirge, the Giant Mountains on the Polish border. This hilly country offered a route from ridge to ridge. Peasants flocked from all around to meet him on the road, eager for a sight of him, how does he look, the man who defeated the Danish king and has been packed off home by jealous Habsburg. Oh to scoff cherries with emperors and kings! They twittered and slavered: “He’s already shaved the Emperor. Look at those silver partizans, the warhorses. Didn’t leave ’em for the Emperor, he’s not stupid.” They felt no hostility as they stood in the meadows, on the slopes, doffed hats, brought hay and straw.

On he went into the country, ploughing like a ship's keel through the helpless and half-addled, the members of conventicles, local gentry, Utraquists, the forcibly converted. Revenge, the blessed unsuspected providence of Fate. The traitor shaken loose from his overlord, adrift, without kin. Should we let him go hungry; shall we let him come on. Passionate groaning at encounters, jubilation that swirled, squeaked contentment: Wallenstein has to stick to our part, or perish as a private citizen!

Little Mother Prague watched silent from the Hradschin, asked no questions as the swarming procession drew near.

Moldau flowing beneath the grey bridge. Ferdinand alighted at his palace of oriental opulence. He tucked himself away. Fleet messengers sped to Saxony, Brandenburg. When Italian artists asked when they might finish the paintings in the drawing rooms, the response from the palace spread rapidly from mouth to mouth: "Those gentlemen must wait until I've left. Do they think this palace will be my coffin?"

Brooding humility in the presence of the prodigal son, lost and now returned. Jews and advisers creeping in and out. Weeks punctuated like drumbeats by sumptuous banquets, then the chilly reception of relatives, words as if nothing had happened, a letter from Eggenberg, one from the Emperor; doctors.

Who was it, sitting there in the unfinished palace?

35. The Emperor Takes Charge

CARDINAL ROCCI was borne through the Saturday quiet to the Bavarian's lodging; the Prince-elector was not yet returned from the chase. In the antechamber the little cardinal chatted with every visitor about this latest grand victory achieved by the holy Church; he lowered himself somewhat by clapping every official and chamberlain on the shoulder, and laughing out loud as he sat by himself: "They're in retreat, Wallenstein and Spain. Soon all Lombardy will be cleared and cleansed."

Strident purple-robed Maximilian made haste to greet the new situation. It was for a moment as if lightning flashed before his eyes. He sat with Rocci, damply pale from the hunt and the excitement, big drops of sweat about the pursed mouth, smiled and nodded inanely at the Italian's prattle. When the cardinal left, he sat, hands open on his knees, brow furrowed, bile in his throat. Richel entered with a jaunty step; Maximilian's soft clear voice sounded cold: "Did you expect any other outcome?"

"I am glad His Roman Majesty has given way."

"He has always given way, Richel, whenever faced with a demand. It was no decision of his. My cousin never decides. He dismissed Friedland because he was forced to, and will fetch him back when he is forced to."

"The Duke was not minded to stay with us."

The prince standing, his voice firm: "An instructive development. I must understand it well. Better and more inexorably than last time. He has understood the situation. We shall make sure he continues to feel its effects. We had to exert ourselves to the utmost to bring this

about. I shall no longer play games with him." He slipped past Richel, sat down again, pointed an index finger: "I shall in future tolerate no charade of amity. The Emperor owes me – owes all of us – an accounting. How dare he try to impose tyranny on us. It's not enough for him to declare now that he refrains from doing so. Just because the attempt failed. I demand rdress." He faced his counsellor with eyes strangely ablaze: "To break a treaty, and expect thanks when he's ready to keep to it again." Maximilian stepped quickly to the door, rattled the handle, checked that the windows were closed; hissed: "We do not accept this. As if we are cattle, waiting to be fed. Who are we. I, a German Prince-elector, have been toyed with maliciously."

"And what demands does your Electoral Serenity intend to make of the Emperor?"

"I shall pile them one on the other. The mountain will soon reach to Heaven." Faced with his master's painful agitation, Richel kept his gaze on the carpet, fiddled with his sword.

After a while he said calmly, as the prince stretched in his chair: "Perhaps it will be necessary to take preventive measures, to protect ourselves from future difficulties."

"You will inform their Viennese lordships that I cannot declare myself content with the decision. You will show not a trace of pleasure, and will make this known as well to chamberlains and others. We have no reason to be pleased. We demand the defence of the Empire and our Electoral liberties from encroachments such as those that have lately occurred. The army is now without a head. We demand the immediate transfer of the command to us."

Richel's eyes widened; Maximilian continued sharply: "What do you say? They won't laugh, I'm sure. I did not laugh when Friedland was made General. We'll wipe the laugh from their faces. There will be no peace in the Empire until the Electoral princes command the army. I shall square it with the archbishops. There will be no peace until the Emperor is driven back into his ancestral lands."

"The army in the Empire will be directed by the Emperor and the College of Electors."

"It will be directed by me. I shall insist on it. The Protestants have disqualified themselves."

"It will not be easy to conceal the power play behind this."

"They did not conceal the power play against me."

When the Catholic princes met in the quarters of the archbishop of Mainz, the Bavarian was isolated. Their Serenities were drunk with victory, overcome with joy. They had made sure before their discussion to admit the Marquis de Brulart and Father Joseph through a back door, and receive their congratulations. The French pretended great embarrassment when the archbishop of Trier, to whom they paid a pension, and the very needy Ferdinand of Cologne placed at their feet all credit for the incredible outcome. The Emperor, explained the two Rhenish princes in their broken French, knows what great Catholic power stands behind the League. Trier, in particular, seemed to think King Louis was his own special confederate.

Maximilian, ignoring warning gestures from his friends, in the presence of the haughty Gauls steered the discussion to the imperial army. The Frenchmen listened astonished to the Bavarian plan. They felt the blow, thought it best to leave. The princes wriggled, impaled on Maximilian's proposal to transfer the command to him as head of the League. They snapped and coiled. Glumly they saw that they would agree. And before they had even thought it, they

had agreed; they would sign the petition. Let the Bavarian fight it out by himself. And then they let fly with their anger, it pelted down on Maximilian, before whom they sought to conceal their impotence. They wanted vengeance, compensation.

Ponderous pop-eyed Philipp Christoph of Trier sat stretched with legs splayed across two chairs, hardly lifting his eyelids, and from his throat it oozed: Two hundred thousand talers the Bohemian threw away on kitchen and cellar, and still he's thin as a rake. Halberstadt had to provide for his board a weekly stipend of seven thousand guilders. He sighed: "Poor devil!"

The hard grey manikin under the violet skullcap – Mainz, Chancellor of the Empire – yapped through wide thin pitiless lips: In many localities people were actually eating one another. Even he had been forced to intervene in such matters, and employ violent means to secure necessaries for his board and his kitchen, and exact donations for Rome.

Leaning forward, half-dead Ferdinand of Cologne nervously rubbed his thin red nose; his brother Max was keeping such a long silence; then he could not hold back, lisped and gesticulated: Giving him an honourable discharge – it's a fraud on every prince of the realm. At which all three hummed and ha'ed and stiffened their backs, and their anger was directed entirely at the plump stocky Bavarian sitting beside them. Who suggested that none here should meddle in the business. They must leave it all to him. For by dismissing Wallenstein with honour the Emperor had rendered his decision more palatable; he understood that Ferdinand had not wanted to send the man away. At least Ferdinand had treated him as a prince. As Emperor he could do no less.

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The abbot paced with the hunchbacked count in the bishop's garden, under the windows of the Emperor's rooms. In the vigour of their conversation they had quite stripped the leaves from a little beech tree. The abbot crushed leaves in a hand held to his mouth. Count Trautmannsdorf swung his arms, waved hands before his face: So it's all to start over again; it was all in vain. "So it was, so it was," the abbot grasped the count's arm almost without thinking. "What are we here for?" they groaned, stomping.

The Emperor looked out on them. He sent down his valet de chambre: they were to await him. He came bareheaded, the servant brought riding-hat gloves and swordbelt behind. He was merry, his eye bright: They must make themselves quite at home in Regensburg; the highest mountain lies behind them now, but ahead are still all manner of difficulties that will occupy a great deal of their time. Noticing the crushed leaves in the abbot's hand, he remarked as they strolled that he knew there were waves ahead of the ship as well as astern. He nattered away until gaunt Count Stralendorf, who had just joined them, began to report on a visit from Richel. They crowded about the Emperor to see his face. He opened his little eyes, fired lively questions at the pious count, then at the other two. He shook his head, looked down at the grass with an expression of happy surprise. "What! What! He wants this? My cousin wants this? Does he really want such a close alliance between us? My cousin has cast off all mistrust of me?" When Stralendorf, stiff and embarrassed, confirmed it – the other two lowered their heads – Ferdinand proceeded more vigorously against the lanky count, prodded his chest: "What! Was Richel pulling your leg? He runs this way and that, gets the wrong end of the stick here and there." Now Stralendorf stammered in a rasping tone: No, Richel had

presented in his official capacity a sort of request, perhaps one should say a claim, for Bavaria to take up the position of General of the Army.

"A request. A claim. You know, it's almost unthinkable! It will mean Bavaria's ruin. He'll be poking a wasps' nest: colonels on huge stipends, troops and cavalry gone to seed, a monstrous horde to be fed, clothed, paid, and – all without inflicting injustices on anyone. No, tell my cousin, it's so very kind of him, but I cannot demand it of him. It wouldn't be right. Tell him!"

Stralendorf and Trautmannsdorf paced half dreaming at the Emperor's side. Almost from another world the thought came to Trautmannsdorf – he felt compelled to utter it – that Habsburg must reject this proposal, or else become powerless. With a sympathetic smile Ferdinand placed a hand at his waist and drew him close. "Is my loyal Trautmannsdorf, the jewel in my crown, really so behind the times? Are the days of enmity between Wittelsbach and Habsburg still with us? Wittelsbach has seen how powerful, how inapproachably powerful, an emperor can be. Look about you, my dear count; think less of history. For Habsburg now there is no need to fear hatred. Those days are long gone."

"I don't see it," murmured Trautmannsdorf.

"But I do," His Majesty laughed; "soon I'll place you on the throne and offer myself as your adviser." He released the count, stood deep in thought in a rose bower, arms crossed, facing the others. A young fox jumped around a beech tree on a chain. "The pope makes difficulties about my coronation. Meanwhile my dear loyal General Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland, has crowned me Emperor. Let no one argue otherwise. Why dig up old tales. – No," he broke off, "for the moment I do not entirely believe my cousin is in earnest about taking command of my army. What say you, Magnificence of Krems-minster, to my roses? If you like them, I'll have the gardener send you some. Your praise is to him like an elevation to the aristocracy."

Prince Eggenberg and the Father Confessor, when they arrived back from Göppingen, stifled the stiffening opposition of their lordships. Both were still shaken by events, and fearful that Bavaria would take advantage. When Krems-minster suggested an approach to Duke Leopold, it was already clear they faced a changed situation. Lamormaini rose pale and heavy to his feet, declared that he washed his hands of it, said bluntly that he would not conspire or undertake anything against the Emperor. Eggenberg could see in his face that he was still dazzled by the latest developments. Lamormaini revealed with clarity what to them was only an obscure sense: a new puzzling source of imperial power had emerged among them. None knew if this new power could be trusted.

Then, in the presence of the solemn sad figure of the Father Confessor, they calmed down. The Emperor, the new Emperor, was taking charge. Slowly they revised their estimation of him; slowly Trautmannsdorf recalled what the Emperor had said: these are new times. And they suppressed all doubt when Trautmannsdorf, the boldest most flexible of them all, asked hesitantly: "And what if it is really so, that he sees matters correctly and knows a way out of the German quarrel?"

They were touched, regretted having contemplated a coup. They had come together fervent and shaken, they parted pensive. "What times these are," the crooked count whispered to the abbot in astonishment as they strolled past the silent palace and the Father Confessor

took himself off to the Emperor. “I thought myself still young, and am already worn out, I hardly understand what’s what.”

“Ah,” sighed Krems-minster, “it is an age of experiments. If only we still had the Duke.”

“Think on it, oh think on it, the Emperor means to make peace in the Empire, he sheaths the sword, and thereby disarms Wittelsbach. What a notion!”

“Pray God and all the saints that nothing come against us.”

“Just think, it looked like a menacing struggle between Emperor and princes, Bavaria and Friedland at daggers drawn, and now – now the Emperor has embraced victory with not a shot fired. Never once admitted Wittelsbach to his presence, and already the man is defeated. Without Friedland! Think on it, my noble friends.”

“Fantasies, my dear count. The Emperor thinks so, and you think so.”

“Who knows the workings of fate. Why should new methods not be tried for once. Our holy Church, don’t be cross with me, looms powerfully in the background. Urban is said to have a great deal of artillery in his head. And the Emperor’s concern is for his heart.”

“You may be right.”

“No, not just his heart, our hearts. It could be so, at least in the imagination. And with a tiny little antlike effort of imagination, the Emperor has lifted away all our enormous difficulties. Bah, there go the cannon, bah, the generals have no idea what’s going on.”

“Fantasies.”

“The one and only Holy Roman Empire.”

“Ah, now we can laugh about it. I’d like to peek inside Friedland’s head, and the Bavarian’s.”

So proud and determined was Maximilian that a few days later he came in person to the bishop’s palace to request an audience, and press the Emperor to resolve the uncertainty over the army. Ferdinand had met again with his advisers; strangely, all objections were silenced, none of the half-embarrassed council knew what to say to the appointment of the League general Tilly as imperial field-marshal. Indeed they had marvelled, taking a lead from Trautmannsdorf, at the slickness of this simple solution, and how it might prosper.

Ferdinand came gently to the door to greet the sad-eyed Bavarian: “What, dear cousin? You are determined to sacrifice yourself like this? You mean to establish peace in the Empire? You know, this notion of yours accords so well with my deliberations and inward decisions that I am positively startled. Indeed, what better conclusion or culmination to this Convention could there be, than to have you or your general take over my army. Every quarrel falls away. Your military prowess is beyond question. And, no –” he stroked the Bavarian’s sleeve and gave a hearty laugh.

Maximilian, glowering as he listened, asked why he laughed. Ferdinand stepped with him into the room: The Bavarian would one day have to wash away all sins, and in a year or two, at another convention in Regensburg, roles would be reversed. The Bavarian, fixing Eggenberg and Trautmannsdorf with an uncertain eye, insisted; he would ascertain through his intermediaries what really lay behind the Emperor’s explanations. He could not trust his senses, forced himself not to say more, in order to hear with what disconcerting levity the

Emperor spoke. And the grave counsellors too were against it! He was dashed to the floor; the Emperor's chatter washed over him.

Then he sat in his carriage, almost ready to break out in nervous sobs. He had an obscure sense of defeat. Like a man who takes a run to shift a heavy load and the rope breaks and he pulls empty air. Unfathomable, the Emperor's behaviour, what was it, what was it. The sluggish insolent pride of that man, his arrogant cloying love. All Maximilian's deepest certainties were loosened, as when a handful of beans are cast onto granite ground, and as they swell they break apart the stone.

Maximilian blew air. Dining with Richel and the Prince of Hohenzollern in his lodging, he numbed himself with ringing declarations. Cries of triumph all around. Couriers arriving from Brulart, couriers sent to the clerical Electors. These appeared next morning. Bleary Maximilian enjoyed their anxiety, which they dared not express, their deceitful flattery and joy. He felt thrown out of his path, a situation like the time he tried to form an alliance with Wallenstein. Wallenstein, miserable overrated man, scoundrel and knave who let his master send him packing and left without a grumble, no doubt happy with the ton of gold he was allowed to carry off. The triumph rolled hot over the Electors. Ferdinand had won the game of princes.

The French were announced. Maximilian dealt with them haughtily; suddenly he hated them because they reminded him of his fear. Away with them! Did they mean to squash and squeeze and suppress him, turning up so early without notice, like Jews collecting debts. Debts! The Prince of Hohenzollern, who was present at the astonishing scene, did not doubt that his master spoke from an attack of melancholy, causing the insulted messieurs to make an unmannerly exit. But then Maximilian, not yet done, berated him, the Hohenzollern, with wild scornful passionate words: Ha, there is no need to go on exchanging soft courteous phrases with these gentlemen. They should be thrown off German soil, or dumped in the Danube, because he can see through them, those envious, those quarrelsome rogues. Let them not poke their fingers into the Empire.

The court was again drowned in bacchanalian and culinary excess. After long abstention, His Majesty gave himself once more to dissipation. It was said that his morning began with Bordeaux, the evening faded with liqueurs; in between, it was not water that flowed. Much pomp at table with the clerics. With the lady from Mantua, newly returned. With Gauls Spaniards Italians. You could believe all Regensburg emerging from its little dwellings, the Emperor giving Friedland's corpse a fine send-off. It was said that Ferdinand had wanted peace at any price; the Empress had importuned him; whatever Lamormaini was up to would soon be revealed. And then Maximilian made his move. He followed a well-known scent: Ferdinand the bold drunkard and glutton! This was the fat wild boar he had chased his whole life long. Such silent breathless laughter in him.

The Emperor had drawn the princes to him as if thirsting. He could not have enough of them, collectively or one by one. Nor of the Gauls, the Spanish, Italians. And they came. The rift in Regensburg had been averted. He pressed most strongly for Maximilian's company, and along came Maximilian, jovial, alert, inwardly roaring with laughter. He knew that all this pomp was the extorted wealth of Germany's Estates; it caused him pleasure – hot, seething with mockery – to see how the Emperor held out all this pomp to them as if they knew

nothing, were as unsuspecting and blithe as anyone. Ferdinand, still Emperor because no one seriously meant him ill. Who had sacrificed his field-marshal, really, for no other reason than that he wanted to be at peace with them all, and – to keep on guzzling.

And the same thought arose in another silent participant at the feasting – Lamormaini, like Maximilian watching closely over the Emperor's manner, feeling for a sense of him; worshipping the Emperor, tormenting himself in his presence. He was pulled along by the general astonishment at the transformed sovereign.

Such twitching questioning lurking listening at court. Master-chef fetched from Vienna, along with his retinue of pastry-cooks, sugar-bakers, builders of giant cakes, horde of wine-stewards carvers cup-bearers footmen. Here comes the Chief Steward with his black staff, entering to music ahead of steam-swathed footmen bearing dishes. On the table, placed before human teeth ready to tear, are dead creatures of the forest that not long ago went singing flying dancing: grouse swan peacock white egret crane red pheasant. Sugarbread marzipan aspic. Among the overflowing delicacies are white pyramids, the four elements placed around them; Fortune with her golden locks purple gown on a globe rolling beneath pointed toes. A melange of nations around the table, happy mouths, frowning brows; the German is banishing sorrow, the Spaniard deplores sorrow, the Frenchman serenades sorrow. Music: who knows anything of sorrow or joy. Fireworks ballet pig-sticking hunting breakfast.

Appalled Lamormaini, squatting blackly behind the swollen elated Emperor: he has thrown away the Duke as if he were nothing. He has saved his kingdom. Now he has forgotten all about it. Has already forgotten Friedland. The priest was filled with a sense of dread. Prince Eggenberg like a child, gazing at Habsburg among the feasting lords and princes; he shrugged: "Good for us, we're over the mountain." Counsellors Trautmannsdorf and Krems-minster quitting Regensburg unremarked, away from the terrifying spectacle of their master.

At the Emperor's side in a carriage, on horseback, the lady from Mantua. Black high brows like sickles, burning gaze, taut glossy cheeks. Prancing about her on white horses were comely Frenchmen, right hand perched at the waist, huge golden scarves. At the first formal reception of the princes at the bishop's palace, she stepped alongside of the Capuchin Joseph on pointed feet in little white shoes, yellow skirt bunched forward in both hands so that the purple under-skirt shimmered; she bared her white socks to above the ankle. Golden yellow costume cut away to the shoulders, five rows of pearls at the throat; dainty supple symmetrical breasts, arms swathed in wide white atlas-silk. Her hair fell in curls to the sides down about her throat, a sunflower big as a plate sprouted heavily from the nape of her neck. Severe victorious mouth.

The Emperor indulged her by starting peace talks in Italy. It was not enough: Casale is about to fall, there must be an immediate armistice. The old Spanish warhorse Spinola hurled curses at the world when he heard it, three days later lost his wits and was soon dead, the siege at Casale unfinished. The Empress shook with joy. As she said to her chamberlain, and wrote to Father Joseph: "Inform Collalto that in besieging Mantua he besieges my soul. I shall secure for him chains of gold, lands, and every distinction if he will restore freedom to me and my town. Let him come to Vienna; he should take no time for deliberation; we await him."

Negotiations proceeded in a desultory fashion in the heat of summer; the Electors requested that the Convention be dissolved. Harvests were brought home. Tilly, ice-grey pious

man from Brabant, was marshal of both armies. The imperial army shrank, as did that of the League. Peace in the Empire, and soon peace along every frontier.

Wide carriages stood outside the princely quarters. High wheels, trunks sagging low, crowns on panels and roof. The roar of banquets still filled the town. Ponderous Trier dragged himself sighing up the step, looked wearily about, dozed off. Parchment-faced arch-chancellor Mainz grunted cosily; off went the carriage. Reluctant greedy Cologne, held by the jangle and gleeful clamour of the town. Maximilian with a firm long stride, Richel beside him, door closed, curtains drawn; on a par with France, imperial power within his grasp.

Regensburg held the French longer. They could not tear free from the incredible sight of this German monster. The imperious mask of the Emperor, the glutton, loomed daily over them; they swore to his face that they would support no enemy of the Empire.

His eyes were like those of a squinter: you never knew if he was looking at you.

END OF BOOK FOUR

Book Five
Sweden

36. "I Come to Defend You"

ACROSS THE FURROWS of the greygreen Baltic Sea they came sailing, the mighty wind-blown ships of the Swede, cogs galleons corvettes.* The carved bellies and breasts had entered the cold waters at Calmar by Öland, at Westervik, Norrköping, Söderköping, came sailing south. Bright long pennants flapped from lines and spars. To the fore the flagship *Mercury* with thirty-two guns, then *Westerwik* with twenty-six, *Pelican* and *Apollo* with twenty, *Andromeda* with eighteen; thirteen on *Rainbow*, twelve on *Stork* and *Dolphin*, ten on *Parrot*, eight on *Black Dog*.* Wind laboured in rigging, tautened sails, the broad-beamed vessels reared, leaped ahead, glided like water over water. Then under the press of air they bent low, cut tore jagged spraying ruts of foam into the smooth fluid surface, came prancing up again. On deck the myriad men, myriad horses. Sea sinking away beneath them. The fleet came speeding from Elfsnabben, the wide gathering ground, towards a foreign land. There lies the low coast of Germany. Rolling pitching wallowing like primal monsters, the breast-heaving swollen ships dipped, rose spar-groaning from sluicing water. Crowds of flat-bottomed boats, cutters brigs schooners, came from the shore, a white strand appeared. Light signals flashed in triumph from the dripping painted galleons and cogs. Horde after horde poured onto the silent deserted beach; foreign shouts. Menacing salvos roared from poop decks over the land.

Men from Svealand, Gotland, from Söderhamm Örebro Falun Eskilstima, fishermen sailors miners farmers smiths, little sturdy-legged men from Finnish lakes who still had bears and foxes to contend with, they knew their weapons, swarmed clad in iron and steel, led horses wagons cannon across the undefended island. Behind them little black-haired men, agile Lapps with horses, bows and arrows. They carried fascines and baskets, hauled bread and beer.

They ran at the castle of Wolgast, overcame it in a trice. The Oder flowed wide and calm into the Baltic; on its bank Stettin, city of Bogislav, duke of Pomerania. Year after year he had endured the extortions and oppressions of Friedland's troops, had made approaches to the Electoral princes and the Emperor in Regensburg. He stood white-haired on the ramparts with a small detachment of guards, shivered despite the warmth in his silver-threaded coat. For three hours a Swedish captain in blue doublet and heavy swordbelt negotiated with him in the sunshine. Meanwhile the twenty-eight warships drew closer, *Mercury* with thirty-two guns, *Westerwik* with twenty-six, *Apollo, Pelican* with twenty, *Andromeda* with eighteen; *Rainbow* with thirteen, *Stork*, *Dolphin* with twelve, *Parrot* with ten, *Black Dog* with eight. Behind and among them the huge transport vessels.

The Duke, raising his hat, retreated for a few minutes into the tent that had been erected for him and spoke with his colonel Danitz, who swore to defend Pomerania's neutrality with the arms of its citizens. Bogislav, tears in his eyes, shook him by the hand; it was all too much, first the imperials, now Sweden. Blew his nose, went out broken to meet the haughty waiting negotiators. Their conversation over, the warships withdrew somewhat to give way to the transports; hundreds and hundreds of Swedes mounted the ramparts; the Duke stood stock still by his tent, was ignored. Stettin admitted four thousand men; civic flags fluttered anxiously.

Five days later the Duke sat at a table in his palace at Stettin with blond Gustavus Adolphus in person, who told the listless man they had common interests that must be formalised in writing; the Roman Emperor was the enemy of both. “He is my Emperor,” said Bogislav, “to whom, as a prince of the Empire, I owe fealty.” So they agreed, after Gustavus had smiled a sympathetic smile and the duke had meekly signed: he would ally himself with Sweden in common defence against despoilers of the land “without prejudice to his Imperial Majesty” – this tender addition by the Duke himself. The Pomeranian Estates made their way to the palace; the Duke spoke eloquently of their dire condition, sought to divert their anger onto the Emperor. After conferring with the Duke they found themselves ready to pay the two hundred thousand thalers suggested by Sweden, and granted a three percent harbour duty.

When the Swedes rode and marched out of the melancholy city, leaving a garrison behind, they entered an empty landscape. The few peasants ran astonished around the strange strong horde, Lapps with their bows; heard through interpreters that these men had all crossed the Baltic to defend them in their religion and against the oppressions of the imperials. They passed news of the encroaching human wave, hid horses and provisions in safe secluded places. The foreigners spread out through western Pomerania, ten thousand infantry, two thousand five hundred cavalry, all quite unmolested; crossed the Mecklenburg frontier at Damgarten. How it ran through the soul of the Swede and his entourage: this the territory of the giant from Bohemia, it lies undefended before us.

Here too the word ran swelling from the king’s mouth, drummers carried it to villages: He is the King of Sweden, adheres to the Lutheran creed, has come with his men across the sea having heard of his co-religionists’ distress. He has dared to venture boldly into the lion’s den, even if the beast should spring at him. But to his astonishment they have fallen away from the only creed that brings salvation, and entered the service of wicked Wallenstein. They should take heed. If they fail to follow his call, if they care more for goods and chattels than for salvation, he will pursue and punish them with fire and sword as perjurers, traitors, renegades, yeah as bitter enemies and despisers of God, as adherents of the Emperor.

Sickly grins at these harsh words from the invaders. Silence and grins spread like a miasma around the marching army, until they came upon Savelli, imperial field-marshal, before whose grimly waiting masses they flinched growling hissing back across the frontier at Ribnitz into exhausted Pomerania. The splendid warships, wide transport vessels bobbed on the Oder as far as Dievenow, but the weeks were slipping by. The foreigners idled on Pomeranian soil, their strapping king strode with his limping secretary Lars Grubbe through the camps, addressed them outwardly at ease, feigned a laugh when they shouted after him “Thickhead, potbelly”; responded in the same vulgar tone. They were informal: “Monsieur king, since you are so powerful, find us some shoes.” He pulled his high boots off right there in the camp, went barefoot, they flourished the boots on sticks and flung them after him: “Pay us our wages!” They must make short work of it, can’t waste away in Pomerania. Swedish cavalry were on the way from Prussia, they awaited them as the winter advanced.

Then the Swedes gathered like a boil about to burst from Stettin and Pomerania, from ships and from the islands, outside Damm they sat a few weeks glaring at imperial troops wasting away at Greifenhagen* under General Schauenburg, successor to the late Torquato

Conti who had reduced this land to misery. At five o'clock on Christmas morning cannon began to roar; iron balls, grapeshot, grenades hurtled onto grave-strewn suburbs, onto wretched hovels outside the walls where desperate mercenaries had taken refuge, streaked over walls and churches, shattered crashing against the barred town gates. These were opened to the south, and before any breach was made pitiable mercenaries poured across the bridge to flee for their lives towards Frankfurt on the Oder, threshing through the freezing current, trudging with woeful cries through snow, many not looking back until the cannon fell silent behind them.

Blown to smithereens, the famed regiments of Sparr Wallenstein Götz Altsachsen. In the town wall a breach big enough for twenty carts to pass through. The Swedes rushed in, snorting cavalry leaped over corpses on dungheaps, away over the houses, over the inhabitants on whose bodies and possessions they sated themselves until bugles blew. Cries groans jubilation resounding to heaven on the birthday of the holy Christ-child.

The invading fury raged all day long. The Germans had withdrawn from the whole of Pomerania. Like a dancer on tiptoe who leans forward as if about to fall only to dash free in a wild whirl, the men of Gotland remained a week in Garz and Greifenhagen and then were drawn out onto Pomeranian ground, that wide level threshing-floor. And in one swoop down into Brandenburg. The apathetic Prince-elector Georg Wilhelm implored: Nothing left in my realm but sand and beetles. Gustavus aimed his cannon at Berlin. He had the feeble castellan brought out to him in a coach, thanked him for at last making up his mind, and he'll have the opportunity to take part in the struggle for the evangelical cause for a monthly contribution of only thirty thousand thalers.

The king's heart was lifted up.* He made his HQ at Bärwalde. His face gained colour. He sought allies.

In the palace at Uppsala he had spoken two years before to eight men: "The burden has been placed upon us: we either await the Emperor here in Calmar, or meet him over there in Stralsund. Now my last and highest goal must be a new head for evangelical Christendom, and beneath that a new constitution for the Protestant Estates; war is the means. Catholicism must be defeated, otherwise Protestantism cannot prevail. No compromise or third way is possible."

So much in men and capital had he taken from his kingdom that in East and West Gotland and Svealand now they ate acorns and bark from trees; he had imposed a monopoly over grain sales, over copper and salt; had debased the currency. His cock's crow from Bärwalde – "The King of Sweden is here" – lured a debt-ridden wastrel of a German prince, the Baron of Hessen-Kassel. He swore as he bowed splay-legged and craven before the glowering king that his lawsuits had been ruined and lost through the partisan prejudice of the Court Chamber; a Protestant no longer had rights in the Empire. The king, perceiving the braggart's dissembling, promised with tears in his eyes, his voice trembling with indignation, to take the petitioner under his wing for the glory of God and defence of innocent oppressed Christians. Before they parted the baron, with a drivelling paean to the invader's chivalry, accepted a down payment from Sweden with a promise to rouse the inhabitants of Hesse to rebel against the Emperor. The affable foreigner countered by holding out the near prospect of the prince-bishopric of Paderborn, Höxter, Eichsfeld, Hersfeld. The baron departed drunk.

On his way home he stumbled unexpectedly on a nervous special delegation from the ancient city of Magdeburg. He led it in triumph to the quarters of the ponderous pious Swede, lapped up the words of praise that came from the king, before slinking homeward.

The baron's deceitful encomium to the Messiah from the North had heartened the Magdeburg delegation; they licked their lips as they came into the presence of the king, who was still railing against the injustices suffered by Hesse. The five of them stood side by side. And only now, as they heard the low incomprehensible spluttering words of the gatekeeper, the chamberlain who led them in, did a chill sense of embarrassment crawl over them. They lost their powers of exposition, and all they could manage in response to the sly mighty figure gazing down at them from his seat were trite commonplace phrases. Only one of them, a young have-not, succeeded in overcoming his discomfort; he began to curse that League, that Friedland as was and all his pack, and agreed when the king asked unctuously about the Roman Emperor: He is but a big greedy mouth, and the sinful Restitution Edict a carving-board on which he arranges his roasts.

Gustavus, reddening, found these words apposite, again cried the injustice done to Hesse, and ten minutes later the five men stood there swollen-headed, engaged in ever more heated exchanges defaming the Roman Emperor, that blind dog, scandalous papists betraying the people, gesticulated, dripped satisfaction, urged one another on, and the stirred-up ponderous creature from Sweden, the foreign king, matched their mood, swore avidly to kick the Emperor out like a dog, by the nose, the flanks, tear his belly open, break his jaws for all the insults he has heaped on the evangelical brotherhood. Their boiling rapture subsided in steam; they spat; the king glowed content. He thanked them. They would hold together. He sent a clever young man to accompany them, one with an irresistible gift of the gab, Stalmann, who was to inflame the ancient city of Magdeburg with the prospect of imminent liberation. The five, rewarded like kings, set off with him.

That evening Gustavus Adolphus sat with pale limping Grubbe and bald big-skulled Oxenstierna,* his chancellor, huffing and frothing. His work was prospering. He had not wanted to let the Magdeburg delegation go. Laughed, growled: how good of the Emperor to maltreat them so, we'll forge a great diversion at Magdeburg, half the imperial army will be tied down there, meanwhile we'll throw ourselves at Frankfurt. Even Oxenstierna had full confidence in Magdeburg's Protestant steadfastness, sighed admiration for Stalmann.

At this time another visitor slipped into the king's quarters in Bärwalde, one he had long expected: the popeyed red-cheeked refugee from Bavaria, Charnacé. The Frenchmen flung his arms around the king with a jubilant cry: At last the hour has come when I can stand together with another foreigner on the soil of cursed spiteful thuggish Germany. Yes, here we are in the German Empire. The Emperor's man has fled the scene and I am so happy, so happy. And he swayed his hips, opened his arms in humble devotion to the king.

Gustavus angrily: "I have not come like a mouse to this barn to nibble foreign grain, but to bring order, and to help distressed fellow religionists."

"Habsburg's cruelty is boundless, his starving troops are murderers and killers. We shall help to rid the Empire of this plague. Depend on us."

"You are Catholic. Ha! I do not like Catholics."

"We love you, Your Majesty of Sweden. I can only rejoice in your presence, look at me. What does it matter now if we are Catholic or Protestant. You are planted in Pomerania, we tramp unresisted over German soil. We breathe her air. If you have buglers and drummers, let them blare and beat in the Swedish manner. I shall fetch Frenchmen to blare so that everyone hears: foreigners are in the Holy Roman Empire; the Habsburger sits in Vienna; let him come and chase us out."

Gustavus astonished: "Such bottomless hatred, monsieur."

Now the haggling began. The Frenchman had not troops, but money. He initiated the negotiations with a sly grinning reference to the Regensburg treaty in which France had undertaken not to support any foe of the Emperor. Yet he was doing so. "But," he laughed like an idiot, "in secret!" When he mentioned a hundred thousand imperial thalers, the king cried: "Not enough!" Two hundred thousand: "Not enough!" Gustavus Adolphus and big-skulled Oxenstierna drove the Frenchman higher and higher, swore that he would not sell his soul so cheap to procure himself a papist, they needed more. The Frenchman arrived at four hundred thousand; this satisfied the Swede. So much, he laughed in glee, should the French contribute to him every year, so that he can make an end of the idolaters and perhaps too of him, the tender Frenchman. He meant to keep thirty thousand infantry at the ready, and six thousand cavalry as well. They parted loud with joy, and with scorn in their hearts.

And just as the Hessian baron had brought Magdeburg along, the Gaul enticed the Hollanders to follow him. Charnacé almost misspoke as he whispered with the Dutch deputation: "He's a fool," he meant to say, "you must treat him with care, he is hardened in his evangelical madness, do not annoy him." Then he remembered that these were Protestants, and rocked smugly on his heels: The potbelly was so proud to have pushed him up to four hundred thousand, when he had five hundred, nay a million available. Let them take heed. They thanked him glumly, were too mistrustful to include him in their negotiations; their lordships – the *Hoogmogende Heren* – at The Hague handed over as much as they could to the Swede, because he was their co-religionist.

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The Swedes had sucked the teat of victory at Greifenhagen, boots bread beer coin streamed to them; they had no desire to linger, pushed on past New Brandenburg, Klempenau, Treptow to Demmin on the frontier with Mecklenburg, nestled among marshes. The Roman Duke Savelli,* who had quit the pope's service, lay guzzling here – often he took a horse from the peasant's plough to sell the hide to the knacker. Surrendered after three days. The merry Swede in his tent told the Italian: How unfortunate that he quit his wonderful post in Rome. Then, after several regiments has drilled themselves with bugle-blasts into a tidy formation, the elegant duke with his gold chains, long sable cloak, plumed hat drooping splendidly down over his face, was hitched to a plough. A peasant they had seized was made to bridle him. Soldiers drummed, hounds leaped about the groaning duke, a horsehide complete with hooves and tail was flung from behind over his finery; he collapsed.The king stood, lads swung whips: "May the hide have mercy on him! Plough! Plough!"

As rumours spread of the seaborne mercenary chief's benevolence, along the Brandenburg frontier, from the region of Schwedt along the Oder, the uncompleted Finow Canal, came throngs of peasants waving banners, seeking the king. They found him with his jubilant army near Anklam during a snowstorm. He was about to head south, to Electoral Brandenburg. Gustavus gazed smiling down from his huge warhorse at the ten old men who stood meekly before him with three brightly painted banners, thought he was welcoming a Protestant delegation. He was too impatient to listen, would not retire to quarters to hear them out, but set off along the bare windy highway past the trundling baggage train and the soldiers' fifes and drums. They had to keep changing places because the king couldn't understand what they were saying, interpreters ran from one to the other, snow filled their mouths.

If the foreign king is minded to take the peasant's part, as indicated at Demmin by his treatment of the despoiler Savelli, let him think of them. And they catalogued their grievances; the king's horse reared up, Gustavus exchanged angry glances with the officers alongside. With a curse he flung his riding crop to the ground. He forced himself to be calm, bent to receive the crop from a proferred hand, shouted at them: Are they really Protestants as they claim, are they deceiving him, do they not know that the Saviour died on the cross for them, but not so that they can throw away the sacred creed like a hunk of rotten meat.

They insisted: We are pious Lutheran Christians, but will perish, starve along with wives children cattle, if one more army falls upon our land; begged with upraised arms for the sake of their shared religion to be spared another martial onslaught. He raging and spitting, circling them. They could not make out what he said sputtering swollen-faced in Swedish: He had plundered his own people to defend the only true faith, defend them first of all, and here they come begging. His horse turned in circles, he would not let them move away.

"Sire, we are pious Protestant Christians, war is our ruin." Now the officers adopted the anger of their king, unable to extricate himself. They rode at the peasants, hit them on the head with the flat of their swords. Gustavus, freeing himself, pulled his horse about; the heavy mail-jangling beast, held to a slow walk, trampled two peasants; the rest flung themselves into snow. He rode away, officers in pursuit. Wailing peasants lifted up the trampled men, they stomped the banners into the mud. "He is no Protestant, no Christian." They tramped day and night wailing through villages. The jubilant Swedish army following behind.

The little ice-gray Brabanter had sped from Regensburg like one mad with joy. There he had stood a spectator before the stage of war, carping envy-riven at the play; and all at once as in a dream he, Tilly, has changed places, is centre stage. The ancient stern malcontent Marquis Tilly is directing the monstrous scene from that spot, visible to all eyes, vacated just now by Electoral princes and Estates. He would no longer be Tilly, subordinate to the nagging Bavarian Maximilian; erased now, quite vanished the legendary campaign in Hungary, the pursuit of Mansfeld, rebels eradicated without mercy, Danes devoured. Wallenstein's deeds loped like spurned mastiffs at his side; one day those deeds would turn to dross. The notion swelled in him as he rode north to join the army: he had vanquished Wallenstein; the Duke's coach-and-sixteen careened through his thoughts, long lines of baggage carts covered in red Russia-leather, his lifeguard's silver partizans. He relished it; but underneath lurked an uncanny sense of impotence which he tried fearfully to banish.

And as he pressed north, wild rumours swirled around him, grew more circumstantial: the Swedish army had overpowered the outer fortresses of the Empire as if in play, scattered Savelli's regiments. Could be true. Tilly wrestled with himself. His nights were filled with chaste sorrowful reistance against his ambition, his longing. He must show where he stood. He was deeply implicated in this struggle. The rumours swirled. He would remain a pious Christian, would not rebel, whatever happened.

And the old wretch, all a-tremble, at one moment swore to hold himself in check, and the next moment was shaking Friedland by the collar, sweated for joy; was limp and miserable.

Out there amid the blizzards it grew livelier day by day. The noise was all of war: riders, carts, cries of canteen-masters; once the Brabanter's escort had to engage with armed footpads.

Now the carriage curtains must be kept open. On the high road, on the fields: something's happened! Not just snow lying there! Shattered platoons shamelessly abandoned! Cannon outside peasant cottages, huge guns on carriages, unattended. This world; something's happened. The Swede has taken the outer bastions of the Empire, he's over by Frankfurt on the Oder. Where are Wallenstein's lot? Savelli's? Everywhere starving people, scattered bands of criminals. They want to come into the Empire where all has been eaten bare, the Swede is at their back. Duke Savelli has been violated in his living person by the Swede, slices hacked from shoulder and breast. No Wallenstein forces now by Stettin, the Swede is lodged in Mecklenburg; from Brandenburg everything is in flight.

The curtains stayed open. Fields teeming. Hordes of vagrant Walloons, musketeers, selling their weapons. They won't obey. Women – whose wives and daughters are they, cattle, goats driven along by cursed Wallensteiners. Sloshing back past him into the Empire, just when he thinks to attack them. Like sand through a gap, there's no stopping them. As if the diabolical Friedland, before he left the house, had sawn through every beam, loosened the foundations with gunpowder, broken through the walls. Tilly, filled with horror and disgust, was hurtling in his carriage into these Brandenburg regions, face to face with the appalling work of destruction wrought by that wicked monstrous man. Swedes on Usedom; Stettin taken; Schauenburg's troops chased from Greifenhagen; Demmin, Bärwalde. No sign of Savelli, Torquato Conti, Schauenburg – he had meant to hitch them to his waggon.

The carriage was halted near Brandenburg, pushed to the side by the stream of refugees. He saw: this is the end. Stood in snow, was all alone, field-marshal of the Emperor and the League. Before whom all Europe should bow down. He lay distraught at Brandenburg for several days. He went about in profound shock, the Bohemian's perfidy a bucket of cold water over him. Tried to find his feet. Found barely a single usable regiment; the old army, his army, had totally disintegrated. On every side they still sang of Friedland.

He set about his old paltry handiwork. For troops he brought in his own: three regiments from Oldenburg and East Friesia, six hundred horse. Dejected he waited for them. And when they arrived there was no food, no fodder for the horses. Almost out of his wits, he wrote. His almost nerveless fingers wrote to Bavarian Max the same kind of letter as before: approaches must be made to the Treasury for relief. They sent two hundred thousand carefully counted guilders. The machinery is working again; there are troops, see the camp, they need fodder hay bread. Nothing to be had in Mecklenburg. The reply: Wallenstein sent his Bohemian

officials into the duchy, they took everything not nailed down; there is nothing left for him. Pricked by his anger, the Brabanter regained his old dogged clarity; he would not die the butt of scorn in this frozen land. He advanced on the king with all he had, dared him to engage. The king slipped away, back to Pomerania. Tilly kept on his tail. There must be a fight, a battle.

37. Magdeburg Wedding

IN THE ANCIENT fortified city of Magdeburg, the Virgin's Town, Stalmann and the new envoy Falkenberg, Gustavus' Lord Chamberlain, polluted the air with imprecations against the Emperor, paeans to Gustavus Adolphus the saviour, as long as everything in the city that was Protestant and steadfast swore by Sweden and believed the promise: the King's coming soon.

The ruffian Count Pappenheim, whose face was one big scar and who had lain for dead under a heap of corpses at White Mountain, surrounded the city, squeezed it in his arms. It rejected occupation by the imperials. On his own the count could undertake nothing against the place, so he sent word to his master. Tilly let the Swede be. He pivoted, ambled slowly towards Magdeburg. No one should mock him. Sent the city a friendly warning:

"Foreign hostile potentates have been lured into the Empire. They appear beneath a glittering facade, as if they mean to support co-religionists who defend German freedoms and liberty. And all suchlike canting verbiage. All they seek is their own dominion; they will place the yoke of serfdom on the necks of princes lords and cities."

Within, nothing changed. He advanced to the walls with many cannon and a large force. Within seven days all redoubts outside the town had been stormed, a bridge above Magdeburg destroyed. An Old Council loyal to the Emperor urged surrender, associations and guilds were at each other's throats. Stalmann and Falkenberg toiled resolutely against sinking morale; they enticed doubting counsellors to church towers, pointed to distant fires and clouds of smoke that were supposed to mark the Swedish camp, in taverns read out concocted letters from the king, for show rented magnificent quarters for him. For their orders read: The city must tie down the imperial field-marshal, until the King has dealt with Brandenburg and has enough troops. Every day is a victory.

Stalmann, sly lanky fellow, came in good time to the unruly guilds of boatmen and fishermen that lurked rebellious within the walls, accepted payment from him. He needled them: The rich are wavering, want only to strengthen those accursed imperial regiments, they fear the Swede's righteousness. Now every day people discovered threatening letters at certain houses; assaults, murders occurred. Stalmann had the town in his hand; Falkenberg spoke with pathos in the Council: "Stick it out! Have patience!"

Splendid ancient stately city on mighty Elbe, surrounded by an overgrown grassy wall behind the moat. From the Sudenburg Gate straight through the town ran the sumptuously ornate Broad Way, ending at the tall towers of the Kröcken Gate; on either side a tangle of lanes and marketplaces. Near the Sudenburg Gate and the Düstere Pforte – the Gloomy Portal – the huge New Market, where the mighty cathedral gazed majestically down at lesser spires: St Sebastian, Peter and Paul, St Catherine, St James, St Peter, St John, St Ulrich, St Nicholas.

And when Stalmann and Falkenberg realised the king was not coming, being bogged down in Brandenburg, they decided, cut off as they were but sharing his sorrow, to help him out as far as they could. Magdeburg was nothing, its German citizens a pathetic weak-willed rabble. They should not have the satisfaction of selling themselves and the Swedish cause to battle-thirsty Tilly and thereby make it all in vain, all their King's hopes, their men, in vain would Sweden have been plundered, in vain the bark torn from trees to be devoured by good Swedish burghers and peasants.

On the riverbank, close by the churchyard of St John, lay the fishermen's bastion and the fish-wharf, with the little guildhouses. The most dangerous insolent fellow among them, unruly shaven-headed Hartmann Wilke, was bought by Stalmann; they became brothers. Stalmann coerced his own Magdeburg darling, a respectable lady, into flinging herself into Wilke's arms. Wilke relished the idea that the town could not hold out; just let the imperials in, let them destroy everything the rich have grabbed, he won't stop them; he and his guild brothers, including the savages from Thief-gibbet Lane, will help them.

At the bastion beside the Broad Gate a large quantity of gunpowder was stored in magazines. Before eight days had passed, days of growing turmoil among the citizenry, many tons of powder had vanished into the hands of the most determined most detestable creatures.

A sweet blue May day dawned. The sky softly glorious, everything spreading forth for life. Then from the New Defences by St James the snarling monster advanced out of the indistinct darkness of heady flower-scented night towards the wall, its talons and paws demolished bastions and turrets, with a leap and a bounce it crashed its bright plump body smack onto the empty early morning street where here and there shop windows were being flung open, a girl watering flowers in her front yard. Smack onto the street.

For minutes it lay still, spellbound. Then opened its mouth for the heart-stopping mind-freezing roar. So that the people knew their hour had come.

A short while later, apart from a small remnant, they would all – men women children loyalists the wavering the hearty the Old and New Councils – lie strangely motionless cadavers on the ground, in rooms cellars, with sad questioning smiling pleading despairing grimaces, in crazy unimagined positions, the soul torn from them as one pulls the head off a chicken. Dumped from carts beds wagons into the Elbe whatever did not moulder on the ground, amid the wreckage of the wharves.

When giant cuirassier Pappenheim, who on attaining manhood scorned death, clambered up ladders onto the New Defences with the regiments of Gronsfeld, Wangler, Savelli, stormed through Stück Gate into wide Linenmaker Street, the verger of St James blew Attack! on his bugle, hung out a black flag. Imperial pikemen were already dashing down the street in red campaign sashes, across the vineyard slope, through gardens: "All gained! All gained!"

Doors were burst open, the first people hacked down. The stream of imperials, fed from behind, enveloped the streets in a flood of hot lava. Five hundred citizens loyal to the Emperor, including women and children, approached from the Old Market waving red sashes. Were at once cut down by Croats and Walloons from the front the back the side, laid flat and trampled. Horses already, blades swing down. Falkenberg fled under the onslaught across the New

Market from St James to the screaming councillors and guildmasters, who, mired in their squabbles, had allowed the moat to dry out. As his page buckled on his mail vest and leg plates, Falkenberg, impatient and twitching, snatched the iron helmet from his hands, it slipped and clattered on the flagstones. Shaking his fists, Falkenberg exchanged ten low words with tall unarmed eager Stalmann before charging at the imperials with a hundred horse, Swedish warcries echoing proud and unmistakable in the Broad Way. Four times he charged, a thousand imperials fell, near the Stück Gate he crashed down from his horse under musket fire; the beast reared, dragged him by the stirrup round in circles. As his heart died he trembled with joy to see burghers on the wall speared, smoke rising on every side. For among all the heavy cavalry pikemen musketeers there flitted from the Fishermen's Wharf and the ferry landing a big unholy rabble, shouldering and clutching little sacks and bags, they blew up houses before the victors could pile in, plunged daggers into anything that barred their way, shook gunpowder out in attics, cellars. Fires, small explosions in every part of the city.

Flames flames flames flames flames.

Stalmann and Wilke pushed breathless through burghers and troops, scattered powder, don't forget the churches. Squads of dragoons bent on rapine swept clattering through the streets. "All gained! All gained!" Splintered shattered doors.

Smoke, acrid seething endless smoke. Beneath a blue sky, up into the heavens a gloomy spreading burden, in it flames flickering. The cloud collapsed, fell black back onto the city.

A hundred barrels of powder lay outside the cathedral. Wilke laid the fuse, a cavalryman thrust his sabre through his neck from behind; blood gushed from his throat and after twitching for a moment he fell on his face. Stalmann, bending over the smouldering slow-match, was knocked over by a hoof, seized by Croats and tied up to be dragged before the provost. Thrown into a house at the New Defences he sawed through the rope around his hands with a sliver of glass held between the teeth. A smouldering beam singed through the rest, burned into his flesh.

That evening Gustavus Adolphus stood chatting outside his tent with Lars Grubbe. They gazed in growing astonishment at the sombre glow in the sky. During the night Stalmann made his way to them. The king, rising by the light of a pine torch, kissed him without a word after his distraught reporting wailing cursing. And as they stood outside the tent, the ruddy glow in the sky rising ever higher, Gustavus Adolphus wept; in a rage he swore: "I hope to catch the vulture at his carrion meal and deal with him, even if it takes my very last soldier."

Fr. Wiltheim and his brethren came two days later through the smouldering Sudenberg Gate to the cathedral of St Mauricius. Whimpering stark-naked children, half-dead women clung to the high-backed seats in front of the choir, at the altar, in the nave. In his ornate thanksgiving speech he pointed to the images of the saints, the blessed Virgin, St Mauricius, and admonished them for falling away. All recited after him the Angelic Greeting: *The Lord is with thee: blessed art thou among women*. Soldiers, gold chains around the neck, beakers hams clothing in their sacks, half-naked women driven before them, roared into the open door:

"Years ago this ancient Maiden
Denied the Emperor a dance. *

Now the baseborn make her prance;
Serves her right, the ancient Maiden."

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All at once the Protestant Electoral princes and Estates in Leipzig were elated: their hour had come. The Empire was threatened by Sweden, a foreign intruder, the Emperor in danger; they would have their revenge. They came together along with their court theologians, buried their old quarrels. The Saxon preacher Hoë von Hoënegg opened the meeting with the resounding words of the Psalmist Asaph against the enemies of Israel: "God shall make them as a whirlwind, as stubble before the wind." They puffed out their cheeks; the Swede would be the chastisement for the Emperor's arrogance, the Restitution Edict, the oppressions of Friedland's marauding soldiery. They had no reason, no reason at all, to stand against the Swede. This was a war between the Emperor and Gustavus Adolphus; the hour of vengeance was at hand.

Sternly worded letters went from Leipzig to Vienna: they would be freed from the great unprecedented and utterly intolerable distresses of war, would in future consent to no contributions billeting free passage of troops. In Leipzig they tittered: how can the Emperor wage war if he is denied billets and contributions? They lifted their hands against the Catholic Electors, threatened belligerence on any pretext whatever. In Leipzig they hugged one another: Pour another cup of this hot pure wine. Brandenburg and Saxony were there with many of the Estates, so much was drunk in every salon that the Swedish envoy could not stop laughing. But the Germans sat on their benches and marvelled that they had sent such haughty letters to the Emperor. Repeated to Vienna, cheered on by Sweden: What the League has achieved they too can achieve; will admit no one, no one into their territory, will defend themselves.

And thereupon they gave themselves a bold War Constitution. Saxony began to set up an army. This brought them lots of praise from Gustavus Adolphus. On Palm Sunday the same Hoë von Hoënegg gave the sermon, loudly lauding the bold decisions of the meeting, pointing to the dreadful fate of Magdeburg, proud Protestant fortress turned to ashes by the Papist in his untameable fury. But in vain would he stretch his claws out to the Saxon and Brandenburg breast. A happy hour approached for the deeply sorrowing Church. For the Fatherland of the German Nation, loved by all, eternal peace was in prospect.

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The Emperor's field marshal made two sallies: south towards Thuringia, then into Saxony.

The first from Magdeburg towards Thuringia. Town and countryside had been nibbled bare, a burnt wasteland; Tilly needed to recoup. He fed his army up in Thuringia. Now he raised enormous contributions, saw the joy of his troops, sent complaining burghers packing. He the imperial commander. So seasoned that the hostile nickname The Arsonist bothered him not a bit; he did not reject the name, but secretly relished it because no one seemed to have noticed what a disaster had met him in Magdeburg through Swedish infamy. Not even the taking of Magdeburg had earned him a triumph. In Thuringia the Landgrave of Hessen teased him on, staged a grand burlesque of resistance.

A swollen stream, twenty-four thousand men, rolled towards Saxony, halted at the frontier.

Tilly saw a decisive moment approaching. The vain stubborn behaviour of the fat Saxon beer-king annoyed him. If the Saxon does not change, I shall tie him down. New well-fed troops came flooding up from the south. With forty thousand men he launched a conversation with the Saxon, had full authority to bring the Elector to his senses. He asked: What did it mean, that sermon in Leipzig on Palm Sunday, who was the stubble, who the whirlwind.

The Prince-elector stuttered: He should be addressed with respect, he is an Electoral prince of the Holy Roman Empire.

Who, asked Tilly the Imperial Field-marshal in response, is the stubble, and who the whirlwind. When the Electoral prince of the Empire sits there and speaks, does not the Field-marshal of the Roman Empire have the right to say a little word.

Say it! Say it! I am a gentle father to my people, wish to protect my people from the pressures and torments of war; do not hold it against me.

Your land is imperial territory, we must come in.

Pray let it not come to that; one has one's army, perhaps you've heard of it, at the ready for our defence.

To me the soldiers! They are the Emperor's, the Prince has no right to troops.

Johann Georg pulled socks over his feet, toddled off to the palace at Torgau. Complained and whinged all the way: he the most loyal of imperial princes, and they treat him like this; what is it to him how the Emperor deals with the Swede, he certainly won't interfere. And this thought so stirred him that he hastened back to Tilly at the frontier to tell him of it. As if a light suddenly shone he explained to the Field-marshal: Our entire discussion was topsy-turvy; we talked past one another; for what does the matter revolve around? For sure not the Emperor and me, a humble Saxon. Rather the Emperor and the Swede. The Swede. Hello, grand mighty Imperial dealings between His Roman Majesty and His Swedish Highness.

And?

And? Could he, a random prince, take it upon himself to interfere in the dealings of such potentates and stand in their way.

Of course not, came a grunt from above.

So why should anyone cause him grief, when he is simply going his own way.

What, what does he mean with his army.

Oh, best not mention that miserable wretched little army, better not to have it at all.

So give it to me.

The Saxon waited in case more words came. Headed limp and fretting to Torgau. There he found Gustavus Adolphus, who had arrived with a small cavalcade; he chuckled as he greeted the tremulous old man. Who moaned: This is my thanks for trying to stay neutral.

"Is that what you wanted?" the giant Swede menaced in a loud voice.

"Not at all, not at all. Only, so to speak, as far as the Emperor is concerned. You know what I mean."

The worried old man gave a whimper.

The Swede kindly advised him it would be best to follow a straight path; no one can serve the Emperor and at the same time claim to be defender of the Protestant Church.

"He has never attacked me."

The Swede, roughly: "The point now. What do you propose?" After lengthy persuasion the Saxon brought out what was troubling him: Was Gustavus aware that the Emperor intended to take Meissen, Naumberg, Merseberg from him in consequence of the Restitution Edict. The Swede, coldly: Yes. (This ruse had come from his own negotiators.)

Johann Georg laid his sad old head on the table, wept. Looked left and right for a way out. Beer was brought to calm him. He swore black and blue that he had always stood loyally by the Emperor, and did not deserve this. It was explained to him by the Swede and his persuasive companions that Tilly's intentions were fixed at present solely on recovering his ecclesiastical foundations. Johann Georg hesitated a long while. They plied him with drink, to make the deciding easier. Suddenly he stood up: He will not expose himself to scorn; he does not want his name sullied for future readers of the annals of his House. They must tell him again what the Emperor demands of his possessions. Then for long minutes the Saxon wordlessly shook his great head under its fur cap, stared fixedly ahead: "He shall not succeed!" He called to his courtiers: Had they heard, their Fatherland is in danger, the Protestant cause is threatened. Lebzelter took him off to bed.

Next morning– his sleep was disturbed all night by unease about his loyalty to the Emperor, and the Restitutions – he concluded a treaty with the Swede. His face showing resignation, he explained to his counsellors: It has come to this: he must defend his House against the Roman Emperor.

They confirmed it. (Gustavus Adolphus had made them gifts of gold chains and coin.)

"We shall stand as one man," said Johann Georg to the Swede as they shook hands. The gentle Saxon was moved to tears; departing, he gave the Swede his blessing.

As the Saxon carriage rolled away the king stood with Oxenstierna – a paltry figure of a man on whose neck a monstrous skull was gingerly balanced – and limping Grubbe, his secretary. Looked from one to the other, bemused: "Is it true, or not? Electoral Saxony conspires with me? Is it true?" Then, moving indoors, "I'd sooner have believed the Bavarian would ally himself with me than the Saxon. What advantage does he gain from it?"

"But Meissen, Naumberg, Merseberg!"

"God Almighty, he didn't even check with the Emperor, he believed me!"

Grubbe grinned: "Your Majesty has a very convincing manner."

"Oxenstierna, what do you say. He believed me about Meissen. Has the world gone mad?"

"We may safely say that God has blessed Your Majesty. You may say other things as the occasion arises, and everyone will believe you."

"And there he goes. Pray excuse me, gentlemen, I must go and calm myself down."

Grubbe stroked his beard: "If you look at it aright, what could the Saxon do but believe you? We could have offered him our island of Bornholm, he'd have believed it."

The king still lost in astonishment: “For the sake of three foundations, a German Electoral prince deserts his Emperor and betrays him. What an Empire!”

“So dilapidated that it has long invited Swedish hands to put it to the test.”

“Oxenstierna, the Saxon gives me courage. It’s a joy to be here in the Empire. Report home: our Saxons are amenable – better than I could have expected.” They climbed into the carriage, all three laughed tears when Oxenstierna said: “Nice work in this forest, where trees run up and beg to be felled!”

These were hot summer days. Gustavus Adolphus marched out quite unruffled to engage with Tilly. His route lay through Frankfurt on the Oder, where in a single day he dislodged seven imperial foot regiments and one of horse. Twenty-one guns fell into his hands, twenty-six standards, nine hundred quintals of powder, twelve hundred quintals of lead, seven hundred quintals of slow match, a thousand iron balls. Seven hundred bodies needing burial.

He was no longer merely a Swedish king. His voice rang like steel: it is a religious war he wages. All should come to him, as Saxons Brandenburgers Pomeranians have come. The hour of reckoning is here for Catholic arrogance. His voice domineering, stirring rage and fear. Upon those sat near him, spiritual and temporal, his anger showered down. Bland smiles at first, and then tottering distraught as he smoked them from their holes; hands fumbling for the sword they strove to stand tall and face him.

They will be avenged – that voice from on high – those poor wretches at Magdeburg who succumbed to a fiery death at Tilly’s hand. The Palatines, their home a wasteland. The most lamentable of all God’s children, the Bohemians, tortured and tormented, all worldly goods lost, forced into exile from Bohemia their dear homeland. The good Protestant Christian will never forget that country as long as the True Faith shall endure; will never forget the evil monster, conjured by the Emperor out of that land to turn the Empire into the Pit of Hell: Friedland, who perpetrated his unholy deeds as far afield as Denmark.

More and more emerged from their holes, tottered into his camp. As he advanced on Wittenberg his army had thirty thousand infantry and five thousand mounted. And many, many of them were Germans. Running with the Swede because he had taken many towns, and paid with good French gold.

He was so fat and heavy in his armour that in the whole army there were hardly five horses able to bear his weight. He was stern and puritanical. Bigotry formed part of his rectitude; determination, vehemence. He never indulged in reflection, believed in Luther and the Gospel as firmly as in the solidity of his war-hammer. Never feared that anyone could best him.

But the ghostly little Brabanter, who had now crossed the Saale not far from Leipzig to close in on him, also had no such fear. He felt a profound distaste for that man who never ceased mouthing religion, never ceased defaming the pious Catholic faith, he the fighting man, disgusted that the other was no honourable warrior. He longed to make an end of him, pushed rapidly on. In no previous battle had he felt such strong desire to smash his adversary. As he reported plainly to Vienna: this man is no true enemy. Relished the joy of yielding to the urgings of his heart without restraint.

He reached the high ground north of Breitenfeld, just outside Leipzig, under the beat of drums and clank of arms as his mass of troops formed up. Sixteen infantry regiments, sixteen mounted took up positions. The Swede and the Saxons advanced on them.

They couldn't wait to mingle their blood.

Between nine in the morning and four in the afternoon, eight thousand of Tilly's soldiers became corpses, five thousand Swedes and Saxons. Gustavus Adolphus rampaged like a berserker among his heavy cuirassiers, his mighty steed had to carry him wherever he wanted. The world was nothing to him. "God with us!" he cried unthinking, his sword raged, was one mind with his. The lives from the corpses stormed into him, dimmed and fuddled his brain, stretched him fit to burst. He snorted as he fought, neighed like a warhorse. His sword was a comb, the comb ran through the imperials, he was a barber. "God with us!" he roared. The lives bloomed choking within him, he could not evade them, there were too many. Cannonballs whooshed past, one took his white hat with the wide grey feather; he sucked in the draft that came behind: Send me another soon.

They fought with great cunning, tried to catch the wind to blind the other side with dust. Like a single great clump arrayed in the Spanish manner stood Tilly's forces, the battle-line ten ranks deep, divided into huge deep squares. On came the enemy, Livonians Courlanders Finns Swedes Saxons, wind in their faces, pushed across broad Lober Brook, thrust through bankside vegetation, mobile brigades, on the wings cavalry interspersed with musketeers. His cavalry leaped three deep, fired when they saw the whites of their eyes, two salvos, drew swords.

Tilly's regiments let loose a salvo. The Saxons took to their heels abandoning standards and guns. Furious imperials leaped into the breach, turned Saxon guns on the Swedish regiments. These were stuck in churned-up ground, massed ever more densely.

And like a trumpeter who at the end of a long note squeezes from the depths of his breast a last shattering cry that flies like a swallow to be lost in the clouds, so the Swedes unleashed from twenty-four guns waves of fire over the Germans, a quarter hour, half an hour, an hour, two hours, filling the air with five-pounders ten-pounders, pounding relentlessly with half-cartouwes, thundering thundering with full cartouwes. Like a wall shaken to its foundations the German army at long last toppled heavily over the battlefield, and away. Cavalry storming on, guns and infantry buried.

Amid the rushing dust storm of the fleeing horde, Cronberg's regiment gathered up the lost Brabanter. Behind them the slaughter continued. In the dark they heard the frenetic king fire Victory on the field. He screamed pouring with sweat, laughed half out of his mind, gestured to every side: "God has turned Lutheran. God has tuned Lutheran." As night came on more dead were sown far and wide, the Swedes kept at their work.

Tilly fled, fled, did nothing but flee. Hard on his heels the regiments of Starrschädel black-yellow, Löser red-white, Klitzing blue-white, Arnim red-black, Schwalbach red-yellow, Stålhandske, Wunsch, Tott, West Gotland, Småland, East Gotland.

38. Mantuan Aftermath

AS MIST DRIFTED white under the bridges from meadows and the lake, crawled along the traces of Mantua's eastern streets, the white-clad Emperor climbed stiff from cold out of his carriage in order to walk to the buildings. At the Carmelite church by San Giorgio bridge, where as a girl she had received her first Communion, the Empress would be waiting in her carriage. Hatschiers riding on ahead sought among the ruins; down a steep lane they espied a train of carriages, mounted men in front, imperial carriage-and-six, doors closed. Ferdinand's hatschiers sounded the imperial bugle-call; the doors remained closed. Ferdinand stepped slowly down the ruined muddy lane. When he opened the door of the first carriage he heard sobbing. He had expected this; he took a seat at Eleonore's side.

The horses pulled them on. He said softly, arm around the black-veiled lady's shoulder: "I looked for you at the Carmelites. But I suppose you could not find the convent."

"Did you find it?" came from under veil after long quiet weeping.

"The city looks bad, Eleonore. What fortune does it bring, waging war. Your cousin Nevers would have done better to leap at my peace proposal. Now all lies in ruins, and he must beg the French to pay his debts."

"My cousin is nothing to me. You made peace with him, why was Mantua not spared."

"He came too late to my generals, Eleonore, with his submission."

"And I? And I? Why have you done this to me?"

"Don't cry. I shall build it all back up again, for you."

"I don't want it. It has happened. You did it. Nothing is of any use. It has happened."

He stayed calm. "How could it have been otherwise. I could not stop it."

"But it lay within your power, nevertheless. In Regensburg you dismissed your field commander, that was up to you."

"No blame attaches to him. Nevers behaved childishly. He tried to play games with me. I owed it to my position, Eleonore, not to give in."

"Your position? No, you, you. And I? To me you owe nothing. My home has been destroyed as one destroys a heretic city, as Magdeburg was destroyed."

"Women and children wept in Magdeburg, too. I had a premonition."

She threw back her veil, offered him a pale shiny face.

The carriage continued on, they bumped slowly over rubble. She sat close beside him, hands at her temples, whispered: "Understand me rightly, Ferdinand. If women weep in Magdeburg and yet you give the order to destroy the city – I cannot understand. And if the women weep, for my sake, say, they are just any women. But I, Mantua, look at it, Mantua, where you have come to, with me."

"I must mourn, my child, for sure, along with you. For this lovely city and for you."

She stared a long while uncomprehending into the calm melancholy eyes; said hesitantly:

“You know, Ferdinand, to be evil from nature is a misfortune, the person is helpless against his endowment. But one like you, wanting to be evil, knowing he is evil, that is more than bad and sinful.”

“What is it then?”

“Horrible that you even ask. You want to know? Loathsome. There, I have said it.” Her eyes blazed into him, she pulled the veil down again.

They drove silent through a sea of mist. He began: “It is my position, it’s what I have become through my position. There was a time when I might have understood you in every point, when I sent this Wallenstein to Hungary on Mansfeld’s tail, and atrocities were reported to me. I wanted to dismiss him then, he even offered to go, my doubts seemed comical to him. All the counsellors opposed me, pious priests. I’ve grown used to it, now I know no other way.”

They halted in the mist by the Ursuline convent outside the city. After a while they climbed out. They entered the chapel through a side door. The long dark space stretched away, light flickered from candles at the altar onto brightly coloured pictures. A deep male voice sounded from above, to one side. Nuns kneeling, heads bowed, row upon row.

“You feel, it causes you pain, that you are excluded, because you are women. Yes, you become agitated that a curse lies upon you. The Devil plays his game with you; to whomever Satan bears his teeth most horribly, it is the image of a woman he holds out; so it were best if the whole female sex were uprooted, once and for all.

“Oh do not despair, sisters in Christ, oh think on it: you are human. Think on the one who hung on the Cross, for all of us.

“His mother was Mary. Yes, Jesus had a mother. At every hour you see Christ the Lord, crucified, see his lamenting mouth, his tearful eyes, you weep at the holes pierced through his holy limbs, see the blood welling from his side, with which he will care for the whole world.

“You see Jesus crucified. You do not see Mary. Not her picture, the mother’s blessed smile, her prostration before the Cross, the numb horror of that is happening to her son.

“The golden hair, the lovely lips, the breast with which she once quieted him, the arms in which she lulled him, the lap on which she held him, the feet with she walked about with him. Mary you have never seen.

“She did not hang like her son on the Cross. Even before her son was born she was almost annihilated, had already experienced it all. Every terrible sorrow that her son must suffer for our salvation – she had already felt it all. For the flesh of her body was already devoured by the love of God, tearing, ripping, smelting. God’s love for Mary is not like that of a rose petal falling on a face, whose passing bestows a scent to make the eyes close in a blessed daze. It is no flute-breath, no summer gossamer in the breeze. Whoever is stirred by God knows only the meaning of Death. Bitter, so bitter, so full of deadly thorns is his bliss. Whoever is stirred by God knows not that it is God who stirs. He knows no comfort. Whoever is taken up is granted only death and eternity as his destination, and cannot tarry long on this Earth. When God stirred Mary, already the Cross was erected for Jesus. He is the son of his mother; the horror of humankind from its contact with God he carried within his body and in our own existence. Seething contact of fire and water; his life no more than smoke, flight upward, filled with pain.

"Mary! Mary! Mother of Christ!

"Let us praise her. Of all women she was chosen, of all humanity she was chosen, our advocate at the Eternal Throne, our consciousness, our liberation, comfort, ensoulment. Heavenly she was, to our great good fortune, so that God's gaze was drawn to her, she the wonder of the world. The bridegroom's wine, his thirst-quenching grape. Mary! Thou loveliest, thou sweetest, thou most wonderful, God's cultivated garden. The world's sweet sound.

"From her body springs every strength, her veins spread to sink into our hearts, the heart of the earth, like roots. All that lives, sun and stars, draws her close. Her heart rises up to bear us all, ye sisters all, we brothers. Her body dances and turns. Her feet shiver and beat like a frost beneath her garments. She bleeds, she brings forth our happiness.

"Let us weep, dear sisters, weep and pray to Mary. We place our hopes in her, and rejoice."

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Slowly the Emperor made his way back to Vienna, through the Tyrol – the bishopric of Brixen, Lienz, on to Judenburg.*

Back at the castle he had to receive many nobles and Estates come to greet their returned Emperor. A huge salon was readied for them. Anyone looking towards the door across the shiny wide squares of flooring became helpless, overcome by vertigo. The ceiling was a jungle of rectangles, right angles, octagons, beam upon beam, black, rampant with pictures overflowing their frames, flooding across half the ceiling, suddenly breaking off. And close under the ceiling, against the pillars, along the wall pierced by twenty windows, antlers jutted, pillar after pillar crowned by enormous deer heads staring wildly from a painted tangle of leaves, flowers, branches; in many places along the wall animal bones too. Gigantic painted panels loomed down from the walls, heads bending forward over the floor.

Through the low ornate door in the narrow wall guarded by stony-grey Romans with lances – above it a heaving battle scene rose to the ceiling in a garish profusion of colour – through this narrow dark opening poured the gaily costumed court. On the purple-draped dais beneath the smooth golden baldachin of wood, the Emperor and Empress, behatted, sat side by side. Bright morning light from the twenty bay windows. Over the parquet floor tripped these men and women, happy glories of the earth come down from the castle. They tripped like wedding-guests performing the torch-dance, ornamented couples, beards swinging, skirts flying. Over the door a beam, divided by a silver St George jumping down from the lion; voices sang in turn from one side, from the other side red-gowned men blew long golden trumpets. Wide-skirted silk-shod ladies, heads of wheat in the hair of blonde laughing creatures. Proud neckbending heads, teeth flashing, throats encircled by chains, shoulders ermine-clad, fleshy arms bare, breasts swelling from the low-cut blouse. Slow obedient knees in and out beneath swathes of flowing atlas-silk, trains trailing behind like the scent of a bitch. White arms used to the whip and bridle hauled and gathered flouncing finery. On the pedestals of strong shanks, bending in time to the music, they bore the clean smooth-skinned scented body; in it as in a sorcerer's cauldron beat the cosseted greedy heart, deep-breathing lungs, wine-thirsty stomach, the long pale intestines sated and stuffed with pastries, peaches, roasted fieldfares and the hot tasty secrets and byways of procreation. Eyes that open

for splendid pictures masquerades sleigh rides, hounds casting, dances in crowded salons, mouths that command pray kiss, sing songs, ears that open to happy words. In garments of atlas-silk, gathered in by white lowered arms. Proud knee-bending Chaos advancing, defying sun, air, flowers, storms.

Hunched on the purple seat, grey-bearded mouth slightly open, the Emperor took in the sight, waved hands at them. His head shrank between shoulders drawn high, the tall white ermine collar was pushed up onto his neck and behind the ears. His legs planted side by side kept his body upright. He flicked his frilled wrist free of the heavy throne-cloak. They swept confidently past, bowed their strong smiling bodies to him; he beamed back at them as if this were all a happy commonplace, while wordlessly extending both arms to the imperious mournful lady at his side as if to say: not me. She smiled, and as if they warmed to the blaring pounding music and the procession of human splendour, her eyes grew dark and moist.

Ever more of these sturdy mouths for eating drinking praying singing, knee-rustling atlas-cloth gathered in by white bare arms, on its pair of pedestals the greedy heart quite shameless, the stomach craving its wine. The golden trumpets blared; none in the huge bustling salon noticed as clouds darkened the daylight.

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The Empress, swathed in loose satins, toying with her gold crucifix, sat in a covered balcony, feet stretched on a low footstool. Blunt-faced Countess Kollonitsch, sweet and full-bosomed, leaned over the marble balustrade, one arm around the leg of a Cupid, peered happy and exhausted into the green jungle of the park, trilled.

“Who can you see?” the Empress asked.

“I? What I can see? I see trees.”

“Who’s running about there? I can hear people running.”

“In the park, Lore?”

“Yes, where are they. Who is it?”

The countess still in her silks, dark carnations in her high-piled hair, faced the chair where the Empress leaned forward supported on her elbow, looked quizzically down at her. As they both poised listening intently towards the park, an indistinct scuffling came from below, intermittent, like someone rubbing against a tree, like a branch falling, or someone shuffling cautiously through sand. At once the Empress started to her feet. Eyes face hands in a panic. “Can you hear, someone’s there. Someone’s down there.” Young Kollonitsch shrank back nervously to the balcony door; the Empress was staring wide-eyed down at what was only green park and gravel paths; she sprang back, felt for the countess. “What do you have. Do you have a stone, or a knife.”

They hurried indoors, the countess wanted to summon the guard, the Empress held her back, her face wild. “Be quiet.” Pulled a pike down from the wall, and a small club, let the pike drop, ran with the club to the balustrade, after looking about for a moment flung the glinting weapon overhand into the trees. Listened; when all remained quiet she ran past the speechless countess back indoors, dragged the pike behind her, tried grunting to lift the huge shaft onto

the balustrade. And as it rested on the ledge she shrilled, flushed with anger: “Come help!” The countess came slowly, eyes always on the Empress, took hold of the shaft with her. The Empress’ gaze passed briefly over her calm questioning face, then rested on her, their hands together on the shaft. They stared at one another. Kollonisch asked, gently pleading: “What are we doing?” The Empress made another thrust, stared into the foliage, pulling back gazed calmly at the bewildered countess, dropped the shaft with a cross sheepish look. “See who is down there.”

The countess made no move: “There can’t be anyone in your park.”

The Empress stood a long while staring down, her whole body trembling a little, then turned back: “Just think, if it had been a man, I would be dead.”

Kollonitsch dragged the pike back indoors. As they both stood rubbing their hands she breathed: “No one was down there.”

“Leave me, leave me,” the Empress waved her away, trembling more violently and very pale, dropped sobbing into her chair, asked for her footstool. She repeated, glaring towards the balcony: “Think, I would have killed him, if it had been a man.”

After considering a moment, dark Kollonitsch gathered her train, sat down beside her. “But I quite forgot to ask you about the reception. So many of them, while we were waiting to console you. Now tell me, did you enjoy it?”

“You are so kind and dear to me. – What was that just now? Can you explain it? I alarmed myself, didn’t I?”

“I too was alarmed, Leonore. It was nothing. Anyway: you did enjoy it.”

“I’ll tell you something, Angelika.” The Empress leaned forward, turned her head, frowned fiercely: “It was nothing to do with me if I had killed someone. I was frightened, and – how strange, I, a woman, came upon the notion of killing him.” She shuddered, her clothing rustled.

“It was lovely, how the choir sang.”

The Empress shook her head, eyes dreamy, unfocused: “Yes, Angelika.”

Later: “I am possessed, Angelika, I fear myself. Don’t tell anyone. If the bishop of Bamberg were to find out, he would burn me as a witch.* Don’t laugh. How is it possible?”

After Kollonitsch withdrew, the Empress absent-mindedly took up a little mirror from the table. It lay in a hexagonal ivory frame carved with people, men and women emerging naked from the smooth polished edge, floating towards the height where Christ the judge of the world sat enthroned with a sword; at his feet two figures knelt in prayer. She held it to her face without seeing, then noticed her reflection, covered it with a hand. “How can I execrate him, when I am the same? I’m possessed by the devil. Yes. He has made his way into me, he has me.”

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From Halberstadt, four days after the battle, pale German lieutenant Regensberger set off with a letter from the pious wounded general. In Vienna was at once conducted to Prince Eggenberg. Festoons hanging from the ceiling of the long rectangular space turned in the candlelight; tears trickled from the young rider’s eyes as he began his report. The old prince kept him close, in his utter dismay invited his friends Trautmannsdorf and Abbot Anton to

attend. When they entered some hours later, they found him sitting in the same chair from which he had heard the lieutenant. His face grey, angry chin resting on his hand. Shaking his head, he declared himself unable to master his thoughts, they must read for themselves what dear Field-marshal Tilly has written about the battle with the King of Sweden.

And as they read he wailed: He cannot think, he will leave, must withdraw from court. He shuffled over the carpet in his blue silk nightshirt; they spoke among themselves, he sat, played with hands blue with cold, not listening, then suddenly glared accusingly at them one after the other, attended to what they were saying as if awaiting judgement.

The hunchback count's analysis was brutal. Knitted brow: Now the Empire will at any event collapse, the Electoral princes with it; we feared this before, without really believing it. The prince turned almost desperately to the abbot, who stared anxiously at him: But just now you plumped for the Electors, as safer for the Empire than Friedland! Trautmannsdorf crossed his arms frostily, snuffled at the letter: We were wrong, wrong, wrong.

"What now?" implored Eggenberg. Abbot Anton stroked his hand. Trautmannsdorf insisted: The main point is first to acknowledge we were wrong. Eggenberg whimpered: "What do you want of me. You know how I've devoted myself to the ancestral House and the imperial House, how I planned it for the Emperor from his youth onwards. I was wrong, you could have stopped me. Save us, have pity, Trautmannsdorf." Anton stood behind the prince, spoke softly into his ear: "You are unfair, my prince. He does not mean to torment you, he just wants clarity. You know him."

Trautmannsdorf: "Pointless to seek conclusions from the situation. We must only line up the facts of the matter, and the conclusions will reveal themselves."

Eggenberg searched the calm face, asked anxiously: "How then?" The count drummed nervously: He will not force his pearls of wisdom on the prince, let alone trivialities.

"So what then, what then?" Eggenberg pleaded. Under Anton's accusing gaze the count grew more cordial, spoke softly, read the letter through with them again, and declared: A reset is necessary. When one dislocates a limb that has done good service, believing that it will go even better thus, well now, one must reset it as soon as the damage becomes evident.

But the prince was too distraught; he fell into a despairing self-reproach, they had to calm him, then again he insisted: I am blameless.

Next morning the Emperor received him; Lieutenant Regensberger was invited to an audience, delivered a halting report. Ferdinand asked mildly after his parents, and where he had been placed in the battle, expressed joy that he had escaped. He summoned his Lord Chamberlain: Look after the lieutenant well at court, give him a hundred thalers as thanks for his report, and let the lieutenant present himself again before he leaves.

Then alone with Prince Eggenberg, who had said hardly a word, the Emperor regarded his unhappy old friend a long while. What had got into him, how he looked, did he feel poorly again, if so he'd better go and lie down; why bother himself with this business. After gulping and clearing his throat at length, Eggenberg yielded, threw himself at the Emperor's feet by the writing desk, wept sobbed sniffled helplessly. Ferdinand stepped back in surprise: What is he up to. Eggenberg, quite beside himself, stammered out: Forgive me.

Ah, for what? Had *he* lost the battle at Breitenfeld against those dreadful heretics; does his dear old Eggenberg think himself God, who arranges everything; and finally: “We must accept the facts , and consider how it all ties together.”

The old prince stood up, his face blood-red. Ferdinand smiled, tugged at his frilled cuffs, stepped closer: But Eggenberg seems unwell, during the convocation in Regensburg he should have followed orders and stayed in Istria. Eggenberg sighed, and looked up: He had been unable to rest for worries about the imperial House.

As the bells of St Stephan’s pealed, the Emperor sat in his wide armchair, an abbot’s chair, dark beechwood, on the arms and back were brown still figures that moved against the hands and neck of the sitter, wrinkled men, praying women, girls singing hair-plaiting. Women with an infant at the breast, bishops blessing, leaning on a crosier.

He has thought about it, he muttered. They pressed him so, pressed him, wanted power in their hands and then were unable to master it. Now there they stand like poor sinners, and have a sinking feeling. Ferdinand had crossed his knees, his hand caressed an infant slipping from its mother’s leg. The one who complains most bitterly is his cousin Maximilian, that proud man; not far from his frontiers there lies a pitiless foe. We mustn’t let ourselves become oppressed by circumstances, we must promise the Bavarian adequate and timely assistance.

“We are disarmed, Your Majesty. We do not know how to save our skins.”

“Write to him that he shouldn’t worry. If he fears for his father, he can send him here to me. They can live here as my guests.”

“Majesty, we don’t know how we’ll save our own skins. The King of Sweden advances with such dreadful force; the Saxon Elector is allied to him. Tilly’s forces, and ours, are on the run.”

“Heaven forbid, my dear Eggenberg, that you ever stand in my shoes. The ancestral House would be lost. Gather your courage, sly Odysseus. Why so depressed, Eggenberg? Why?”

The prince held out trembling arms, let them drop. The Emperor waved him gently off, hands to his eyes. “Leave it, dear friend. The matter is easy for us. Friedland parted from us as friends. The princes will overcome their objections to him. We may all depend on him, he has come through worse predicaments.” And so easeful and calming were the Emperor’s words as he lay comfortably back that Eggenberg had the impression the matter had little to do with him, was none of his business. The whitish bright eyes flickered somewhat distracted over the privy counsellor, about the room, sideways to the amber-inlaid drawers of his writing cabinet.

Ferdinand brought his wandering gaze to a stop for a moment, hoisted himself forward over this anxiously questioning creature that loved him: “Eggenberg, loyal Eggenberg, why are you upset. Did Regensberger frighten you that much. Go toFriedland. He is our sword. Just take it up once more.” He continued complacently: “Of course I don’t know if he’ll set about it more tenderly than before. And he’ll look for a good return in the Empire. That’s why he’s our old valuable Friedland. Just fetch him back. He is to come again. He’ll be glad to know it hasn’t worked out, lacking him.”

And when the old man bowed, Ferdinand dismissed him amid humming and tootling as he sank deeper among the wrinkled men, praying women, girls singing.

Cloakless hatless without swordbelt, that evening Ferdinand came face to face with the Mantuan lady at the door of his antechamber. Servants closed the doors. Eleonore gathered the folds of her golden dress, as she came rustling pressed him onto the window bench, pressed fists down onto his shoulders, rubbed her face against the stubbly cheeks: "Do not do this to me. Do not take him back. I will not have it." Then: "If you mean to murder me, then take him back. What designs have you for me?" Then: "I shall not let it go. Never, never. Even if it means leaving you again, and for ever."

Pulling her face away she glared at him: "Man, you, who are you that you can listen to all this. Sitting here like this. Before me. No, I shall not let it go. I shall set myself down in the ruins of Mantua. With the Ursulines. To show the world: this is what happens to a woman, a married lady, good lady wife of the German Emperor." He made no protest, pulled her to him by the waist, his fingers played with her long chain of pearls, gently he soothed her: "You were already a little wild in Regensburg. I had to wander here and there seeking comfort. Never had I so much to atone for and smooth over as now. Our good Eggenberg most of all."

And off he went to supper. She did not accompany him.

He guzzled and caroused in the long Spanish Hall, where the whole wall was divided into squares and from every wooden square a princely visage painted by Pietro Rosa from Brescia peeped out. Sixty princes peeping into the rotunda where Ferdinand among his merry chamberlains officers guests had bears fircones windmills wagons ships borne in and circulated – these were drinking-vessels; and where a dog and a cat were tied to the legs of a fat pig that the Emperor chased through the hall with his golden dagger. A brown short-tailed ape sat in the middle of the table, drank from steins, overturned them as it leaped. For the whole evening the Emperor's mood was one of sustained unstinting merriment.

39. In the Grotto

AT MAXIMILIAN'S court there was kept a little misshapen human creature as Fool, an unbelievable glutton. Mostly he loitered around kitchens cellars tables sideboards – in order, so he said, to check out the dung in which his asparagus grew. He truly loathed all guzzlers and tipplers, they had nothing to do with him. A pork belly, calf-gristle, a nicely steamed and peppered beef stomach meant more to him than stuffing himself full. As a horse sets up a little dance at the sound of bells, so his blue-red slack wrinkled old face would become animated, his heart would grow lively and his hands grasp for a forked meat-knife whenever his little nostrils sniffed a spicy odour.

He went at his food like a warrior. He would squat beside his booty, hold it down like a not quite vanquished opponent. He preferred it when they left him alone, not even looking at him. Growled like a dog as he ate. He let his long rubbery tongue hang out through the teeth, his hands lifted the food, the mouth snapped at it. When the demolition was in full swing, gravy dribbling like blood from the corners of his mouth, a snorting smacking cracking crunching tearing slurping grinding would begin. Here was no eating and swallowing, but rather total destruction and bodily assimilation. And this was the process that enraptured him. He could not resist all the while uttering foul comments, even though from time to time he was beaten

half dead for them; he blasphemed about the new better style of Mass he was performing, now he was calf with the calf, pig with the pig, fish, capon. He was sacrificing not to Heaven above, but down here below. He uttered heated vengeful remarks to besmirch their pious thoughts, was flung helplessly about by the passion of his rage and agitation. And sometimes it was thus that he greeted some group of nobles outside the church or the New Chapel, preceding them with a ceremonious splay-legged gait, holding aloft a cowbone with a little banner on a skewer as a choirboy holds a censer or a crucifix; with a nasal whine: "On to prayers before the haunch of venison. On to the vomitorium, the nightsoil potty. On, my dear sirs, no slacking now, no slackening in your zeal. Take stock of yourselves!"

In these times the ladies and gentlemen at table were very sensitive to noise, and had no desire to hear him. The dwarf was hauled out from his lair under the table; he hung sleepily, chewing dribbling groaning growling, from the hands of the pages shaking him. He hit out, knew he shouldn't snap and gnash like a dog. Whipped and let back in, the bent jingling freak crept back to his lair, now in silent rage, now regaling the guests with a toxic flood of obscenities, stopping from time to time to gasp asthmatically and embarrass the young lads and pages, the attending servants, with his ribaldry and smut.

"He does it on purpose, that gnashing!" the Jesuit Father Confessor cried in triumph, looking round at him as they pushed him past. The dwarf saw with disgust how the gentlefolk supped from full plates, shoved the selected morsel in their mouths without a thought, conversed softly, one ear on the music. Such betrayal of food; dolts presented with roasts. He stumbled towards the door. The Lord Chamberlain, revolted, bent his head over his plate.

One afternoon the dwarf was escorted to the Grotto Courtyard of the Residence. The old longbearded ivory carver Angermaier was just leaving, his face gloomy; behind him two assistants carried out a whole ivory-inlaid table. Among opened boxes and tapestries in the middle of the flower-bright yard, was extravagant blackhaired Hans van der Biest, painter, to whom Maximilian was not listening.

Beside the Prince-elector, seated by the rim of the fountain dressed in tight Spanish clothes, young counsellor Küttner stood leaning face-twitching on his silver cavalryman's sword.

"I must find something to disgust me," Maximilian played with his knife; at a gesture of Küttner's hand the painter stepped back with a stiff bow. "Küttner, the doctor told me I must feel revulsion. That would be of the speediest benefit to me."

"I know, Serenity. The Fool is here."

"Begin," Maximilian hissed.

"What am I s'posed to do?" the dwarf cried as he was pushed forward. He was pale.

"Begin, varlet."

"And do what?"

"Will you begin, rascal!"

"Why the curses, rascal, rogue, varlet? Open your own mouth and say what you want."

Maximilian wearily turned aside his head, softly: "Talk to him, Küttner, keep it short."

Küttner, a young man of Gallic elegance, proud, went blade in hand right up to the nostril-flaring dwarf, whispered: “Perform your tricks, dog. You know why you’re here.”

“Dog? And why it’s here? For the food, you dolled-up Frenchie.”

“You, you’re the Fool, don’t you know what you’re supposed to do.” Küttner brandished his blade in anger, he came from Paris, had spent little time at court, had no idea what tricks the Fool played.

The Prince fixed both with an embittered stare, so apathetic he was in no condition to speak. “Begin, get on with it!”

With stately gait on tall red stilts, a tame stork approached from the terrace, now and then stabbed its beak into the boggy ground. It followed the watercourse leading back to the spring. In impotent rage Küttner began to assail the dwarf with the flat of his sword. Maximilian followed the scene, fists clenched. The outraged dwarf leaped about under the rain of blows. “Eat. He must guzzle,” cried Maximilian.

The dwarf ran free, howling. “What must I eat? What must I eat? Stop killing me!” Before Maximilian’s hard gaze, amid spraying grit from Küttner’s ill-aimed blows, he flung himself howling, arms outstretched in despair, onto the sandy bank by the spring.

And now with ponderous grave steps the longlegged big-beaked bird approached. When the dwarf heard it he pulled himself together. In deathly fear he rose to his feet, and now he flung himself at the stork. He was no taller than the bird’s legs. He fumbled with his arms towards the creature’s breast, it retreated cawing and flapping its wings, shook itself, and flew at the little man. Again and again the beak flailed down on the dwarf; defenceless, he took a direct hit just under the chin. His cap was torn, his knees bent, otherwise he seemed not to notice. His gaze was fixed on the great bird’s feathered breast, he was already hanging by both arms around the long neck that twisted and turned, tried to shake him off. His feet scrabbled, the strong creature stood a moment cawing cawing, and then fell forward. The Fool coiled about the stork in the sand. His face was buried in the screeching creature’s breast, its cries were almost human. He spat feathers, chewed gnawed at the tough skin, the convulsively twitching flesh; his own blood flowed; he licked and slurped at the bird’s blood. And now, wits still addled from the sword-blows, he forgot who it was behind him, who it was leaning forward in his chair watching him with a long startled face. He began to work his jaws, and at first reluctantly, then with a wild abandon began to eat, to annihilate, destroy the frantic screeching creature. The stork, lying on its side, stretching its neck and kicking out like a fallen horse, tried to stand. The munching dwarf’s heavy weight held it down.

As the bird emitted a shrill penetrating trumpet-cry, the Prince desired Küttner, who was squinting on from the side playing with his sword, to pull the dwarf away. Küttner bent, grabbed the dwarf’s back. The dwarf clung doggedly on. As Küttner dragged at the bird, the dwarf loosened his arms from the bird’s neck, but in a ghastly manner his face hung like a growth in the sticky red mess that was the bird’s breast. Blood dripped and spattered bright red all around on the ground. With an oath the cavalier clamped the sword between his knees; the dwarf’s passionate chewing grunting slurping gulping could clearly be heard as his arms sought again to dangle from the bird’s neck. The stork held its neck upright over him, dreadful

blows with the beak rained down lightning-fast on the murderer's calves and back, mingled with horrible piercing screams. Küttner set to, grabbed the man's legs, a tug, he swung the dwarf around, dumped him heavily among flowers. The bird staggered, cawed, stood a moment, blood dripping, then flapped its wings, turned, stumbled quickly away. The dwarf's horribly smeared head emerged from the flowerbed; howls of rage, tears. The Prince lunged past, took up Küttner's sword, turned vomiting back to the flowerbed, plunged the blade straight down through the struggling dwarf's right thigh, fixing him to the ground.

In the art gallery in front of a sumptuous carved chest – club-swinging centaurs in relief vainly assailing a gentle group of humans, Righteousness Wisdom Strength Moderation – the Prince and Küttner stood half-shadowed by a pillar. Maximilian told him to retrieve his sword; the dwarf was still loudly complaining. When Küttner returned with the bloody blade, the Prince was sitting by a window. They listened as the laments faded into the distance. In the silence Maximilian, on the chest, shook himself: "My doctor should howl like that." A sour laugh, eyes flashing: "Do you know, Küttner, what day it is today?"

"Michaelmas, Serenity."

"St Michael's day. Patron saint of the Germans. We put up a good fight; he will praise us." Maximilian's laugh was milder, weary. Küttner leaned his girlishly soft body forward, long-fingered hands raised to the lacy shirtfront. "The Fool was bestial, Serenity. How could there be such a thing in the world."

"Both of us fought well. In the land of Moab, St Michael wrested the body of Moses from Satan.* You fought like that. I am drained, Küttner, and feel better."

The other smiled politely, kept silent.

"You are to me the dearest man at my court, Küttner. I trust you more than almost anyone." Suddenly, after some searching, Maximilian raised his arms in an emotional gesture, rasped: "Küttner, what is to happen?" He drew the other down to him by the hand. "I am lost. I – " He stammered: "I am prostrate before the most odious man in the world, before that Goth. He'll take pleasure in humiliating me. Saviour, oh my Saviour, what have we come to." The Prince seemed ready to burst into tears, he gazed up at Küttner whining, grinding his teeth.

The other looked away embarrassed: Germany lies under heavenly protection. "Say that again, Küttner. You're so much younger than I. If there's no heavenly protection – I see no help for us. I strove so hard, it was too much for me. Sit here by my side. Don't be shy. Let me lean on you. I have no wife,* no friend, my father's ill. I need to say something, you won't betray me. What happened in Regensburg was no gift to me. I'm like a fool who's gambled all he had, all I can do is moan." Now he really was weeping, an arm on Küttner's shoulder. Küttner quickly suppressed his aversion; he knew the Prince's morbid fancies, went along: "What sort of Michaelmas would it be in Germany, with Your Serenity so penitent. We shall not yield, Satan shall not be our master, be he ever so armed with the leather cannon* of the Finns, and all those Swedish novelties."

"I would feel better, Küttner, if this day hadn't happened. How high above my father I felt when he had to hand over to me this realm that lay almost ruined.* But I! But I! See there, no, don't see there, no one should see there. It's a horror. We waged war on the Palatinate and

Bohemia, were unfazed by burning villages, corpses along the roads were a joy to us, we marched through as victors. The things we saw. We were victors, Küttner. Our land, our Bavaria for which we have cared and scrimped and saved, must now endure all that. I let them mock me as a miser and a brute, but see how we all thrived so splendidly. I staked everything on this land, myself as well, my noble House, the honour of my name, the fame of generations past. Do you know who'll come along now, who it is: a fat rude coarse man, from morn till night he rolls Lutheran curses around in his mouth like tasty morsels. He'll wallow like a swine in our pure lovely churches. Our beloved towns, oh you know them well, he'll come snuffling around, will hurl fire upon them, squeeze them dry. I shan't be there, I'll be somewhere else with the court. Oh I don't want this. What is it hanging over me. Do I deserve this for my sins." He had released the young envoy, his head drooped to his breast, he gulped, stammered.

Küttner knelt before him, stroked his knee. "Not so loud, gracious sir. Walls have ears. Look, lift your head, see me. I am your envoy in Paris. Think of King Louis, don't bury your soul in the swamp like this. King Louis is well-disposed, he needs you. Count Tilly wasn't destroyed, there by Leipzig. The Swede will be halted."

"You believe it, Küttner? Be glad. I am already half in flight. Already lamenting my poor people of Munich, the pious monasteries, all the wonderful sights. There is no escape."

"In Paris they count on Your Serenity. They hope you will read the moment correctly."

"Meaning?"

"You are no friend of Habsburg, they believe, and for sure no friend of Spain, because he deprives you of the Palatinate. They say in Paris that after the battle at Leipzig you understand the true import of the situation. That somehow you'll make peace with the Swede. France has done so already."

The Prince wiped his brow; averting his face he invited Küttner to sit at his side. "Don't kneel there. Tell me."

"I can only report what Father Joseph told me when news of Breitenfeld came: I am to ensure my Electoral lord does not feel this disaster as a setback for him. It was the imperial army that was defeated. It was a warning sent out beyond the Regensburg road, to Vienna; a sign to your Electoral Serenity not to keep with the wrong party."

"I have not been defeated, I have not."

"Rather the learned and worldly-wise Father suggested you have in fact gained an advantage. It lies in your hands to let the Emperor know how matters stand and how you see them. And finally, it is not for you to defend Pomerania and Lower Saxony. The League was not founded to liberate Pomerania." Maximilian forced a smile as he looked sidelong at him: "You, dear Küttner, are saying I am not defeated. Things will work out well again."

"Electoral Serenity, your hour has come. I repeat what the Cardinal and the priest have often emphasised: you must take courage. The Emperor is judged. All German Estates turn from him, after those dreadful deeds of Friedland that he sanctioned. Seize the hour. You must act now in self defence. Your land and your noble House are at stake."

"What did Richelieu say?"

“Do not stand in the way of the Swede. Do as His Most Christian Majesty has done: favour him, and seek your advantage. France advises this. She advises this because you are her ally, her natural ally, in the struggle against Habsburg. France has an advantage in you, she will not offer bad advice.”

Maximilian, an arm on the slim young man’s shoulder, remained silent, he made a long face, wrinkled his nose; softly: “Do you think he killed the stork?”

Küttner, a little taken aback: “The wound was not deep.”

“A disgusting person. Let me look at you. Also a person, one who will not abandon me. I shall have to keep you close. And how, in Richelieu’s opinion, should I best mollify the Swede?”

“Mollify, Serenity – I speak as frankly as you will permit – that is actually not necessary. Who, in your view, is the Swede. I’ve heard lots of tales about him. He’s as calculating as you or I. Like any stupid Lutheran he has his hatreds, but they don’t upset his calculations. First of all, your League is out of the game. You have no need to mollify him with words.”

“How I feel lamed, as if from a fall. I feel it in my bones – a dull ache, a nagging dread. Am I not in a terrible wild dream that will not leave me.”

“Then all that’s needed, Serenity, is your command, how Tilly must comport himself. Order him to offer an armistice.”

“I would not be defeated, would not be beaten, in Richelieu’s view.”

“A decision will be helpful to Your Serenity.”

“It’s unthinkable. My arm, my bones.”

“The situation has turned to your favour. You could play a decisive role.”

“I shall stand up now. You will help me, Küttner, and accompany me to my room. I am glad. I feel better already.”

Maximilian hobbled on the arm of the slim gentle man the length of the art gallery. They crossed the courtyard. The autumnal air caused the Prince to shiver. He regarded his companion with a smile. The chamberlain was waiting at the wide stairs up to the entrance. The Prince felt he might fall asleep earlier than in a long time. But when he awoke in the night and lay there on his back, he could feel the strange sensation of bruising, broken bones, crushing in all his limbs. He fled, struggling against it, back into sleep.

The French envoy Charnacé, redheaded warrior, having been received next day together with Küttner by the Prince and his privy council, set off to meet Gustavus Adolphus. They had not far to ride. He was camped at Erfurt, just across the Thuringian Forest, having overwhelmed Leipzig Halle and Querfurt. Fourteen thousand Swedes occupied the town. The king was lodged at the sign of the Tall Lily. He took the visitors on a little ride around; their discussion began on the Petersberg, with its Jesuit monastery. The fat king was surrounded by German princes, he was loudly jovial with them, they came to no conclusion. Making ready to depart he invited them, as they pondered their dubious situation, to follow him for a few days.

Via Gotha and Schmalkalden in one heave, through Armstadt and Schleusingen in another, the Swedish army pressed on across the Thuringian Forest. During this push the king and his entourage would speak to no one. The envoys were entertained splendidly, soft Küttner was

distressed and pained to see how quickly they came south. Charnacé declared with a curse that he would leave in two or three days. He too was alarmed; he said two or three days, but could not tear himself away from the intoxicating advance, had to see where it was heading; maybe it would turn west towards the Rhine. The Würzburg fortress of Königshofen surrendered at the first bugle blast. With drums silenced the small imperial garrison at Schweinfurt slipped away. Panic-stricken terror ran ahead of the Swedish horde. They approached Würzburg, wealthy seat of the prince-bishop Franz von Hatzfeld. The town capitulated as soon as it heard the bugles. On the left bank of the Main, on a steep cliff, the strong fortress Marienberg. The commandant would not surrender. During the night it was stormed within a single hour. None of the garrison survived.

They inspected the loot: relics, silver-gilt busts regalia chalices church treasures. They all rode into town; in the prince's Silver Room Gustavus, fat hand pointing out to Charnacé this or that object, selected gems pearls gold and silver items for himself; most was left to the disposal of his officers. There too was the prince-bishop's library, assembled over decades by the most learned Echter von Mespelbrunn; they rode past; the king ordered that it, and the libraries of the university and the Jesuit college, be packed up for transport back to Uppsala.

At last the king deigned to sit with the two foreign envoys in the Armoury for a discussion. Charnacé first spoke on his own account with the king, who sat on the edge of a drum, banged his sidearm on the booming skin; he embraced Charnacé, roared: "Drink, marquis, drink! To think our friendship has proved so helpful to us! This calls for a drink." At the king's call, jugs and beakers of wine were brought in. Charnacé drank without enthusiasm; he hoped for still greater victories from this campaign and how does the King see it ending. That, said Gustavus slurping, is what they all want to know; doesn't himself know exactly, in war Dame Fortune holds the cards. Then he pretended not to understand the Frenchman, how far he meant to advance towards the Rhine, presented an exaggerated jovial demeanour; Charnacé had a hard task to interject that his sovereign had taken himself to Metz, which for decades had lain under French protection, and there aimed to soothe the populace, who had called for him. The Swede with a shattering laugh: Glad to hear it, he knows they fear him, to them he's Old Nick, he'll eat them up, devour them, it's a fine old game. – He was inscrutable.

When the Bavarian joined them, the Swede excelled himself with loud overdone compliments. Now chairs and benches had to be dragged in, Grubbe and Oxenstierne must celebrate with them here in the Armoury, everyone being so high-spirited. Küttner had to mention that he would like a private session with his French friend. Gustavus enjoyed this, found it lovely. So let them sit here all three together, having a nice chat; he, Küttner, of whom he had already heard, was a splendid young fellow; how delightful, you can almost believe the man's a noblewoman, he's so pretty and distinguished; and for that he deserves to be taken up with doubled hospitality by me and my headquarters, in good Swedish style.

Now Küttner, pale and miserable because he could not bring the foreign king around to his line of discussion amid the swaggering tittletattle and snickering, began softly to present his pleadings. With no change of demeanour Gustavus urged them not to disrespect all this here, these extraordinary wines; Küttner should stop worrying, he's a splendid young fellow, it's a real pleasure to listen to him. And so Küttner, cautiously seconded by Charnacé at his

side, had to clarify what his master had tasked him with: Bavaria's desire not to impede the mighty victorious progress of the Swede, and to enter into a position of neutrality. Gustavus, rising from the drum and setting down his beaker, cried: What a lucky day, never was such a lucky day, what could be dearer to him than to live in peace with his fellow man. Standing there huge in his leather jerkin with the big scarf, he stretched his arms high on either side: So let them be smashed, those who bring discord and death into the world with their hateful tyrannical behaviour; I brim over with joy that everything has turned out as I thought. He embraced blushing Küttner (Charnacé smiled a melancholy smile): In you I embrace the Bavarian Prince-elector. And he gave a great belch. You will soon have my reply. He made his hearty farewells, still bellowing laughter like an ogre and referring them to his chancellery.

By the railing outside the cathedral in Würzburg, Swedish soldiers entertained themselves at four gaming tables open to all; beside them sacks of thalers and ducats. Livestock driven into the square bellowed; for one Imperial thaler a cow was cut loose, a sheep for a few coppers. A few days later, as the envoys rode across the cathedral square amid the general din of military bands gamblers livestock, a royal courier came hurrying behind them with a letter.

In their lodging they read the dreadful Swedish reply. Bavaria's neutrality was cordially welcomed by the king; but in addition the League must reduce its strength by ten thousand, and of course also give back all that had been taken from the Protestants, and leave the king in possession of all he had occupied and would occupy. In return the king would not pass through Bavaria; he allowed a fourteen-day armistice for consideration.

Küttner was sure of only one thing: he must leave Würzburg at once, but whither he had no idea. He wailed: "I can't carry this reply to my master." Before his eyes was the earnest send-off Maximilian had given him.

"Come now!" Charnacé urged; he looked forward this meeting with the Bavarian, who had for so long resisted an alliance with France. "You must go to him."

"Help me, marquis, support me in his presence."

"You are afraid of your master? But you did so well!"

Maximilian would not receive the Frenchman. Dejected before Küttner he groaned: "It's a blessing; we have fourteen days; I can still avert this. Or it's a trial: I must drag it out for fourteen days and still it will happen, I must let my land and myself be destroyed, if I am to retain my honour. Don't betray me to my father, Küttner. Stay with me these two weeks. It may happen that everything changes. Do you not think it may all change. Surely this can't really be happening."

Küttner wept, as soon as he was alone.

40. Sweden Victorious

AS THE FOREIGN conqueror approached, mutinies broke out among the Bavarian militias; many fled, tried to hide their property and bring themselves and their dependants to safety. For the first time in this strictly governed realm it happened that the Estates protested at new war taxes, many absented themselves from the Assembly convened in Munich. Agitators went

through the land. Near Preising a short fellow turned up, his woodsman's face a tangled thicket, people hurried to hear him, he preached from the shingles of a cottage roof:

"So here comes the Swede, and ho, there's war in the land. Would that it were to your advantage! War is a matter for great lords. Before anyone can chop off their heads, they make haste to divert the war onto the common people. The prince-elector in Munich has it in his hands to make peace; but it doesn't suit him, he has horses and can soon be away. Cut down the princes, all in a heap. Save your skins, you've nothing else to lose. You want to be dolts and scoundrels until that worthy gent has you by the scruff? Until he's squeezed you with his proclamations and provosts and corporals and his whole devil's guard to force you to serve him as mercenaries in his war and be struck dead and hacked to bits while the Swede devours your cattle, fires your barns, ravishes your womenfolk, throws your kids into the flames? The prince's corporals will have their fun with you, just you watch. Lazy slow-witted folk you are. For what is a prince, a lord, an elector, a big powerful emperor. Bend your back before him and he's your emperor. Bare your buttocks to him all together and you'll see how long he stays emperor. He's powerful because you fear him, you scaredycats, that's all. He has no power. Look at the seat of your pants, that's where you'll find it. This governing business is nothing but deceit and delusion, from the lowest throne to the highest. It's all your fault, the lot of you, that we're in this pickle, you should be clubbed to death as you stand there gawping with your mouths wide open. The war would do you good if it made you see and feel and taste what kind of godforsaken rogues and scoundrels you are. The sins you've committed through your stupidity and foolishness no Saviour can ever make good, He could come to you and you wouldn't even look at Him as He tries to help you. Princes rule because of your stupidity and fear, their throne is in your head, you stand surety for their wicked deeds and their arrogance. Your wretchedness is such that I'd need a mouth like the Tower of Babylon to describe it. For the whole feared power of princes and tyrants is scarcely more than a dream-scare, an imagined nightmare. Cowardly dolts allow princes to grow big. Oh you poor wretched ne'erdowells and lumps of wood. Princes are a shame, they are your shame. They are devils incarnate, and you are the devil's dam and gran'dam. Soon the Swede will be here and you'll see how the devil seeks out his helper and thanks you for fattening him up so sleek. Run off to Munich. There he sits on the throne you built for him so he can slice strips from your hide at his leisure. Tell him: Mister Prince-elector, war is on the way! Will the Swede come or won't he. Help us. He'll let you be clubbed to death to save himself. Pull yourselves together into a single heap of violence. Take up your knives. And if his answer does not please you, you can have some fun: princes have a throat between head and shoulders, have some fun with it. A man such as he sprays no more blood than a calf."

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On beyond the Thuringian Forest to Königshofen, Würzburg. Westward down the Main, through wintry Franconia. "The Goths are coming, the Vandals are coming!"

In Würzburg the Swede had himself enthroned as Duke of Franconia;* members of the religious foundations, invited to the marketplace by mayor chancellor and councillors, dazed and with expansive gestures of loyalty, swore an oath before God and on the opened Gospels to acknowledge none other than his Royal Majesty of Sweden, his heirs and government, as

the sole territorial and hereditary sovereign. In the tumultuous marketplace a Swedish general mounted steps to toast the Würzburgers in mangled German – they kept their heads down – as his new compatriots and good Swedes. The Swede swarmed out to claim the rest of the region. Franconia's abbeys and monasteries fell to his generals. Nothing but ownerless land, people and property. The towns of Minden, Eichsfeld near Mainz, came into the hands of the general Duke George of Luneburg. The Free Imperial Knighthood sent their director to pay homage, big-mouthed Adam von Rotenhan, along with two counts of Erbach; the Benedictine monastery of Amorbach was casually thrown their way. "The Protestant faith is victorious!" roared heavily-laden Finns, Swedes on snorting looted steeds. None could refuse them a thing, no one and nothing must be locked away. They practised righteousness with fire sword and torture: The Empire has hitherto lain in shameful serfdom; no coddling of papists, and no better for Lutherans! the invaders jeered.

Ever more Germans came creeping about the tasty banquet table. The Count of Löwenstein-Wertheim was stuffed to the gills. The council of the imperial town of Schweinfurt bowed to the cavaliers officers generals and His Royal Grace himself; the town acquired fourteen Würzburg villages, along with properties of the noble house of Echter, monasteries. Nuremberg lay to the rear, they could not ignore the town, it must decide. The learned men and big names of the town took counsel, the dreadful new Duke of Franconia enquired insistently via his intermediaries as to their attitude; they submitted, promised to deliver whatever he wanted. The whole region, assailed by whip and spur, pledged seventy-two Roman Months* worth of taxes to support the Protestant commons. In Regensburg the three clerical Electors had helped bring the great Holy Empire into good order, they had chased away the mighty beast Wallenstein from his army, his regiments scattered to the winds. Their power now comprised letters written on flammable paper: Imperial Constitution, the *capitulatio caesarea* – the King of Sweden Goths and Vandals would not even read them. He asked how many mounted men they had. Then he asked if they were his friends, in which case they should provide him with forty thousand imperial thalers every month, deliver provender, hand over their fortifications. Otherwise he would lay waste their towns, and if they rebelled would not spare the babe in its mother's womb. The clerical lords spat.

With twelve thousand men he headed for Frankfurt am Main, and on out of the Bockenheimer Gate to Höchst. Kastel Bingen and the Mouse Tower* came under his control. Icy winter. He needed no more troops to achieve victory. Eight Swedish knights took the town of Eberbach on the Neckar. They looted; the authorities had them interned. With six thousand foot and three thousand mounted, many English among them, the army headed towards Mainz. Two days later the town hoisted the white flag. Von Wittenhorst had been sitting there, he decamped to Luxemburg lock stock and barrel – including two field guns.

And His Swedish Majesty, having come from Uppsala by ship across the Baltic Sea, having conquered Pomerania and Brandenburg, and at Breitenfeld swept aside the imperial Field-marshal Tilly, now settled for the winter in the fortress of Martinsburg in Mainz, on the bank of the Rhine. The Swedes, unmolested, indulged their barbaric pleasures across the town. Horrendous sums were imposed on clergy and laity alike. Such pillaging being insupportable, the foreigners invaded churches monasteries colleges, and auctioned off the chattels through

the windows to burghers from Frankfurt and Hanau. What the burghers owed was assessed house by house, the houses of debtors torn down street by street and the timbers sold. Redoubts were swiftly dismantled, monasteries and chapels demolished, churches were converted into rubble for fortifications. As the demolition progressed, to annoy the Catholics they sang "A mighty fortress is our God". Saint Alban's church, flattened, became the Gustavus Fort at the confluence of the Main with the Rhine.

Thus, said the Swedish general, do we help you to praise God.

The Swedish king lingered several months in Mainz. He lay in the harsh light of Terror. Germans scurried about him. From back home, from Sweden, he heard little; what news came was cryptic: complaints over the heavy burden that lay on the land, anger at the devouring German monster; trade depressed, no silver to be had, the copper coinage debased; unprecedented price increases, whole districts a wasteland, parishes that lack even one strong arm. The king enquired cautiously about six regiments of foot; the Council approved just three. Their reply intimated that the German war had never been envisaged as such a wild conquest. Gustavus pooh-poohed his annoyance: Maybe so, but he has Germany, they'll come round. He meant to become the prime Protestant power in Europe, and sit with his back straight facing the Emperor and the head of the papists, as head of the Protestant interest.

And in fact, although he may already have been pious, after his victories he let actions speak. That winter every foreign house of God and chapel fell to him without mercy; yet he said that as far as lay within his power, there should be no mocking the name of God. Violent as he was, here he seemed to fear overstepping the mark. Oxenstierna himself marvelled to see how the King's eyes flashed when the cursing around him grew too loud, when he personally handed blaspheming cavaliers over to the provosts and was not satisfied until he saw them on the gallows. In Martinsburg that Christmas he addressed worthies from Nuremberg, showed them a document, a book by an archdeacon at Rochlitz in Saxony about the Swedish triple laurel wreath and the triumphant crown of victory; in it he was called Joshua, Gideon, Mattathias, there was mention of the Apocalypse, it suggested that he go to Rome and destroy the city. Terror gripped the worthies of Nuremberg, they listened humbly to it all. The pot-bellied giant stood there in his plumeless hat, irresistibly sure of himself he gazed into their faces as if they were lambs: What Bavaria and the Catholic hereditary lands had once achieved! If it all comes together, Pomerania, Mecklenburg, Upper and Lower Saxony, the Palatinate, Franconia, Swabia, the imperial cities, Hansa towns.... They were glad to be allowed to leave.

And as the resting lion received ever more envoys from the timorous German Estates and sent them off weighed down with alliances and obligations – Duke of Celle, Bishop of Minden, Counts of Wetterau, Westerwald, town councillors from Brunswick, Ulm, Lübeck, Luneburg, Bremen, the deposed Duke of Mecklenburg – lovely refined Frederick of the Palatinate took his leave of the *Hoogmogende Heren* at The Hague. The millstone must be loaded once more on the wagon. The entire company stood on benches when he appeared in the doorway, doffed his gaily plumed hat, showed his slack somewhat bloated very grave face and raised his left arm as his hard blue eyes that pealed like bells passed over them. Now he is off to meet happier times, nodded the grey president earnestly – remaining seated, with his hat on. They, his hosts, are overjoyed to see their guest and friend so near to fulfilling his wishes; he who

perseveres will gain the crown. Frederick's lips moved silently. His thoughts were elsewhere, he merely inclined his head, heard them bestow on him an honorarium of fifteen thousand thalers. Dutch riders swept him up together with his gushing English Elizabeth and the court, and escorted them into winter-blanketed Hessen. Here's Hessen, here's Frankfurt, here's Mainz. The carriages rolled behind buglers into the city. Outside the banner-fluttering tapestry-hung Martinsburg, amid the rubble of buildings and seething crowds of Swedes and Finns, there on an armoured horse the enormous laughter-belching Gustavus Adolphus. Snow fell on their shoulders. On the arm of his Swedish Majesty the blooming buxom Englishwoman was led up into the great banqueting hall, its sideboards aglow with looted German landscapes. Behind them trudged the lean Winter King, silent, eyes helpless, touching the extended fingers of a long thin lady with hectic cheeks, heavy purple brocade, her little screams became more hysterical from one minute to the next: the foreigner's queen.

At table the Palatine swooned a little when the foreigner addressed him as 'Majesty'. What did it remind him of; they had passed him finger-basin, towel; the foreigner wanted him to go first, he's King of Sweden, why would he do that? They tried to liven him up with art. Masked ball. Pitch torches in the four corners of every room, half-dark the long line of opened salons. Violins from the bishop's orchestra, trumpeters, lifeguards. The King danced ungainly folk dances dressed in Russian costume, his caftan was of cloth of gold, his head under the white eggshaped cap sank into the high sable collar, his feet trod and stamped in clumsy red shoes, the toes adorned with pearls. His arms in their wide tubular sleeves flung left and right. The Palatine lady leaped beside him as a Turkish warrior, showed her plump legs in black silk stockings, slit-sided boots; her wide-pleated skirt with violet flowers fell to her knees; she had wound a green turban about her ears, you couldn't see her blond hair, only her full sweaty glowing face. The Palatine himself not in costume, eyes dull, drinking in a dark alcove, monopolising a small table. Sharp little Rusdorf approached with a greeting. "Rusdorf! What are you up to. Dance with me, Rusdorf."

"I am not invited, Electoral Serenity."

"Pfui, dance! The king wasn't invited, he's dancing."

"The king? He's the host."

"Leave me be. He's not invited." Rusdorf thought his master drunk, tried to see his face across the table.

"You pester me, you give me no peace."

"My lord Elector is so alone, I shall summon his serene consort."

"I'll say this loud and clear: I live and die as the one I am. You should not have revealed this to me here, you should not have had me fetched here, I want no part in it."

Rusdorf, quietly: "Then your only recourse is to submit to the Emperor."

"Should have done so. You never advised me to."

"The king!" whispered Rusdorf as the Swede approached. Frederick drank, drank, groaned. His eyes began to glisten.

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Never, as the shattering news came from the west, could the court in Vienna reconcile itself to the recall of Wallenstein. To the terrible news from Mainz was added intelligence that Philipp Sötern, Electoral archbishop of Trier, had placed himself under the protection of the French king, in his horror of the Swede had handed to the French his fortresses of Coblenz and Ehrenbreitstein. A deeply shaming piece of news arrived from Cologne: the Prince-bishops of Mainz Würzburg Osnabrück Worms had fled to that town; through their spokesman Archbishop Ferdinand of Cologne they assured the Emperor of their continued devotion; but the Emperor was far away, their lands, the Church, their own lives in dreadful peril; unable to delay while awaiting the Emperor's consent they had decided to seek help from his most Christian majesty King Louis; their representatives were even now on the way to Paris.

"What more can befall us?" asked Trautmannsdorf, "in Germany we're a worm-eaten apple; Habsburg is rotten, the Swede is the worm, the Frenchman is the worm. Help cut them away."

"What will be left of the apple."

"Soon nothing will be left to us, my dear friend Eggenberg, other than Swedish schnapps or a sword through the neck from our old benefactor Wallenstein."

"I know you want Friedland back, and the Emperor is not disinclined. And how long will it take, Bavarian Maximilian asks, to settle the appointment. We'll have to go and fetch him. No good will come of it, Trautmannsdorf."

"And I thought the Breitenfeld encounter had cured my friend of his disinclination."

"Friedland is strong as the devil, I knew it from the start. It might not have been the Swede on our backs, but there would have been some other calamity. Who knows if the Emperor would still be in Vienna – if you and I would still be discussing imperial matters."

The count laughed. "Would that be a problem? You mean Friedland would be sitting here. You know well I'd have no enthusiasm for that. But I wonder: will it be pleasant to sip Swedish schnapps here? More pleasant than allowing Friedland to lop off our heads, painlessly?"

Salvation could still be sought from Spain and the pope. Spain was ready to shoulder any burden. From Pressburg the archbishop of Esztergom, Pázmány, that beacon of faith, rode off to Pope Urban in Rome. Ferdinand had received his old counsellor Eggenberg kindly, had listened to his proposal, had read the letter he drafted to the Holy Father: "We are abandoned by those whose interest should be the same as ours. And not merely this: the king who goes by the name 'most Christian' gives money and other means to the Swede, to make war on us. This is of concern not only to us, but to the survival of the Church, and with it Your Holiness. Adherents of the Church in Germany stretch imploring hands towards Your Holiness. We request that Your Holiness admonish the most Christian king to end his alliance with the Swede, into which he has entered in contravention of the Regensburg agreement, and urge him to come to our side against the destroyer of the Church."

"Such pretty letters you write, Eggenberg. Pretty style, cunningly put. What a lawyer we have lost in you."

"Our need is great, most gracious sire. It is enormous, almost unspeakably so. The Empire has never been in such peril."

“And is it not shaming for us to write such a letter to the Holy Father?”

“Just this once I beg Your Imperial Majesty to humour me.”

“Why so serious, Eggenberg; I’ll gladly humour you.”

And when Eggenberg silently held out the quill: “See how you tremble!” Eggenberg stood rigid, held out the quill; after a while Ferdinand scribbled without saying a word.

And having signed, Ferdinand rose silently from his chair as if struck by a thought. The jostling confusion of carved men and women on the arms sank away behind him, his face was lowered, twisted in a smile of excitement, his high voice held a slight question: “It is good that I have signed this. This is the right path, Eggenberg. I endorse it. I am with you. You pose a question to the Holy Father. It should be pleasing to me to hear his answer. I should like to hear his voice.” And then, as Eggenberg expressed his gratitude: “Eggenberg, the Virgin put you up to this. How did you come upon the notion? You pose a question to the Holy Father. So, we shall hear the Holy Father’s voice. We shall hear him.”

“He will not abandon us.”

Ferdinand raised an arm, held up the index finger. “The question will march up to him. He can’t evade it. His spirit will have to answer. A trial. Temptation.” His hands felt behind him for the chair, he lowered himself down, his laugh good-humoured and distracted; propped his head over the table where the letter lay. “I know how he’ll answer, Urban the Eighth in Rome.”

The great Pázmány had already set out to impel the Holy Father to the protection of the faith that was the sole path to salvation in the Roman Empire. The journey from Hungary, during which the awful Swede continued his devastations, took a month. Roman nobles and cardinals came riding reverently out to greet him. Before he was allowed to say a word, the pope bestowed on him a cardinal’s headgear. Then the pope sought to scare him off by warning him not to stoop to the level of ambassador, he a cardinal with the same rank as a king. Pázmány’s acquiescence smoothed things over; the pope could evade no longer.

How far would the Holy Father allow matters to go in his fear of Habsburg; whether the many millions of pious German souls, adherents of the True Faith, were to pay for it with their salvation as soon as the heretic fell upon them. Now the Italian, nervously baring his teeth, forbade himself vulgar rhetoric. Pázmány stood unyielding, though trembling. He thought of what Lamormaini had told him of the Emperor; strove on the Emperor’s behalf. The pope, striding around the Hungarian on strong bones, growled more angrily the more he felt himself exposed; he shouted threatened mocked became venomous.

At the second meeting, as expected, there was no discussion. Urban, rubbing his moustache and side whiskers, jovially smacking his lips, declared how matters stood; he had made a little note of the main points. Draw the French king away from his alliance with Sweden? He has always taken King Louis for a pious Catholic, expects from him nothing but good for the faith, will admonish him. Alliance with Spain and Habsburg? No, he will fight as little against Habsburg as against France. Financial support? He has no money. “Enough; not another word. You came here as a cardinal, I’ve heard enough from you as ambassador. Don’t demean yourself, don’t rob yourself of precious time.” Conferences, ceremonies, masses.

And then, behind his back, jubilation breaking out among the nobles on the Capitol. “The imperials are withdrawing! God’s vengeance! God’s mercy has prevented them from achieving their goal. Now they won’t plunder Rome.”

The great teacher Pázmány departed in shame, accompanied for a while by papal pomp. Shame and shock: clearly the Church was no longer united. The journey went too quickly, he would like to travel two months, three months.

And three months later it was no better; he wanted to make haste, shuffle it all off, bury himself in books. Ashamed before the heretics.

Like a fire-spewing dragon, the little inconspicuous ever so friendly Eggenberg stood before him: “You’ve no need to make excuses. I know you did what a man can do. That fellow in Rome did not act like a man. It means ruin. It means treason against the papal throne. We in dire need, the millions of Catholics in our land; and he thinks of politics. We his most loyal adherents, the Church’s richest benefactors, and he can’t offer support, has no weapons and no money.” Dismayed Pázmány comforted him; Eggenberg grew more bitter, stood shattered. “It means the pope lays us open to Wallenstein. Orders us to lay hands on ourselves. A low false stroke, so low. Richelieu whispered it to him, it is so inhumanly cunning I have no idea how to counter it. No doubt they’ve already talked it over with Friedland, it’ll be easy to rule with him around. They’ll see their error. He’ll fall on the Empire and on Habsburg, then on the pope and France. They’ll rue what they’ve done to us. Let the weapon be turned on them, let them be the targets of the crime.” For hours Pázmány talked to his distraught friend, then confused words as they parted, and head over heels out of Vienna, to Hungary.

Eggenberg pulled himself together next day for an audience with Ferdinand. Every step cost him a resolution. When Ferdinand saw him he sat up with the same strangely excited face, breathed: “Well well, here you come. Now, what will you report to me.” Eggenberg reported how Pázmány had returned in anger from Rome, where he had spoken with the pope. The Emperor, still on his feet: “Well well, he spoke with the pope. And the pope, what did he say?”

“He gave nothing in writing. Noted three points on a scrap of paper, and read them out to the cardinal.”

“I see. He read them out.”

“He said it was not possible to direct more funds to us at present, it would not do to send the king of France a sharp warning, or advise him to join our side, and as for allying himself with us, the pope flatly rejected the idea.”

“It is not possible to direct more funds to us, or to ally himself with me. He cannot send King Louis a sharp warning. Well well!”

Old Eggenberg, beside himself, howled at his Emperor, tears ran to the corners of his wide mouth, he wept without averting his face, rocked his head from side to side shuddering in pain. Ferdinand, quite composed, played with his scarf, swung his Golden Fleece. As if it were nothing, he suggested that Eggenberg might stop crying.

“Weeping. Who will weep. All sorts of things happen in a life. Are we abandoned then? The things that happen.” And as he yawned, his eyes suddenly flicked to the side. He stood, stared pale and deep in thought down at his gaiters, stretched: “So that was the story. The

pope. One shouldn't take everything so tragically." He stepped down, placed an arm from behind around Eggenberg's waist, said brightly: "I have an idea. Do you know how late it is? Nearly four. Snowy weather, that's where the gloom comes from. Come, my friend, let's take a sleighride." And he whistled and sang: "Who would shoulder a heavy load, not his to carry?"

"I am glad to see," the counsellor smiled vaguely in sudden consternation, "that Your Majesty takes it so lightly."

"Oh, if only you knew all the things that cross one's path."

At the door Ferdinand yawned aloud, suddenly shook his flabby body. He heaved a ragged grumbling sigh, said something under his breath.

Said his farewell with enthusiastic tenderness, strutted excited and lively as an actor before a visitor whose hand he squeezes and presses to his breast.

41. On the Move Again

ON THE WOODED castle hill above broad flowing Moldau, the Bohemian lurked. Michna, fat wheezing giant, seeing him squat there hoped to save himself, Friedland's glory had wafted away, he meant to tear free. He rode to Vienna. Their lordships welcomed him with delight. Abbot Anton purred like a cat, this man will buy our way free of the Duke. As Michna sorted out his affairs, selling off a part of his properties to raise funds for loans to firm up his standing with the court, Wallenstein's blow fell on him. He had thought the Bohemian dead and done for, his place seemed vacated; and here comes his hand flying against me. The properties were sold, the greater part of his estates. Before the new owners could pay up and take possession, Wallenstein's men, musketeers and cuirassiers maintained in Prague at the Duke's expense, forcibly occupied the estates, and in flagrant violattion of the law refused to budge despite missive after missive to the squatters and Duke from the Governor of Bohemia's chancellery.

Michna, raging at the Viennese court, thought it would be simple to counter the dismissed General. But the war counsellors unexpectedly declined to take action. Michna demanded troops: But the Swede draws everyone to him! The counsellors bestirred themselves to request the Duke to withdraw his mercenaries. At first no answer came from the Hradschin, and then: Wallenstein has no influence over bands of deserters. They had to bend or break. The counsellors advised the Serb not to pursue the deplorable business, he knows what dire straits the Empire is in, the army has faded away; finally they can undertake nothing against the Duke of Friedland, they dare not; is there anything that might be done in mitigation. So Michna, who had thought to usurp Friedland's nest, was now forced to negotiate with him.

Had to return from Vienna, go back to Prague, and since his letters and couriers were not received had to go himself to the Hradschin, and was likewise not received. His wealth declined day by day, soldiers frittering his possessions away, stealing his tools, driving away his stewards. For half a week Michna ran about the streets, stood bewildered at his house, waited by the door. When he was received at the Hradschin, Wallenstein spoke softly, counting every syllable; returned a part of the estates, but only a part. The Duke had a chit in front of him listing the released properties; Michna sighing, his mind a blank, reached for the quill to acknowledge the list with his signature. He remained in Prague.

This event drew mighty de Witte to the defeated man's house. In mute curiosity, headshaking, he heard the details. One must be careful, he warned, this shows that the Duke does not see the game as lost, that Vienna still fears him. We must be on our guard, rumours abound that the Duke has something up his sleeve. Michna should perk up, with a Friedland still in the Empire one has ways to grow rich. He smiled: "The key to every cupboard." Michna's mouth stretched in distaste: "I've had enough."

The Duke lurked on the Hradschin. Playful polite respectful letters came from Habsburg; the couriers were extravagantly rewarded, the letters read with ever greater satisfaction. More frequently to the palace came his brother in law from the family Trčka von Lipa, Count Adam Erdmann, a merry blond-bearded man who spoke in a rumbling basso, at dances escorted his sweet Maximiliane and conducted gentle flirtations and horseplay with her sister, the Duke's wife. The Duke looked on benignly, he loved his brother in law. Trčka lent a willing hand to scare off the Bohemian cousins who tried to bestir the Duke to lead a rebellion. Friedland, ailing, would not let him return to his seat of Dimokur; the duchess too begged him to stay.

Wallenstein was in a strange state. He was dreadfully changed. The hard face had acquired deep wrinkles, the hair over his ears had turned white, stood in tufts, the eye sockets were too big for the little pupils that lay far behind the lids as if about to disappear into his head. The Breitenfeld business had broken over him at a critical juncture; he had been preparing a trip to Hamburg with de Witte to sell his entire Bohemian holdings, in order to undertake some enterprise from this far corner of the Empire in conjunction with the Hansa towns, maybe with Christian of Denmark too, who was keeping very quiet. The courier who brought news of Breitenfeld – like everyone else, he assumed the Duke would be delighted – was upset when the dismissed General, sitting beside Trčka in the autumnal garden house spitting mussel shells, turned quite pale, his lips quivered. The sharp little eyes flicked left and right, squinted unfocused; the long torso slumped over the arm of the bench, hung dangling over the parquet.

An hour later Friedland stood up, staggered on Trčka's arm up and down past the bow windows of his pillared hall, jaw jutting, teeth grinding horribly: "He has anticipated me, the fat Swede. I thought he might. He's beaten Tilly. He's coming for the Emperor. They're defenceless. And so all my work was for the Swede, that braggart from Uppsala." He spat, groaned, his fists worked away murderously: "But Tilly. Good old man. Good old. Worked for Spain. Thought he could take my place. By Jesus' holy blood, I'd like to see how he ends up. The Swede will think he can come, here's the Empire, waiting just for him. Where is the Swede. You must go to him – to Arnim. I'm not dead yet."

Croaking, roaring out loud, wailing: "Stop shuffling. Put me down. Where is the Swede. He'll kill me with his own hands. How long shall we still be in Bohemia. We're defenceless! The beast advances by the day, and I can't move." Whimpering, mad with rage, he allowed himself to be settled back in his window seat. "I'm done for in this world. The Lutheran rogue, he's seized the moment, he's guzzling the roast. You'll see, he'll guzzle it all. Me included." His trembling fingers fumbled in the pockets of his green silk nightshirt, paper crackled: "Ferdinand. He wants to keep me sweet so I'll do nothing against him. Now here comes another. No letters to him. I, I cannot think." A cracked laugh, his lips were white again. Trčka held him tight, hurled loud words at Vienna. They bore him off to his bedroom.

When the Master of Horse Neumann joined them they debated far into the night. It emerged that the Duke, through close-mouthed intermediaries, had long since allied himself with the Swede; he had asked for several regiments to be sent to Bohemia, meant to fall on the Emperor in concert with the Swede. The malevolent man had delayed; once Johann Georg joined the Saxon regiments to his, the Satan ceased all contact. The Duke's fists clenched on the bedclothes: "He thought me a bumpkin, and made me one. Thinks he's won the game. Tilly lost his reputation and his honour in that battle. I shall suffer as much, unless I move."

In the early hours the frightened courier slipped into Trčka's room, asked to be released. His room lay directly over the Duke's, and he had heard the whole night as Friedland cursed him, called down pestilence upon him. The shouting had stopped only an hour ago.

Trčka's travelling carriage followed behind the courier. At the town gate they separated; the count and his four horses galloped for dear life away to the north. In the carriage beside him, squeezed into a corner, sat a shabby popeyed villain, featherless felt cap on unkempt Czech hair: Jaroslav Raschin, exiled Protestant, one of Wallenstein's secret envoys to the Swede, who had risked his life to come in disguise out of Saxony to the Duke. Beyond the border town of Teplitz they took horses, rode across the mountains through days of fog. Then Raschin pushed on ahead to call Arnim, now the Saxon field-marshal, to Chemnitz.

Whether, Count Trčka wanted to know, Arnim hates the Duke of Friedland, or is prepared to treat with him on matters of the common good. Then: whether the field-marshal is ready at this very moment and without hesitation to leave for a meeting with the Duke of Friedland at Trčka's castle of Kaunitz, between Pardubitz and Prague.

The passionate insistence of the two men persuaded Arnim to hire carriage and horses so they could all travel back together. So overwhelmed was he by the suddenness of their request that they were already past Chemnitz before he handed over to his lieutenant, and with some trepidation set down in writing, with absolute clarity, the order that no communication whatsoever from Swedish HQ should be acted upon unless he personally had seen it first. Then the man from the Uckermark snuggled under the pile of sheepskins between the other two as they raced into the mountains, and pondered his situation with growing dismay. A powerful sense of attachment to the solitary Duke surged afresh in him. His Duke was calling him, he had last seen him at the happy height of their success; then Friedland had packed him off to Poland. Great Friedland needed him. He completed the journey in shame, torment even.

Wallenstein was not yet at Kaunitz when they arrived. The field-marshal took a nag, and with Raschin encountered the Duke in his slow litter along the highroad. A painful constriction of the throat and behind the breastbone when the field-marshal caught sight of his former master, who waved to him from the litter, his face creased in laughter, head stuck out, congratulated him on his recent achievements: "I'd have liked a share in them, that's why I sent for you." And he prattled on in his old roguish way.

In his warm carpeted bedroom Wallenstein hopped restlessly up and down, leaning on his swordstick. A small table with wine stood near Arnim. The tall Duke: "No one knows I've left Prague. The doctor sits in my parlour. They think I'm ill, in my bed. I've lain long enough abed, don't you think, Arnim? Wonderful times, these. A splendid man, your Swede. Brings a fresh breeze into the world." Whispering: "And he has you by the short hairs. Tilly has run away.

You are such bold fellows, a joy to my heart. You'll help me take revenge. I'm grateful." Arnim, trying to hide his agitation, sang the Swede's praises. From Wallenstein a searing glare.

After pacing up and down in silence: "Does he have you in the bag too, Arnim? We want to bring peace to Germany. Put an end to the butchery. The moment is favourable, I wanted to tell you this. Don't miss out. And don't let yourself be misused by the Swede. I'm glad you're in favour with the Saxon Elector; remember, that's at least partly due to me. Now we must act swiftly and decisively. Firmly committed left and right. I wanted to tell you this."

After interrogating Arnim about his plans, he said suddenly: Emperor and League face an imminent ultimatum: peace, or total defeat with merciless conditions. To Arnim's horror the Duke demanded that he march into Bohemia. Gave the exact numbers of troops under negligent Marradas, who now commanded in Bohemia; the Saxon incursion would signal a Bohemian uprising, the Emperor pincered. He stood facing Arnim, who was also on his feet; uttered bursts of speech close to his face, eyes cast down, rapped the knuckle of his index finger on the table. Only as they parted did he gaze long and hard at his former subordinate, who had found it painful to listen to the undisguised bitter thirst for revenge that seemed to be revealed. Wallenstein's information on Bohemia was accurate – Arnim knew the numbers roughly; the Duke staked his own enormous estates on the desired incursion. He rode off in a turmoil of concern excitement joy confusion. Raschin tried with some passion to question him: "Has the moment come?" It was the question asked daily by the Bohemian exiles back at HQ.

Friedland and Trčka rode bugle-blaring into the snowy courtyard of the palace on Castle Hill. Happy lightly-steaming Trčka was greeted with kisses by his darling, who came running to meet them. Gentle Elisabeth took the Duke by the hands, led him carefully indoors, her arm at his waist. How they all shuddered under that wild cold voice they had not heard for many months. Who was it walking at their side, whom did the gentle duchess lead by the hand. Who squatted there telling with a laugh of his happy encounter with old Arnim. The duchess withdrew her hands, but only for a moment; then her heart contracted at a blessed memory: how she, an unmarried lady of the court, long years ago had for the first time trembled at this voice and had then fallen under the spell of the Bohemian everyone called a savage and who, as everyone warned her, sought only a connection to the court. Tenderly she took his hands again, kissed them. She listened in delight and humility to the snarling steely voice. And already at the door to his reception room the Duke, throwing off his furs, turned to Trčka and his companions, bent down to whisper slyly to him: This lovely palace will soon see an end to flirtations, we'll have packed our bags and set off on our travels, better today than tomorrow, trara the postillion's horn, and who can say where it will lead. And to Elizabeth, who had turned pale: But you'll come along this time, I'm not going to die far from you, as you fear; yes we must flee, didn't you know? But from whom?

To everyone's alarm he gave the order that very evening, and the stern grave Master of Horse Neumann with the greatest stealth spread word to pack up valuables and important things. The wider household was not informed. Each day one or two unobtrusive strongly covered wagons left the palace. To Moravia, supposedly. One dark winter's evening some weeks later, the Duke set off with his retinue. This occurred while the Swede sat in Electoral Mainz, and two days before Arnim led his Saxon troops into Bohemia.

For Arnim's Saxons were already on the move, amid unending cries of woe from the populace. Marradas was supreme commander in Prague; as the danger became apparent, Wallenstein advised him with a shrug to offer resistance. But against such a rapid incursion no resistance was possible. Suddenly, as if in a dream, the Bohemians saw the imperials fleeing from the capital; next day Saxon songs rang out in Old Town Square and by the Thein church.

From the battlements of the bridge-gate at Old Town protruded rods and spikes occupied by desiccated human heads from which the bodies had been severed. While they lived they were called Kapliř, Budovec, Dvořecký, Bila, Otto von Los, Valentin Kochan, Tobias Šteffek, Michalovic, Kober, Haunschild, Jesenius. The finches nesting in the mouths and on the heads of the rebels did not share in this day of Saxon rejoicing: their nests were destroyed. Splendid coffins were made; into them were laid the heads together with the spikes to which they had been attached and which had become to them a second body. From dazzling sunlight the tired faces went down into the silent chambers beneath the earth.

Suddenly the Battle of White Mountain – had never taken place.

Suddenly the land was – free.

The governor had fled.

Friedland, the supreme criminal, had fled.

Townspeople ran from their houses, took a look at the square, ran to the bridge. They came to a stop: the heads are gone. Should we rejoice? And outside the royal castle stood a most unlikely figure, one of whom tales were told, though none now believed he was real: white-bearded Count Thurn. Stood there in a tumult of cheering ecstatic Bohemians on the rainswept square beneath the curtained windows of the castle built by Libussa and Wenceslas. The defensive towers Daliborka and Mihulka; Matthias the emperor, Rudolf the emperor no longer dwelled there; was the blind dog Ferdinand, the idiot, still living in Vienna? The Bohemian Thurn and his protector the Saxon field-marshal Arnim von Boitzenburg lodged in the imperial apartments. In the choking jubilation of those winter days, the doors of the secret conventicles sprang open, the bearers of ancient renowned names ran about the streets and squares; enormous processions formed spontaneously in all parts of the city. They climbed with minds full of glory to the State Chancellery, waved ancient flags amid cheers and singing, before them the windows of the meeting hall from which men of liberty had flung the traitors Martinic Slavata Fabricius into the dry moat. In the Wladislaw Hall, in the ancient Hall of Homage, they stood before Thurn and could not believe it. Once a tumultuous procession stormed into the cathedral, marched with clanking helmets and weapons to the opulent Chapel of Wenceslas; a priest in the mob grasped the bronze ring at the chapel door. Bowed in delight he rejoiced wide-eyed: This ring the very one grasped by their Wenceslas as he died undaunted in Altbunzlau. The predatory vengeful mob was ready to loot the great estates. Now Arnim took charge of several abandoned houses and palaces, those of Friedland first of all; his troops patrolled with pike and musket. Some looters were shot.

The mob was outraged. Count Thurn tried to restore calm. The nobility and their unruly followers accused him of treason, because he would not sanction the storming of properties belonging to imperials: they have a right to vengeance. He pointed to the Saxons: they won't

tolerate it. It was not Bohemians who had conquered the land. They demanded the immediate summoning and arming of emigrants and refugees from Saxony, restitution of their property, compensation. “Justice, vengeance!” echoed around the castle square. Thurn, enraged and conflicted, threw his hat from a window, cursed the hour that had brought him back to Prague. He was not allowed to speak; stones and shot crackled through the air. Along the highway came the swaggering son of Berka,* who had escaped from prison after the battle by Prague, and Smil von Hodějovský. They had fled their homeland as young men, and had found no joy in Saxony that was not alloyed with homesickness for their mother on the Moldau. They appeared clanking in armour, unconstrained determined men, before a crowd that had as little desire as they to be reined in. They were disarmed, and chained in the castle dungeons.

Frustration swelled among families, doors slammed shut when the conventicles came together. An explosion must come. The Saxons were pleased when the first assaults by the rampaging mob were directed at the Jewish quarter.

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The Duke took private lodgings at Znaim, in the south of Moravia near the Austrian border, displacing the tenants of five houses. Dr Stroperus was amazed how the gout erupted on his hands earlobes toes, how the face flushed so readily as he paced restlessly through the rooms, each room quickly designated for a specific purpose; how the Duke scolded only in the evening, struck out at servants, and in his old detestable manner even threatened the doctor with death for allowing him to decay. Letters and couriers once again flew out daily.

Stealthily the Duke summoned to him the colonels of nearby regiments, and then those stationed farther off. He ascertained how matters stood with the replenishing of their ranks, with weaponry provisioning thirst for war. Encouraged them to boldness in recruiting and training, they must stint at nothing that his coffers can provide. The Empire is in danger; if the Emperor will not summon you or cannot afford you, I will not look silently on as the Swede plays his hellish game to the end in every German alley. If the worst comes to the worst, then stand with the Imperial Prince and Duke of Mecklenburg.

What rang out from the utterances of these officers attracted by his call, who at first singly and then in little groups gathered in the mean little houses, was their anger at defeat by the Swede, at how the Emperor had thrown the army into a stinking slurry-pit.

“Count Tilly is useless,” they cried at the chinking wine-table where they sat with the tall Duke, “he’s cancelled the commissions of Protestant colonels. The League is a bunch of bigots. We’re no longer an imperial army. Who’s in charge? His Stinginess of Bavaria.”

“We pray to Jesus and Mary. But our Protestant comrades are bold and brave, there was no need to send them packing like heathens.”

“They acted as if we were going to war for the monks. We’re soldiers. Whoever accords us honour and pays well enough is our man. Tilly was beaten, we sit in a mousehole and nibble at straw. We’re raring to go.”

“We’ve stood loyally by his Grace of Friedland. We bewailed his despicable treatment. Here we sit, his guests, not only to drink but to affirm how we turn to him with longing.”

“Wasn’t us who told his Grace of Friedland to be off, we wept tears for him as if our mum and dad had died both the same day, and there’s us dumped in the beggar’s sack. We pledged loyalty to him as the Roman Emperor’s field commander with handshake and oath, now if no one wants us we shan’t abandon him in his grief. He can depend on us.” – “Us too.”

Amid the shouts and heated foot-stamping and banging on the table – tall Friedland in his brown leather cape-collar perched motionless, eyes darting as he let the talk wash around him, like a raven on a branch, breeze playing with him, ruffling his feathers – a tall broad man with a little shaven head climbed onto his stool, his scarf trailing, his face shining and swollen, he held a beaker close to his bearded mouth, kept silent as they called out to him. Then he scolded crowing, left hand waving: “The King of Sweden sits in the Empire, he’s at Mainz just now. The Saxon lies in Bohemia. With how many men? Six thousand. Where are our armies? Run away. Where are Conti, Savelli? Run away. Marradas? Run away. We are dogs. Ready to kick the bucket. I tell you, gentlemen, we’re ready for the knacker’s yard. Please don’t forget this when anyone speaks of us.” He climbed down, chewed with an empty mouth, drank from his beaker staring at the crowd.

First the colonels of regiments stationed in Moravia drew from the Duke of Friedland cash, loans, hints to start recruiting, provisions. Then rapidly, making use of these, he pulled more distant regiments into his ambit. In his rooms at Znaim toiled officials from his former administration, now drummed up again. He declared he was in constant correspondence with the Emperor, was authorised to support the colonels in word and deed, bypassing their lordships in Vienna, as far as lay within his capacity as a private person with professional knowledge and resources. This troubled nobody.

Late one evening the countess Trčka, tripping along with the count and her sister, received a quick smack on the hand as she tried to entice the Duke away from his creaking escritoire. With a sigh he hauled himself to his feet on the arm of Master of Horse Neumann: “Trčka, you don’t leave the table when you’re about to lose at dice. You won’t do so when you start to win.” He chuckled as the two ladies helped him from the room, head tucked between his shoulders. “Do you know, do you know, my darling wife, who I am?”

“But of course I know, my darling husband, who you are.”

“Can you prove it?”

“My dear husband!”

“I’m a man with a head on his shoulders who stands on the two legs bestowed on him by his mother at birth. Hah. They’ll take note. The stinking Jesuits, those timid pedantic hearts. And the fat scoundrel. Tell me honestly, without compulsion, without prevarication, that you have no faith in me, you lot.” He waved at absent figures. “Now you jump left, now you turn right. It’s time to pay. You must come, whether you will or no. It’s pay time. You watch, my dearest Elisabeth. Hah, they’ll pay. Softly softly I’ll stretch out my head, and then go for their little throats.”

He allowed his table talk and dealings with the colonels to be cried far out into the world. To the Court War Council at Vienna, along with casual responses to the Emperor, he despatched a courier with the question: Was the Council aware that his Duchy of

Mecklenburg as well as his estates in Bohemia – Friedland Sagan Grossglogau – were all lost and gone, and what could they offer him, a Prince of the Empire, to save him from unmerited poverty. Two weeks later a second menacing courier: They keep silent, the Elected Emperor of the Holy Empire leaves him in the lurch; he sits in Znaim a refugee, supplied with only the most exigent necessaries. Has the Empire fallen apart? Must he look to his own defence? Pray let him know. He is waiting, seeking out as far as he is able institutions that can save his skin.

Count Trčka received a commission: "I give you," said Friedland, "my two blue eyes and loyal face to take along on your trip. With these you will present yourself to the Swede, or to Oxenstierna, catch their attention and say that this man Friedland is minded to draw to him a mutinous imperial army and do with it as he pleases. Is he guaranteed the kingdom of Bohemia? And how many Swedish and Saxon troops can reach him quickly at the moment of breakout? You will bring a direct written reply from Oxenstierna or the Swede. Off you go!"

For a moment Trčka stood alarmed and uncertain. Friedland cried: "This is no joke! Control your expression!" Pushed him menacing with his thin arms out of the door.

42. Recriminations

WEIGHED DOWN BY the depressing intelligence from Cardinal Pázmány, which made palpable the danger of encirclement, and spurred by groaning letters from Prince Maximilian, Prince Eggenberg came together with the Privy Council in the castle.

Maximilian's situation was clear to all of them. In dreadful peril he had grasped again at the old alliance with the French, this time not to pit himself against Habsburg, for now he sought to make his own way by settling with the Swede; there was no other explanation for his recent armistice. And then the Bavarian saw that he could expect no mercy from the Scandinavian Vandals; he had bought but a short respite. Even before the armistice was quite over, Tilly in mad desperation had broken out, and in this year of decision had hurled himself first at the Swedish ogre, at the relentlessly trumpeting man: he would accept no pact between Protestant and Catholic, one or the other must be laid in the green grass.

Little Prince Eggenberg, standing bowed and overtired behind his chair, informed the others with painful nods of the head that now, perhaps for the first time, there could be no doubting the Bavarian's goodwill; the Bavarian himself, via his ambassador, had flooded the imperial court with the most pitiable letters, the most vigorous pleas: to help, not look on as all of them, Emperor and League, face the extreme peril of abject surrender. A most frightful, a barely mentionable event had become reality. The man who now sat on the throne of Christ's representative, who wore the ring of the Fisherman, that very man Barberini, had with a coldness bordering on scorn shown himself apathetic towards the interest of the Catholic faith. It had been within his power to unite all that was Catholic in the world against the sinister unstoppable invasion by the heretic king from the north. The most trustworthy of men had been despatched to negotiate with him, the archbishop of Gran, primate of all Hungary. Shamed and shattered he departed from Vienna after delivering his report; all he said to supplement it was: He wishes in future to devote himself entirely to his own work. And now, on top of every other misfortune, the final pillar of the house of Habsburg, the former Field-

marshal Friedland, had begun to waver. He had been forced to flee before the surprising incursion of Saxon troops; he cannot ascertain what portion of his estates, which constitute the source of his wealth, remains unravaged. The Duke sits with his family and retinue in Znaim. And the weather is closing in on him. “What can we hold on to?”

From the tensely seated company, shortlegged moustached Questenberg managed a word: the misfortune had at least brought with it that uncertain friends have willy-nilly become certain friends. One can depend on the Bavarian and Friedland, indeed Friedland should count himself lucky if Habsburg makes common cause with him to retrieve his properties.

Silence.

In order to keep the discussion going, the hunchback Trautmannsdorf bowed towards Questenberg: True, this Friedland, as his letters attest, now has nothing; and so why should Habsburg make common cause with him. And fixing a searching gaze on Prince Eggenberg slouched in his armchair: Perhaps some might find it in their interest not to help the Duke; Friedland’s tone at present is curiously menacing. He tested the water: Clearly it is good and effective to remove the fangs from a snake that one fears, and for the sweet Saviour’s sake not to provide it with a new pair.

Eggenberg held the gaze, and softly, trenchantly: This is the decisive point: how do they view the situation without Wallenstein? Questenberg planted his fists on the table: “We need Wallenstein for a second time, and for as long as it takes to restore peace.”

At the table in a wide white ruff the trim swordsman Oñate, the Spaniard, who raised his index finger: “We offer one million guilders, if Wallenstein should organise the army.”

“You see,” Eggenberg held his arms out to Trautmannsdorf.

“I see nothing, except that we are dividing up the skin before we’ve caught the lion. To start with, it’s not at all certain that the Duke will want to come back.

Oñate: “He will, he will.”

“And as what?”

Oñate, simply: “As field-marshal general, like before, and also head of the Spanish army in the Empire.”

“My God, do you know of whom you speak, Count Oñate? His letters are most curious. It may be that in his present situation, having lost his properties, he is ready to assume command. Maybe. Maybe he has other plans. Wallenstein! How he’ll bite! No wolf compares with such big gaping jaws when he wants to bite. Our situation pleases him, it holds much promise for him. What do you think, Eggenberg, and you, Count Trautmannsdorf, will it really be necessary for you to seek rescue from him? He’ll rescue you to the extent that he relishes it, and he’ll sup on the roast with cream sauce, onions, vegetables and pastries, as much as he wants. The Empire will have another aspect after such a rescue. Enjoy your dinner: his dinner.”

Eggenberg: “What do you advise?”

“A treaty with Sweden, and fast.”

Eggenberg: “No, tell us, Count Trautmannsdorf, leaving this aside for the moment: is the Duke in your opinion so very dangerous?”

"Your enemy. Nothing more. For sure not mine. Maybe he can't cause you too much damage now; you'll have to be content with that. Anyway, you know I love and value him. Alas, events brought it to a point where he has become an enemy of the ancestral House."

Trautmannsdorf relapsed into gloom, rested his head in his hands. More silence. At Questenberg's side the big Confessor, Lamormaini: One must make use of people as they are. Instruments of power are available to be used against the Duke. Friedland seems prepared to make a move. Clearly he is still vigorous. One must seek somehow to bring him to heel.

Questenberg, bitterly to Trautmannsdorf: Does the count know that Friedland has drawn almost every colonel in Bohemia and Moravia to his side. Imperial colonels. The army sundered, desperate, ill-paid, the officers' sense of honour sullied. "Our regiments could go over to Wallenstein and we'd have no way to stop them, for we are nothing. We are losers, poor politicians, because we took Wallenstein from them. And he: he has the wherewithal, takes the regiments, the Jews pay whatever he needs, he reconquers his own properties, allies himself with the Swede. It is all too possible. If we leave him be, we can be sure of nothing."

"And whose fault is that?" Trautmannsdorf pulled his arms brusquely back from the table, cried: "You. He was not our enemy. You turned him into one. But I won't speak of that." He sank steaming back into his chair: "If it is true that the pope conveyed this decision to the Hungarian primate, then we shall have to include it in the most secret of the secret books of the ancestral House. We shall inscribe it in the imperial memorandum books not only to guide future politicians, but to inform everyone inside and outside the Empire with an interest in the Catholic faith. It is impossible, it cries out to Heaven, that the dreadful peril facing Bavaria and Austria, the several kingdoms and ancestral lands, finds the pope with blind eyes. He has declined to give support to a tottering Roman Empire in dire danger, facing almost total destruction. He'll have to answer for it to those whose representative he is. And is not. You too, Prince Eggenberg, will have to answer for it. It was all unnecessary. We were in power, we sat in the saddle, and then came that devious treetrunk of a plotter, that disloyal despoiler of the Empire, the Bavarian. He stirred the Electors up against Habsburg. We could and should have remained strong. But instead, you were afraid. From the start. Friedland was loyal, I tell you, up until that moment in Memmingen when we let him go and he saw that he means nothing to the Emperor. After all his service to us he was kicked out like a mangy cur. His Imperial Majesty, in his personal love for the General, was barely able to protect him from extreme consequences: public infamy, demotion, removal of titles and estates. Why? You all know why: for nothing. Because of the old hatred of the Bavarian who buzzes behind Habsburg like a horsefly and stings him to distraction. What would have happened? Germany would almost have become an empire, with a single head. Now here we sit whimpering about the pope; later we shall whimper about the Duke. Now he intends rebellion, I have no doubt. He makes use of our dire situation. He would have to be a seraph not to. He hates every one of us sitting here. I can't conceal my love for him, can only try to do him justice. I must. You are at fault, Prince Eggenberg. You drove a wedge among us and made us weak. You took away so much of our courage, ours and the Emperor's, that at Regensburg we were rendered mute. The Empire will never be allowed to forget this. Not in a hundred years, or a thousand."

With a smile of despair the prince looked down at his cold trembling fingers:

"At least do not forget that I wanted the best, and that we have all atoned heavily for it."

"Not good enough. The Swede will play a different tune. It has come to the point, Prince Eggenberg, when I must here speak quite plainly. Following the battle at Breitenfeld you should have offered the Emperor your head. It was all the result of your politicking. You advised the Emperor to follow a path of conciliation. Is that what you did?"

The prince, with a silly vacuous smile, not looking up: "You lay so much on my head?"

"Have you offered it to the Emperor?"

The prince pale, deflated, shaded his eyes a moment: "I must tell you, Trautmannsdorf, that what you are doing to me begins to become intolerable. What do you intend?"

"Should we not have a right to sit in judgement over you? Should you not account before us for your actions?"

"For what I have done I accept responsibility. Your love for Wallenstein robs you of reason."

"My love for Wallenstein. I want not merely revenge for being forced to act against him. I must protest against the ruination of the strongest position in the world that the Empire has ever had. Friedland could have held the Habsburg Empire together. Now he has been rendered a nullity, blighted, transformed into a horrible demon before whom we can only tremble. But let us weigh them both: Wallenstein nothing, and Habsburg nothing. You, who made them both into nothing, are still something - is that just? I say this here at the table: I love Habsburg and am loyal to His Imperial Majesty. But you, Prince Eggenberg, would do well to hide yourself away now and for all time, because responsibility for that accursed Regensburg convention lies with you and no one else."

"You gentlemen will appreciate that this debate cannot continue. I have always accepted whatever was advised here and reported it to the Emperor. He knows every standpoint and point of view. This discussion has been concerned more with my head than with anything else. I invite you, Count Trautmannsdorf, to come with me to the Emperor."

"To what purpose? The Emperor is powerless now."

"He is the judge."

"Meaning?"

"Come with me. I owe you satisfaction for your Wallenstein, and I demand it from you."

"Meaning?"

"I hold no grudge against you. I understand your feelings."

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The Emperor, in the abbot's chair with its streams of human figures: "This seems almost a court of judgement. You the complainant, and Prince Eggenberg the malefactor. Or vice versa."

Eggenberg: "I should like to know the verdict of His Imperial Majesty."

"Verdict, Eggenberg?"

"I have suffered greatly under the latest events. Your Majesty knows of them. But matters are in fact so monstrous in their consequences and circumstances, and may turn out so

disastrous, that I cannot be content merely to mitigate and acknowledge errors, but must request an overall verdict. I have accepted full responsibility. It must be lifted from me. Or the head that preserves the memory of all this must fall."

The Emperor: "And this, it seems, is also the view of our Trautmannsdorf?"

Trautmannsdorf: "I did not drag my old friend the prince here."

The Emperor: "Nonetheless – do matters really stand so?"

Both men looked at the floor.

"And my good Eggenberg wants to plead guilty to this avalanche too? Regensburg, dismissal of the General, Sweden, Breitenfeld and so on?"

"The General's dismissal is on my head."

The Emperor stood, paced about the green marble pillar: "All right. I had thought it otherwise." He lightly laid a hand on Eggenberg's shoulder, his face dark; spoke softly: "Do not speak of Regensburg. Leave it, it's not your fault. I never discussed it with you at all. There is no blame. Don't pick at it." Eggenberg opened his mouth; the Emperor went on: "Don't speak. It is as I say. There should be no quibbling, no acceptance of blame." His arms dropped. He saw his reflection float over the pillar. Went towards the tall doorway, observed the two courtiers; his face showed a trace of boredom, hostility. It faded slowly as he sat back in his chair. Then he barked out little laughs, gestured to both men: "Peace, gentlemen. We are only tools, wielded by whose hands, I wonder. I hope, those of God, Mary and the saints."

The two men gazed past one another.

The Emperor, pacing dreamily about, tugging at the pompoms on his nightshirt: "Everything goes so swimmingly. If only I knew who it is you speak of..."

Eggenberg: "The Swede..."

Emperor: "Ah, the Swede. I told you before, you will have to set Wallenstein up against him. I – would like to see this Wallenstein again. See, luckily I did not let Wallenstein be torn from me. I did well there, no?" He thought it over, frowning, as they sat there: "Well, bring him to me. I want to see him."

When the prince and the deeply shamefaced count separated, they were in accord, embraced, squeezed arms, apologised for everything: they must not let themselves be divided with regard to the Emperor's dreadful unfathomable apathy, must take all decisions jointly; the first being to renew Wallenstein's commission as General, but as a counterbalance, to assure themselves of Bavaria and Spain.

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As word arrived that Eggenberg would pay a visit, the Duke, immersed in his endless scheming, was so shocked he suffered a nervous breakdown in the room of Master of Horse Neumann. For half an hour he sat sobbing on a stool at the open window overlooking the desolate garden. His narrow nose was the colour of wax, he kept clutching his breast, his vacant gaze indicated he was not quite in his senses. Then, still sobbing, he swore at Neumann, and his doctor. He sat wide eyed in his bedroom, distraught, back slumped, next to Elisabeth, whispered: "I'm not as I once was, Elisabeth. I'm somehow worm-eaten. Somehow they've

made me eaten away by worms." Standing in a rage, fists waving, trampling like a wild beast: "They've made me worm-eaten. Plucked all my feathers. That's what they've done. They'll pay for it. If there's a God in Heaven, if Mary is the mother of God, if the saints protect me, my honour and my salvation, you can call me the basest wretch and knacker's cur if they do not pay me everything they have. Let the hand of God be on them."

Standing before a picture of a wading St Christopher, he seethed. The veins on his scraggy throat stood out, he drummed his hands on the tapestry: "Gallows-birds, gallows-birds." Screamed shrilly. Elisabeth left him there, chin on his breast, weeping.

Later, his entourage having retired, he sat with her in his little parlour alone at a bare table; smiled suddenly as he pulled himself together, wrathful, hate-filled, eyes glinting, dizzy with joy: "God has played them into my hands. I'll crush them like a flea between my fingernails."

She leaned into him. Could not stop herself, she loved him in his misfortune more every day, and was obscurely ashamed of her love.

The Duke walked, leaning on his swordstick, a few hundred yards down the frozen Znaim highway to greet Prince Eggenberg. They spoke of the gout that afflicted both. Indoors the Duke was assured of the Emperor's joy at his old unaltered attachment. Wallenstein offered, without committing himself, to raise an arm of forty thousand, which he would gradually bring to one hundred thousand. But he rejected any formal appointment to the position of General, cited his frailty.

And Eggenberg, conducting the negotiation with calm assurance, had to concede as he observed the tall sallow hollow-eyed man fiddling with his too-wide cape-collar and groaning as he sat down, that it would be as well not to enter into any long term arrangement. And into Eggenberg's soul there crept a vague uncertain astonishment and sad weariness at the strangely unexpected ways in which events shape themselves. "We all have to die," sighed Eggenberg, shoulders drooping. The Duke bent back his head, turned down the corners of his mouth in mockery, cast a searching happy eye down on the other man.

At court they were anxious to know what demands the Duke had made. The old prince in a melancholy tone said they should wait until they had seen the Duke, he would soon come.

And, invited to Vienna, he did come. Not as on the occasion of his first appointment as General – twenty carriages, escort brandishing silvered partizans, fine bridles and saddle pads just like the Emperor's, lackeys and pages in the finest French fabrics, half a company riding ahead, half behind. Silently now, escorted by twenty men and three personal carriages. On the icy steps of his little house at Znaim he had murmured words with hot-blooded young Raschin and his Trčka. The change in his situation vis á vis the Emperor should not cause them for a moment to interrupt their efforts to strive their utmost for an alliance with Sweden and Saxony. All must proceed as if nothing has changed. No written delegation of plenipotentiary powers: he would not, he rasped out of the carriage window before closing the curtain, make himself a slave of Electoral Saxony or Gustavus. They realised that the Duke, as he progressed slowly along the highway, had something special in mind for the Emperor.

In the knife-sharp January light the Bohemian, shuffling tall and gaunt on his cane, presented himself to the Emperor, who with his own hands pushed a chair towards him. Both

could see in the dreadful clarity of day that Death had laid its mark on eyes, nose, mouth, even the hands. Each saw it only in the other.

Ferdinand, flustered, read out a letter from the Empress just received from Schönbrunn; the lady from Mantua let him know she would soon return. As he did so, and the first hoarse words came from the Duke, his view of the Duke changed, and once again there rose in him the insatiably writhing lindworm, the long creeping lashing thousand-footed body. Once he had feared it. Now all was clear. There must once again be something like war, and he had to take a moment to think: against whom? The first to come to mind was the Bavarian. Ah, so now it's the Swede's turn. The Duke here predicted it. No doubt he'll defeat him. It may also happen that the Swede will defeat this man; such matters are inscrutable. A strange business.

The Duke spoke of measures already taken to set up an army, and the fact that all advantage lay with the Swede and Electoral Saxony. His voice so loud and hoarse; how his wet Bohemian eyes glisten. Could use such men here. Rewards are an Emperor's business. Starve them, feed them as circumstances dictate to make them all the more tractable. That's what an Emperor does. The task of the Crown. Same in every realm. Without such games you lose your throne. Perhaps the throne should be yielded to these men; that would be the best, the smoothest course.

When they had finished their tête à tête the Emperor, without moving from his chair, silently summoned Prince Eggenberg, asked what he must do next. Suddenly the Emperor seemed to lose balance, became dizzy, and in tittering unconscious merriment forgot what day it was, what tomorrow would bring, what rooms he was going through, whose rooms. Not to Prince Eggenberg, but maybe to the Mantuan lady – she will soon be back – he might betray the enormous amusing secret: that sometimes he had no idea in whose clothes he was walking around, whose the two legs that lifted and felt, the head that moved; and that the signatures traced by his hands fettered him so – *manu propria*, the wording went, *by his own hand*. See there, see, that's Ferdinand.

And Eggenberg was embraced. Ferdinand joked: So you weren't harried to your death by Trautmannsdorf. Now he would much like to know what's to be done with the Duke, how he should be rewarded and recompensed, even the Privy Council is placid now. Friedland is back with them, the Swede will soon be found nowhere on the map.

The prince wearily closed his eyes. No one knows how the Duke can be recompensed; he keeps his lips sealed. No one knows how the Duke will pay for the army he is raising; everyone has the same wish: not too much, not too much. On his desk as they parted lay the Duke's patent as Imperial Prince of Mecklenburg, the Emperor's gift of four hundred thousand imperial thalers, equivalent to the Dukes' debts to the Bohemian Chamber for supplies delivered; consideration was being given to pledging the Silesian duchy of Grossglogau, to help with the outlay.

Next afternoon, the Empress not having sought out the Emperor even though her return had been announced the previous evening, the Emperor went to find her. She was not in her apartments, not in the courtyards, nor in the gardens. A little while ago, together with Miss Kollonitsch – so the watch reported – she had slipped out of the castle heavily veiled and on foot. And he was seized by such longing for her. He lay half an hour alone in his room, his

heart full of sorrow, and then had them change him into brown knee-hose, simple jacket, wide loose trousers, like an ordinary man, an artisan, a beer-tapper; he put on coloured socks and ribbons, unthinking pulled a low brown cap on his head, his valet followed him a few minutes later, kept twenty paces behind like a constable patrolling: small sword, tall brown felt hat, simple yellow suit, red stockings over thin shanks.

The artisan, holding a willow switch, at first wandered up and down outside the castle, strode past the arsenal to the Lower Austrian Chancellery, and back. The weather was rainy, muck lay deep, it was misty, would soon be dark.

As Ferdinand walked past the imposing hulk of the Minorites building, he saw a hurrying figure. And an unaccountable feeling impelled him to follow. It turned down lane after lane, stopped in doorways, fidgeted. Through the Coalmarket to the Graben. Back; they went separated by chairs and carts over a long narrow wooden bridge. He felt nervous, may be a whore, he hesitated. A church tower: St Niklas. The figure turned into the little nun's house beside the church. The door closed. He stood outside. "How strange that I stand here. And that I do not leave." He pulled the bell-rope, asked who had just come in. A girl had opened the door; a distant shout: "She's coming."

Someone hurried down the dark passage, looked him in the face, stood trembling.

"What do I want? Eleonore, even I don't know what I want. All I know is, I want to walk with you."

"You see. Now you come to fetch me. Now you regret your stubbornness."

He clutched her arm, she wound the veil around her neck. "I don't know what you mean, Eleonore. Let us not speak of it. I would like to walk with you, nothing more."

Across the bridge: "Promise me. I shall say nothing of Mantua, and nothing of you. Promise me you will not fetch back that devil of a duke."

"Go on."

"If you must use him, you must master him, Ferdinand. You must manage him like a servant, a wayward commoner no one trusts."

"Do go on."

"You are amusing yourself with me?"

"No, I like to walk with you."

They continued in silence to the castle. It was raining. They went through a side door that a servant opened for them. "Come to me, Eleonore."

"That is all?" She wept.

He, softly: "Eleonore. I myself do not know what is happening. Nothing touches me. Everything brings me joy. Your voice delights me, your tears delight me, your complaints delight me. As if I have built a shell around me."

She still weeping. He: "Can I not bring you joy, too?"

43. Tilly

SOUTHWARD FROM the River Main the army of unlucky Count Tilly surged on its last legs.

With the rump of his troops, twelve thousand men, together with eight thousand peasant conscripts, in the depths of winter he engaged the Swedish general Horn, drove him into the city of Bamberg. Within the walls all Swedes apart from a few who fled were massacred.

Now the bloodsoaked king heaved up from his camp in Mainz, left the Rhine to itself. Behind him remained a young Duke Bernhard of Weimar, and a Count Palatine of Birkenfeld.

At the approach of the snorting Swede, frightened Tilly retreated out of Bamberg alongside the swollen Regnitz, through Ansbach territory past Nördlingen to Donauwörth. Planned to hide himself away across the Danube.

Behind him the unsteady footfall of the Swedish king, ponderous and slow; slurping to the right, guzzling to the left, he chewed, spat, snuffled. He laid himself upon Nuremberg; the city council, tails between the legs, hurried through the gate to meet him, beakers of gold in their cold hands. They yelped and squeaked: “Maccabee! Gideon! Joshua!” He rolled his eyes and, since it tickled him, tolerated it.

“This has been a good winter,” he allowed to the council; “please God, summer will be just as good. I shall preach the Gospel to you in a manner you’ll never hear again.” He stretched his legs, spilled dust and steam into the air. “Be pious, so that God will continue to help you.”

He left a garrison behind. A hundred thousand thalers stuffed in his bags as he went on.

Tilly could not linger in Donauwörth; the Bavarian Prince-elector hurled courier after courier at him: How far then does he think to flee, is Munich too far for him. “I shall flee no farther than I must,” growled the little general, rolling his eyes, crumpling the paper in his hand. “I shall make a stand, I shall. Leave me in peace!”

But the Swede came stomping grumbling snarling tramping ever closer. “I shall make a stand.” Shivering with unspeakable lassitude he again ordered a retreat. Across the Danube, over the Lech bridges. Dizzy, mouth hanging open, he halted on fields of stubble, Bavaria at his back. Dizzy with whirling thoughts he addressed his officers, teeth hardly showing behind his smile: “We shall not leave here. The Swede is coming. We shall defend Bavaria.”

Orders were given to rush troops downstream to defend Ingolstadt, blocking the access roads to Augsburg and Ingolstadt with fourteen companies. Then the army encamped behind the Lech in thick woods. And as Tilly was inspecting the terrain at his rear, riders came galloping to sound the alarm, alarm, alarm. Fleeing peasants, villages villages whole villages on long lines of waggons. As if the Swede had uprooted them, and swept them like a hurricane before him lock stock and barrel. Day and night. Day and night. It rained towns.

Tilly, blown apart, held himself upright. Went about, a creaking structure of bones meanly padded with muscles sinews nerves; belly, breast, skull gaping. The very bloodsoaked soul itself oozing out. All around him cries, screams, roars, grinding, growling, shrill piping. His thoughts dangled like too-long nose hairs over his face, his forehead and eyes, blinded him.

He smiled sweetly in a mindless rapture, dark surging looming despair. He prayed and could not come to himself. He was a man tarred and feathered, completely hidden behind his deeds. He had no more thought for Wallenstein. He tried to rethink his life, his supreme commander Mary with whom every day of his life had begun; he curled up. “I’ve been a pious Catholic all my days,” he whimpered to his field chaplain, who stood bemused, addressed him in ringing tones.

As the first shots landed he rushed about, tried to hear from somewhere if he should not after all fall farther back towards Ingolstadt. Was afraid, afraid, understood for the first time that he feared himself. A thought twitched, surprised: “I’m an old man, never missed Mass.”

Seventy-two cannons were aimed by Gustavus at the woods where the imperials lurked. Trunks splintered with a dreadful crackling rattling. When the enemy, fearsome Finns, discovered an island near Oberndorf, squad after squad swam across like water rats. Some were battered to death, more came. Swedish cannon came over a bridge that in the night none had seen still standing. A howling teeth-baring mud-trampling battle began, half in water, half on land. Swedes, Finns, they were hardly human. There were never creatures like these, emerging muddy from the water, greybrown skin, weeds dripping, arms flailing, they waded crookedly, gulped gnawed frothed whistled. So evil were they, so abhorrent, so fit to be beaten to death, that only hesitantly at first did the imperials, the driven peasants advance on them, and then it was rage and shame, disgust, that hurled them forward: “For the Saviour’s sake.”

The screamed in their hundreds, thousands, the imperials, on the raised levee of the Lech when they saw the unprecedented muddy quaking horror approach out of the water. Few among them at that moment who were not beset by the thought: either die here, or wipe these monsters from my memory. They swept down on the ghouls.

Behind them the murderous roar of cannon, the bursting crashing tearing of groaning subterranean violence. But Tilly on his long-legged skittering grey rushed back and forth between the foreigners and the guns, dreaming he knew not what, laughed, whimpered. His officers could obtain no response. His eyes, opened wide to the whites, were constantly drawn to the silver Brabant flashes on his own left sleeve. These flashes held a secret. At each roar he flinched, ducked, looked around. He ground the word ‘Mary’ between his teeth, as his eyes searched over the wooden bridge, the splashing water. His yearning helplessness climbed into the tenuous air as if on a thread descending from Heaven. A three-pounder, from a shot he did not even hear, overturned the grey, shattered his right thigh above the knee. For a long while he had no thoughts or dreams.

He emerged from bottomless blackness; snow was falling. Evening, a baggage cart, pain gouging his leg. Creaking carts, commotion all around. A surgeon crouching in the straw beside him. The general on blood-drenched woollen blankets, voice flat: What’s happening, where am I. Near Ingolstadt, the enemy tried to cut them off from Bavaria, failed, the king himself almost lost his life.

“What, what!” Tilly, the death’s head, dreadfully aroused; “cut off, what’s going on!” Then he groaned, officers riding nearby must come to him. They crawled in one at a time, told him a dozen times what had happened; he seemed half deaf. He rubbed his nose, forehead, asked anxiously again, groaned: “Regensburg, Regensburg!” grasped them by the hand, pleading.

Then all at once he noticed the crippling heaviness that nagged so strangely in every joint, deep in his bones, his entrails, lungs, climbing to his shoulders; how dry his mouth.

The chaplain squatted beside the surgeon. The cart rattled over potholes, he often turned crookedly on his side. Emerging again from the bottomless blackness, slowly, not quite released: "Chaplain! Ah, Regensburg, take the army to Regensburg." The chaplain. Last rites. Hold fast now, keep a grip. Mary, Heaven, the saints; just empty words, you can say them, they won't let themselves be thought. This boring, sawing, twisting in his leg, the discomfort welling up into his body, this lameness that flooded and ebbed and came surging again, this darkening bonefilling bonecracking spinetwisting deadly lameness.

Now the decision. Be done with it all. Mary, Jesus. He spat, rolled his eyes, this is no business of the Swede. The chaplain held his hands; Tilly asked him to call on Mary whenever he fainted. Snowflakes blew chill into the cart. He wept silently: "All my life I served Mary, want to hold on to her, mustn't lose her. Chaplain's granted me absolution, it'll be all right."

Dark paralysing waves rolled stormily in, mixed with cold pain. Every limb fell away from him. He began to struggle. In between waves he cried: "Mary!" The chaplain echoed: "Mary!" They rolled crashing in, from yellow grass-green brown clouds they crashed into his leg and body. Rattled through the shoulderblades into his throat. Odious clouds, damp sponges writhing into one another. They were Finns wading nearer, spawn of incest. He spat, cried louder, screamed, gasped in terror.

The chaplain called "Mary!" Tilly saw in horror how the lips moved.

Dreadful hammer blows from the clouds. With every blow he convulsed. His breath taken; he was an anvil. What was the chaplain saying. He had to know what the chaplain was saying. Rumbling thunderclaps, grinding, swooping arms outstretched.

Arms outstretched. He lay curled, thrown onto his side.

Rattling in the throat, arms crossed protectively over the breast.

Now out of the little warm bleeding body, the ghost-army came swarming. Flouncing torsos of slaughtered Turks Gauls Palatines; hounds howling, hanging mangled; scrambling horses, the hooves clung to him. Drawn limply on with them, still damp, his own choked soul.

They flew in a tangle, called incessantly through the snowy air, to their dark place.

44. Nuremberg

ON CAME THE KING of Sweden behind dead Tilly; Torstenson on the left bank of the Lech covered him with heavy cannon-fire. He reached Nuremberg. To his camp at Fürth just outside the city came daily deliveries of thirty-six thousand loaves of bread and a hundred barrels of beer. He smacked his thigh for joy as he rode through the Laufer Gate. The city council presented him with a terrestrial and celestial globe in silver, two cartloads of wine, two of oats. "I'd sooner have predicted the Last Judgement, than that I would ever see Nuremberg!"

There was no more resistance. He booted the Prince-elector from his splendid Munich Residence; all that Maximilian had spent his life building was left behind. The Swede knew that memories of Munich would cause the Bavarian's heart to constrict in mortal agony. At

Freising the mayor of Munich, Friedrich von Ligsalz, the patricians Barth and Parstorffer, had ridden out to offer him the keys to the city. Music blared along the highway as the king drew his sword: I have the key already, what sort of joke is this, I'll fine you half a million thalers. And so he rode on, escorted by three infantry and cavalry regiments, ahead of dozens of German princes, into the city whose churches he desecrated with his presence.

It was now warm showery spring. The king gathered the Jesuits in the garden of their church, addressed them in deplorably coarse tones: "Spring has come, the power of the Catholic church is near its end. Its pillars have bent like straws: the Emperor and the prince of Bavaria. Be peaceable and behave yourselves. You see that God is not against me."

At first the Swedish army was intent on plunder, and the council of war spent hours in inconclusive debate, for it was from this place that measureless hatred for the Protestant faith had spread across the Empire. The king ruled curtly: We'll be content with a contribution of three hundred thousand guilders. He distributed a small part of this as honoraria to the accompanying princes, in particular the Palatine Frederick.

Blond Frederick had not recovered from his melancholy. He strolled about the city of his Wittelsbach cousin, on whom he blamed his misfortunes. The Swede had not even enabled him to go to Prague, to the kingdom that had been torn from him. Gustavus resided on lovely Schrannen-platz, by the cathedral. In mute resignation the still handsome puffy Palatine followed the king, followed him like his nemesis, head down and unresisting. Beside him his unfaded voluptuous wife, dreadfully untouchable, hardly human; now and then she dragged him off to revelries. Little Rusdorf encouraged him to cheer up: Cheer up! Where in Europe were such victories as with the Swede! Did the king not lead them on like a pillar of fire?

Spurs jangling, hands at his back, the Palatine with his adviser paced the long circular corridor of the Neue Veste, its walls thick with Wittelsbach portraits. He saw Esther, pleading desperately with Ahasuerus to spare her people. He listened in silence to his adviser's prattle. "You're right, Rusdorf," he interrupted, passing a hand over his face. "I am lost. Lost. I really must cheer up, as you say."

Later: "I don't reproach you, Rusdorf. I don't want to dampen your enthusiasm. My successors will probably be grateful, treat you like a hero. As for me? We're all ruined. All of us. I myself and the princes of Saxony, of Brandenburg. And the prince of Bavaria, who wears my Electoral crown. We are reduced to nothing. A Swedish era is beginning for the German Empire. I, I cannot bear it. As I said: I am lost."

Then he held the little adviser back in a window niche. "I'll tell you one thing, Rusdorf." His big blue eyes blazed. "Those who advised me at Regensburg not to seek the Emperor's forgiveness, not to kneel before him, did me no favours. You know it! I would have atoned, would have lost a lot. Now I sit in a trap. I've become a beggar, a foreigner's hireling, a traitor. Yes, that's how I see myself. Do you think I can stroll past these Wittelsbachs of my own blood without shame seeping into my very dreams?" Rusdorf tried without success to calm him down. Frederick laid an arm on the little dejected man's shoulder, said softly: "The world hasn't ended yet. Don't you think there might come a day when the Swede is defeated? God does not let trees grow up to the sky. I wait. I know what I shall do."

"What?"

"The Emperor's a good master. He'll sympathise with my plight. My regret runs deep. I was young and ignorant. He'll forgive me." And on he strolled with Rusdorf. Up and down past painted Wittlesbachs. And Rusdorf never found out about, and had no way to prevent, the handwritten letter Frederick sent in strictest secrecy to the fugitive Maximilian, asking his pardon for visiting Munich without his invitation. He was no enemy of Maximilian, they were both Wittelsbachs, of the same blood; Max could rest assured that none of his pictures or buildings would be harmed. It was not I who brought the Swede into the German Empire. No, not I. And Frederick humbly requested Max to assure His Imperial Majesty that he felt himself as always to be a true loyal son of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

Following this letter he felt better than he had for many years. It rang well in his ears: 'true loyal son of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation'. Rusdorf had a hard task during these few weeks to keep him with his Swedish overlord. Rumours of his inclination to flee reached even the king, who delivered the good-humoured opinion: "Let him go. Germany is an invalid who can be restored only by harsh means. My cure has only just begun."

Through emissaries Gustavus informed the Reichstag, meeting now in Warsaw, that he was thinking of merging the crown of Poland, already his, with those of Bohemia and Hungary. Venetians who came to him with letters and presents were led by him through the Residence past the Palatine, who greeted them in silence. They took a breather in the Hall of Four White Horses; he thanked them: The Signoria can rest assured that the House of Austria, also in Italy, is laughing today and tomorrow will be gone.

The Swedes had advanced so vigorously – across the Danube; as far west as Strasburg – that the great lords in Paris began to shiver. An unbearable sight, this Goth king, lumbering across the huge feared Empire like a mediaeval siege-tower, hurling bombs and streams of pitch. The silly sly clod from Uppsala. They began needling the Saxon Prince-elector: Is his German dignity content to serve as Sweden's beadle? Who should one see as head of the Protestant cause in the Empire – him, or Gustavus?

They went uneasily from one Protestant court to another. They implored the almost desperate Catholic rulers to remain steadfast.

In his agitation King Louis could not control his fears, neither Richelieu nor Father Joseph could hold him back. He feared the Swede would come before him to Alsace and along the Rhine. He was given his head. He led the army to Metz, took Moyenvic, Pont-à-Mousson. Not yet enough. There's Nancy. We must make haste, make haste to the Rhine while Gustavus remains occupied in Bavaria. We must go on, to Trier. The time is ripe for us.

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Meanwhile Friedland was calmly forming his enormous army in Moravia. Wailing from the bishop of Bamberg, from the free city of Regensburg, the fugitive Maximilian, cries from Alsace, the Westphalian foundations – all fell on deaf ears. He kept gathering, left the Empire to its own devices, yielded not a single company.

His estates still occupied. Not for a minute did his business partners lose faith. The exchange in Hamburg, banking houses in Augsburg advanced to him and Messrs de Witte and

Bassevi whatever enormous sums they asked. By roundabout routes the desperate Jewish community in Prague despatched big gold bars and vessels of silver to his headquarters, concealed in common haywains.

The Empire was didintegrating. He tucked his army away in winter quarters. Stop pestering me, he told Vienna; it will take three months to assemble my forces.

The old machinery was in motion again. His recruiting patents were valid in the Empire, in Spain and the Italian states. General staffs were created in the blink of an eye for the various branches of the army, commissars-general named for Bohemia, among them Count Michna of Weizenhofen – the appointment hit him like a bolt of lightning; for Silesia Stredele de Montani, for Moravia, Colonel Miniati, for Lower Austria, Questenberg. Holk became head of Cavalry Justice, Ludwig von Sestich provost-marshal; the vicar-general was Father Florius from Cremona. As the Duke's lieutenant-general – successor to Collalto, who had been blown away near Mantua – was Gallas from Trentino – he had grown up with Aldringen in Spanish service.

He took over the rabble Tilly left behind, ten thousand men, a recalcitrant almost weaponless horde. There was something raging, shattering in the way the Bohemian now sought to impose himself on events. The moment he drew near to his task he had something about him of a flame that rises smoking from a tall chimney, and now smashes the chimney to the ground, howling storming into the horrified air. Representatives of the banks who busied themselves in his offices were astonished at the uses to which their funds were put. It ran from him by the shovelful, evaporated from him; it seemed he could not scatter it quickly enough among the people. His ardour, said some, arises from the way he squeezes the last life out of his evident bodily decay. Others scoffed: he's just eager to regain his properties.

Those closest to him had long sensed a change; wilder and more brutal than ever, he was engaged passionately in some obscure venture. He never said a word about his lost estates, either of interest or of sorrow. They knew Hans von Arnim had some particular connection with these losses, for he spared the estates and castles as if they were his own. Newcomers to Wallenstein's headquarters wavered between terror and disgust: these are the actions of a megalomaniac. The whole world knew that Wallenstein had taken innumerable coaches and Russia-leather carriages into the Danish campaign. Now vehicles and stables stood neglected in Prague, he showed no interest in them, or any other fripperies.

Assault troops had to be provided with pikes and breastplates; in Pardubitz whole streets of wooden sheds were built to house the enormous stocks of weaponry. It was known that Wallenstein multiplied every requirement by two or three, and was then still dissatisfied and demanded more. Extravagant quantities of powder were stored along the Bohemian border. Around Pardubitz were clamps storing every Bohemian potato, paid for with tax credits. Wallenstein had specified the size to which he would bring the army, but he seemed to set no limit. Colonel after colonel was named; but when his exhausted HQ asked how many more patents, roughly, should be issued, they were told: as many as can be given out until March. The names Fugger Colloredo Holk Merode Chiesa appeared again in the headquarters of the Duke of Friedland, who had not long ago lain at Memmingen, a dreadful threat to Italy and Alsace, and had then gone from there like a light gone from the earth. They rode blissfully towards the man who had made their name, to their true father. In his vicinity they, like

others, stood stunned by the drumming and the almost infernal prodigality and expansion. Some representatives of the financial houses galloped away, not up to the role of spectator at this Armageddon taking shape around the Duke. Michna was no comfort; they were puzzled by the laughter of that clever man; likewise Bassevi, who assured them: It's always like this around Friedland. The colonels swam in their element, fins waving, gulped down the peculiarly refractive air that wafted about the Duke, experienced the lightning flash, the enchantment that scorched and charred away all cares. Behind them they pulled in Montard de Noyrel, Přichowitz, Corpus, Wiltberg, Lamboy, Giesenburg, Felipe Corrasco.

In early April, squinting morosely into the wind, ignoring his gentlemen in their bright scarves, firing off salvos of curses, now carried in a litter, now on foot, now mounted, Friedland inspected the army on the hill at Rakonitz, northwest of Prague. Two hundred and fourteen squadrons of cavalry, a hundred and twenty infantry companies, forty-four field guns, two thousand wagons were to pass in front of him. He held out for just a few hours. Five days later the army was ready.

Then he wanted to resign. And when their imperial lordships Oñate and Eggenberg gave him Ferdinand's letter asking him to remain commander in chief for the duration of the war, he carped at first, then raised his old hoarse cry: Have they not done enough to him already, from Hungary all the way to Regensburg, what do they take him for, a condemned man, a madman; he'll go his own way, save himself from them. His appearance, as he hobbled crept on his cane through the rooms at Rakonitz, was decrepit.

The visitors had expected nothing else. They sat, waited. Prince Eggenberg knew the Duke saw himself beaten by an odious victor, and was minded to counter the dreadful Swedish impositions. It did him good to be reminded of earlier good times, he grew hard, braced himself. It became clear that the Duke would treat them with unprecedented ferocity; Eggenberg and Oñate did not demur; the Duke would break himself against them. His scolding ended, Wallenstein asked, casting a venomous cunning eye over them: What had they brought him; and louder: How will they buy their way out. This was the moment when the pair could withdraw to their quarters: they looked forward to receiving his written proposals, he must set out the scope of his wishes in all clarity.

Without further ado they accepted all that Wallenstein set down in writing, the most monstrous demands a man could make of an Emperor of the Holy Empire, short of killing him: absolute command; appointment as Generalissimo of the Houses of Austria and Spain; right of confiscation in the Empire without reference to the Privy Council, Court Chamber or Court of Appeal; a lien on the ancestral lands as compensation; defrayment of all requested expenses; the ancestral lands to be open to him at all times as a refuge; he must take part in any peace negotiations. Having read this the two negotiators signed, shuddering, in the Emperor's name; they had plenipotentiary power. As they did so they were filled with furious glee: they had smoked him out, now we see where we stand. Here was no field-general negotiating his appointment, but a tyrant out to satisfy his lust for revenge.

On the journey back they weighed up the situation: the Swede's advance will be halted, Bohemia freed, Bavaria freed; then the League can recover its strength, a Spanish army can appear out of Alsace. "Provided he does not ally himself with the enemy, with Sweden and

Saxony," murmured the Spaniard. "He wouldn't dare," Eggenberg reflected. "First of all, the army wouldn't follow him. We need not fear this, for the moment."

"Who knows," murmured Oñate.

"And yet! And yet!" laughed Trautmannsdorf as they sat in Vienna with Wallenstein's demands before them, in silence. Beneath the table he stroked the old prince's hand in heartfelt consolation, pulled him close.

The Duke at once broke off his dealings with Gustavus and the Saxon. Losing no time he put the army on full alert, sent a courier to fetch Arnim, head of the Saxon army in Bohemia. At Znaim the Duke met his friend with cold decisiveness: "Arnim, you must take your Saxons out of Bohemia. You will see to it; the question remains: what to do then."

"I shall defend myself in Saxony."

This aroused the Duke: What a stubborn boneheaded backwards way of thinking. What would he be defending in Saxony? And whom? Are they Laplanders, to have their heads broken for nothing? When Arnim asked what then should happen next, and should he perhaps disgrace himself before the Duke by throwing himself and his army with all its weapons away into the cornfields, the Duke abruptly ended the discussion: Arnim should think over what he, the Duke, had just said; he really wanted him over there among the adversary. He'll understand that this war cannot long continue so, it's dishonourable, a mess of brawling monkeys. Defend Saxony!

After more insults at Sweden and the politicians in Vienna the Duke dismissed Arnim, who cursed himself for a fool, had no clear idea what the conversation portended.

Wallenstein gave him a few weeks. Then he hurled his army, which could no longer feed itself where it was based, at Bohemia. The Saxons scattered. Friedland stormed down from the White Mountain onto Prague. The city was imperial again.

Arnim, still unsure if the Duke had serious intent, tried to make a stand in Leitmeritz. He felt terror mixed with disgust when Wallenstein surrounded him and seemed about to cut him off from his forces. Then he pulled together what troops he had, inflicted damage left and right on the Friedlanders, hacked through from place to place. He had to quit all of Bohemia.

The Jews laughed. The oppressed Bohemians jeered, waited. Old Count Thurn, creeping after Arnim, fled embittered towards Dresden. And a shudder of fear ran across Saxony when Friedland did not stop in Bohemia, approached the Erzgebirge along a wide front, set about reducing the mountainous region.

Suddenly he veered towards Bavaria. No one knew his target: Prince-elector? or the Swede?

The Swede, fattening himself on southern and western Germany, had with him only twenty thousand men. On the Rhine, the Main, to north and south four armies under Banér, Tott, the Duke of Weimar, the Landgrave of Hessen were laying waste, having their fun with the populace.

At first the strapping monarch had been bewildered at Wallenstein's sudden re-appearance as the Emperor's general in chief; waited to see what he might expect from the defeated man; kicked himself for not having been more forthcoming in negotiations with him.

He still hoped. Then came the attack on the Hradschin, the incredibly treacherous encirclement of Arnim. Unease stormed through Gustavus. Before any soundings-out could be arranged, the Duke declared himself. Wallenstein has turned. Is marching on me. The game is clear: Wallenstein means to speak violence to me.

The king headed east, to prevent Friedland from linking up with the Bavarian. Too late. Near Eger the Duke absorbed the tattered remnants of the League army. The hostile forces swooped down from Weiden and Eger, pushed towards Tirschenreuth. Friedland meant to enforce his will with overpowering superiority. Deeply shocked, sick with hate, astonished by Friedland the king fell back; hurling curses at Germany he barricaded himself in at Nuremberg. The Duke had him by the ears, if he wanted could destroy him in his weak condition. In a huge loop, both ends touching the River Pegnitz, the king dug fortifications. The city was called on to defend the Protestant faith. With a slight lack of confidence detected only by his closest entourage, the king assailed the town council with one of his devastating addresses. It worked. The council swore to stand like Magdeburg by its Protestant flag, to the bitter end.

With four thousand eight hundred mercenaries, three hundred cavalry, Nuremberg entered the king's service; three thousand citizen militiamen too, all trained in weaponry, from fifteen to forty years old. They would serve God and the true religion. They displayed twenty-four banners each with its identifying letter, and slogans that the king eyed with disquiet. They read: "This banner flies in honour of God, of conscience, free and pure doctrine." – "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?* Desist, desist, and be a better man!"

The king felt no gratitude. During those weeks, with a strange vengefulness alien to him he assailed Germans, at formal balls in the town indulged in endless imprecations against the German princes; their cure must be hard and relentless. Even the Palatine opposed him when he let rip this way at a great banquet in Ayrmann's Hall by the Laufer Gate: Frederick marched out of the hall together with the Margrave Christian, who had sponsored the banquet. Outside on the dark steps Christian tearfully begged the Palatine's forgiveness. They embraced: "All lost," sobbed the Margrave. Frederick: "I sometimes think Friedland might help us."

Earthworks, redoubts, palisades, ditches, batteries were flung up around the town in the warm June days, encompassing the suburbs of Wöhrd and Gostenhof. The king's camp extended from Wöhrd eastward to Gleisshammer, south to Weiherhaus and Lichtenhof. The strongest position was by Lichtenhof, where he settled in with ninety-four mounted cornets, a hundred banners of infantry, thirty-eight cannon, two thousand wagons.

The imperials approached from Tirschenreuth via Sulzbach. Into this swarm blundered Colonel Taupadel with dragoons and four companies from the Swedish Sperreuter regiment; these were squashed to a pulp. Then they made their way around Nuremberg, headed west along both banks of a little clear stream called the Bibert towards Zirndorf. There in the sweet sheep-dotted landscape they found a low plateau of meadows that led at the rear to cool dense woodland. They halted just a few miles from the Swede, settled in and dug trenches.

Bavarian Max, accompanied by Küttner, rode across to the Duke every day through the tumultuous camp, never raising his eyes from the neck of his grey. He was a prisoner, about to end his imprisonment. Friedland lodged in the middle of the camp in a looted pink Turkish tent decorated in oriental white and blue. It covered a huge square space, topped by a

beribboned canvas cupola. At the entrance, a row of bamboo poles supported a fringed baldachin. The Duke received him in the carpeted reception room, in the midst of his colonels and HQ staff. They seldom spoke alone.

The Duke must go on the offensive, was the tenor of the Bavarian's words. He alluded to the enormous superiority in numbers they enjoyed at the moment, and might lose in two or three weeks. Initially the Duke, busy with a thousand tasks, drinking, paying him no respect, rebuffed him with vague generalities: The strength of the Swedes must first be better assessed, a battle is easy to launch and hard to end. The Prince-elector did not hear how the Duke mocked him behind his back: "I've brought Max so far along that he not only obeys me, but waits for me with shouldered pike." The Bavarian was still importuning the Duke – his land suffers daily ever more devastation, no need to mention that an imperial defeat will cost him his land and his life – when the colonels came with the results of their deliberations. The refrain: We have superior numbers, but are not certain of morale among the mercenaries; they must first become accustomed to fighting; it will be enough to harry the Swede, nip his heels, take some loot. And so it went. They drew it out; the land fell into ruin. From the company of these gentlemen, who lived in Friedlandian luxury and strutted like well-fed princes, there came one day the arrogant question: Did the Bavarian camp consider itself able to conduct war better than the Duke; at Breitenfeld they had once the opportunity to put it to the test.

On through the ranks of the Duke's lifeguard, five deep, stiff rows of Dutch halberds in parade order, massively extended spearpoints with tassels and balls at the blade insert, etched with dreadful skulls and jabbing beaks. Through the whirling tumult of Hungarian and Polish horsemen, each with copper kettledrums at the saddle; they rode across the churned-up meadow, faster, faster, mouths pouting, the drumheads of human skin stridently pounding.

"What is the Duke planning?" Max asked his advisers, summoned from Regensburg.

"He's delaying."

"He is not delaying," said the Prince, his eyes blank.

The adversaries faced each other week after week. July passed, August; broiling heat descended. The meadowland where Friedland camped was boggy; water could be fetched from the Pegnitz only with fighting. Every day they fought for water. They sent criminals and sick men out first, let them be shot, and only then made a rush under cover of musket-fire. Fifteen thousand women streamed into the camp, thirty thousand horses along with the people. The only task of man and beast: lie there, lie there, chase away forage from the Swede, starve him out. Hordes of refugees fled to the Swede's camp, filled Nuremberg. The Bohemian's Croats and Hungarians encircled the town as if it were their hostage, mowed down anything living.

In stealth Friedland pursued his plans. Gave Arnim no respite: He had been chased out of Bohemia with his Saxons; let that be a warning to the Prince-elector of Saxony; they should come to an understanding. The reply from Saxony: the Prince-elector, mindful of his loyalties, does not propose to distance himself from his Swedish ally. Now a mass of cavalry poured from the camp at Zirndorf, first hundreds, then thousands. Holk with his Croats set off for Saxony, the undefended Vogtland. On the way they pressed vagrants, sprang prisoners, caught up common rogues and put them in the saddle; they were to spread devastation about them

such as had never been seen, so that people would acknowledge their strength. As towns and villages began to burn from Plauen and Zwickau eastwards, as the populace was slaughtered and defiled, even Arnim and the Prince-elector fled. The earth-shattering demons left word behind them: We are not alone, Count Gallas is on the way with twice as many.

While at Nuremberg the adversaries sat facing one another.

In the Swedish camp, horses had to nibble dry grass. Pestilence crept among the people.

The Swede, awaiting reinforcements, preached courage discipline. Pale and irascible he rode daily along the palisades, peered across. Out there is no field commander, no warrior, who with a tenfold advantage willnot dare go into battle. He has an inhuman plan: to tire us out. As soon as Banér arrives, we'll pay him back. Every day Gustavus feasted on his loathing. The German princes were slipping away, the Palatine was openly making ready to leave.

Now the Swede had what he was waiting for. Oxenstierna's regiments from the Rhine, Banér and Duke Bernhard with troops from Upper Swabia, four thousand Hessians, Duke William with six thousand. They made rendezvous some leagues west of Nuremberg, at Windsheim. The grey-haired Saxon Elector, all hopes pinned on the Swede, brought six regiments of foot and two mounted. All piled into the city of Nuremberg, which stank of corpses, greeted by tears and terrified cries that now they would all for sure starve to death. And so bitter was the famine, so horribly crowded together were the plague-ridden people, so wound up with his rage was the king, that a decision was expected within the day.

His army tackled the north side of the imperial camp. The Saxons overwhelmed the trenches. Such fearsome roaring salvos of artillery fire came in that the treetops in the woods disappeared in smoke, the plateau of the camp was swathed in fire and fog. For twelve hours the Swedes came on. Just as they had secured the strong eastern outpost of the high land, the Burgstall, it began to rain, and they were unable to haul up their cannon. The massed troops engaged at close quarters far into the night; two thousand Swedes were left lying. Darkness and pouring rain. The Swede pulled back.

Back in Nuremberg. Sent feelers out for negotiations, surely the other has had enough. No reply. Sent a message across: Leave Mecklenburg to me, you can have Franconia. Grim and embittered, Gustavus gave the signal to break out. From six thousand men the Swedish cavalry was reduced to four thousand; infantry companies, instead of a hundred and fifty men each, had not even sixty. Most of the German princes, the Palatine too, had abandoned him in the past few days. He marched past the northern flank of the camp, sent cannon-fire to draw the enemy out to battle. Nothing stirred. A few women ran happily down to the unguarded stream. Cheered through hollowed hands: "A fort we built for Emperor's need, and made a roadblock for the Swede." Friedland even let the baggage train pass by unmolested. A small garrison remained behind in the city; Friedland took no notice of it. As the Swede headed west, slowly, on full alert, he expected the Duke to pursue him. But the Duke stayed where he was, by Zirndorf. Only five days later broke camp; his vanguard scouted north towards Forchheim.

Once again the slowly retreating beaten Swede was seized by a savage desire to attack, realising now that he was of no concern to Friedland. He divided his assault forces, suddenly turned back with eleven thousand men, followed the old victorious trail south to Donauwörth,

and across the Danube. Only the Bavarian could be enticed away from the Duke, coming to the Swede with a wretched little band in the hope of protecting his realm. The Duke stayed put. Maximilian had failed to persuade Wallenstein to take over Bavaria. The Bavarian regiments knew that on the last occasion when the Prince-elector pleaded for troops from the Duke, he had been met with screaming anger. Maximilian tried to put a fine gloss on the situation before his counsellors; with a painful smile said: "Now we are all content. He has let us go. He could have killed us all." They did not stay long with the Swede.

That he still had the freedom to decide was only self-deception on Gustavus' part, born of torment. All his scouts reported: the monster Wallenstein is marching north. Clearly he was heading to Saxony, would follow up Holk's atrocities by giving the Prince-elector a hiding; would make for the coast, cut the Swedes off from their base. When this shocking news reached him, Gustavus was camped near Donauwörth, his nerves over-taut with plans to free himself from the trap. For two hot gentle days his army rested in the hilly summer landscape. Here was peace, no enemy near. The king retreated into the woods, lay like a sick man outside his open tent. Guards patrolled a wide silent arc around the tent; they wore the local long brown smock, on the round blond head was set firmly the tall blue cap with red bands. Now and then women approached whispering over the soft grass; lovely blond hair, plaits down to the breast, bright red fairytale hats; their blue pleated skirts hardly moved: that was Sweden.

The king wanted to speak to someone. Oxenstierna's huge bald skull; Grubbe, his secretary with the silent discreet face. Gustavus sat up: There's no reason to give in; what do you say. After they had spoken, the big heavy man, his sweat-drenched face the colour of lead, kept silent. In shame, head sunk between his shoulders, he said: "The Saxons are no longer mine. What will our women say?" To their assessments: "I went too far. It did not please the Lord. I was vain. I did not keep his cause pure. When the light within is but Darkness – what a darkness. No one can serve two masters. Sweden was everything to me. Now the Germans are coming. They mean to drive me out because of this. The Saxons and Pomeranians and Brandenburgers won't stand by me. If I had not served false idols, they would stay. If the Lord still watched over me. I no longer see clearly. That's why the Palatine went away."

They waited nearby while he brooded all that day and night, struggling with himself. Next morning he was brighter, pulled on his mail shirt, gave orders to break out, delivered a sermon to his lifeguard on a text from Matthew: "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." His gentlemen learned from him as he rode stiffly between them: "Pride has no value. You must not measure your worth by your desire to master all things. We shall draw a clear line between what is desirable and what is superfluous and harmful. Friedland will shortly be forced to engage in battle with us, it will demonstrate whose side God is on. We must win God over to our side. You all, think on it as I think on it. Once we have drawn God to us, we shall be invincible."

This northward retreat, undertaken by the troops with threats and grumbling, saw no mounted raids, no cruel foraging and plundering. The king himself kept moving day and night.

45. The King is Dead

THE EMPEROR WENT hunting at Wolkersdorf; he left his Mantuan lady back at the castle.

How the autumn wind soughed and rattled against his narrow timbered bedroom. The candle flickered in the gusting draft, almost went out as he stood barefoot on the carpet. He tugged at his loose nightshirt, his cap lay on the floor. His arms flailed: "Make way, make way!" Wheezing, wheezing. His face glowed with laughter, feet stamping vigorously one before the other. Elbows out, as if he waded through undergrowth. "Make way!" A long while. Sank exhausted into the chair, laughing.

Next morning Eggenberg and Trautmannsdorf came over. They praised the Duke of Friedland; prospects seemed much improved. At Nuremberg the king of Sweden had drawn in his horns, oh yes; now he was chasing after Friedland, who would soon finish him off.

The Emperor thought: Swede and Friedland, hurling themselves at one another, they'll flay each other alive and then separate. With quiet satisfaction the two visitors said: We hope to rein in Friedland's violence, too.

What is this? Defeat this one, then defeat this one. Now Friedland again. Everyone wants power. The Emperor asked after Friedland, and what particular concerns they had.

He has amassed too much power; his passion means one must be on guard.

That too. On guard against Friedland. How quickly the world changes when you don't keep a constant eye on it.

The visitors posed a strange question: Does His Majesty plan to spend long at Wolkersdorf, and will His Majesty delegate to them plenipotentiary powers in case of emergencies.

What were they up to? Did the dogs mean to haul Archduke Leopold to the fore again? As once in those days of bliss. "I don't know yet," Ferdinand managed to reply, hiding his eyes. Resentment in his voice: It is as yet undecided, for my part. He shivered as he watched them watching him; they seemed inquisitors. He dismissed them with mild threats, waved them away. After they had gone, saw the room as if through a mist. Went hunting.

On the way back they realised Lamormaini would have to be sent to the Emperor. The Emperor, in some strange way, was retreating into himself. Both thought, without saying it, of mad Emperor Rudolf.

When evening came and the moon stepped out from the birch woods, the Emperor stood barefoot on the carpet snorting, waving: "Make way! Make way!" Laughed heartily, stamped; a little human figure, shroud-white moon-dipped. All was again clear to him. Before he tired himself out he pulled on fur slippers, threw a green padded coat over his shoulders. Dreamily, eagerly, almost lewdly he settled on the ledge by the open window, stared into the jagged rustling mass of greenery.

It came rushing past. Out of the room. Back into the room. Over his shoulder, past his ear. It sped unhindered this way and that. Rattled headlong into moonlit gravel. Slid warm across his throat, out past his arms, a big cat, long hairy creature with a tail. Creatures that knew him. Creatures of many kinds, here was their abode; they took no notice of his presence. He was

smack in the middle. Felt so dizzy and tired in all the excitement that his head drooped and he closed his eyes.

His room was on the ground floor. He felt impelled to pull up a chair and climb over the windowsill into open air. They helped him, left and right. Held his hands as he climbed down. He went a few times in and out of the black trees. Broke into a run, imitating them, run fast, brush gently past, lift himself, fly. They whirred about in the branches and treetops, swooped down, came to a clattering stop. You can tread on them, they seep away like shadows into the earth. Such calling, shouting, sudden silences.

A devil, in the dark he couldn't see how big it was, laid a hand on his shoulder, asked him where he wanted to go, its strangely snivelling voice kept saying "dear Ferdinand, dear Ferdinand." It led him, huge as it was, back to the window, hoisted him to the sill so he could slide in. The devil's back was so big the whole window was black.

"Make way!" Ferdinand simpered, lying fully dressed on the bed. He slept.

"I must go to a priest," he told himself as cocks crowed. And was surprised that he felt no fear of Lamormaini. "If only I could speak with a priest. I have to know how it goes with God." He pondered deeply, without accounting to himself for his thoughts.

On days with no hunting he was allowed to wander undisturbed in the woods. He would go out in a white and green smock. He went slowly, tried to think of Wallenstein. To think one can have power over such a monstrous creature: I don't want it, not at all. All I want is to press deeper into the forest.

As he wandered lost in his thoughts, they steered him left, right. Went no faster than he, wide cosy creatures, one at his right hand, one at the left. He went along.

Back at the house a report awaited from Questenberg: further information about the encounter at Nuremberg, and the Duke of Friedland's intention to cut off the king's access to the coast, having already cut him off from the south. "Delicious," the Emperor told himself. And suddenly he shivered; remembered the fat thousand-foot, the Wallenstein dragon, these two coiled about each other, the white throats, knees, smooth revolting bellies. He was so disgusted that a gout of bile spilled from his mouth.

Timidly he crawled towards the tall silver crucifix, laid himself silently and very cautiously at its feet. Waited, raised his head, looked at it. Sighed.

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Prince-elector Maximilian returned without fanfare to an empty Munich. He was informed of the size of the contributions that had been paid. He sat bowed in his Neue Veste. The opulent buildings of Munich were to him a too-large set of clothes; the Duke of Friedland was off to conquer the Empire. He had allowed himself to be bullied. The clerical Electors were no help; they were in France's embrace. The Emperor, said rumour, wants to abdicate, has no interest now in the Empire. Doctor Leuker sent confidential reports from Vienna: the King of Spain has equipped a strong army for Germany, it will be of use in the Spanish Netherlands but will also form a reserve to defend the imperial House against all and any dangers, even Friedland. One can go along with Spain; from Richelieu one expects nothing. Leuker comforted the forlorn Maximilian: he can avenge himself on Richelieu by allying with the Spanish party.

But it all depended on what happened in the field. They heard that the Duke was heading north; another defeat for the Swedes like Nuremberg and no one would be able to touch Friedland. He would erect a despotism over Germany. Maximilian felt unable to bestir himself. Never had he felt so abandoned, threatened by such spine-chilling peril.

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Behind Holk came Gallas, via Wunsiedel, Hof. Behind Gallas the Duke. Through Forchheim, Bamberg, the county of Reuss in the territory of Meissen, which was pillaged. On to the Saale; the river crossings must be secured.

Ahead of the army, couriers sped on steaming horses to Arnim, now in Silesia; and from Raschin to Count Thurn: the Saxon Prince-elector must, must sever himself from the Swede. Peace should must and will be made, whether he hides himself away or not. And Johann Georg, deeply despondent after the devastation inflicted by Holk, beat his breast when the dreadful swarm set out from Nuremberg: he will make peace, or else he will suffer the same fate as the Palatine, will have to tramp behind the Swede dragging an empty sack, he, a German, head of the Protestant cause. And his counsellors had already prepared an offer to Friedland and the Roman Emperor when couriers arrived from Gustavus himself, telling the Prince-elector to stay calm: Gustavus is in pursuit of the Duke, that's of help to the Saxons, nothing has happened, he won't let him go far. As for Arnim, he announced a forced march out of Silesia.

In a rage, intolerant of objections, Johann Georg declared to his cabinet: "Peace must come. Somehow. Let no one tell me how. If the Swede cannot bring it, then let the Emperor. We are all Christians, not cattle to suffer so unspeakably. And now again. I've had enough."

The Duke hurled himself across Saxony, made his base in Leipzig, pushed north to Torgau. The Swede was soon there; the passes at Hildburghausen and Schleusingen, south of the Thuringian Forest, had been kept open for him by furious cavalry charges led by Duke Bernhard of Weimar. The king broke through the Forest, his route taking him near to the scene of his first decisive victory over that Tilly who had now departed this Earth. Through Arnstadt Kösen Naumburg. Desperate people begging for help lay abandoned along the road.

"What do they want from me," the king shrugged, gritted his teeth. "I'm doing my duty. God must save them." As at Nuremberg, he planned to await reinforcements before attacking.

But when Friedland sent out his general Pappenheim to repel the oncoming forces of Hans von Arnim, who kept his intentions to himself, the Swede, filled with solemn self-assurance, thought his moment had come. He would not wait for the onset of winter, could not hold out until spring: "Friedland has given himself into my hands," he felt when he heard of Pappenheim's departure from Halle.

Swarms of people around him: men from Småland, East and West Gotland, troops of Horn, Banér, Tott, Stålhandske, Klitzing, Löser, Bernhard; they'll be crushed like ants under a heel if we don't win. They had the right faith, Sweden, the whole of Sweden, had given them all it had; they would not be defeated. These were the thoughts that obsessed him as he closed his eyes.

"We shall win," he decided. He rode through the misty autumn evening issuing orders. "They'll fare no better than Tilly at Breitenfeld." He set to with passion to shape his plans.

Friedland was reluctant to respond. The word from his headquarters when they saw the vengeful Swede approaching: Not to win, but weaken the enemy, spread terror, withdraw in stealth as soon as our losses grow too many. A call went out to Pappenheim: drop what you're doing, hasten back. Wallenstein's stirrups – he insisted on riding – were padded with silk.

The Swedish regiments: Karberg, Duke Bernhard, Wrangel, Dieshausen, Courville, Stechnitz, Steinbach, Brandenstein, Anhalt, Löwenstein, Hofkirch. And then Usslar, the Landgrave of Hesse, Bulacher, Goldstein, Wilhelm of Weimar, the lifeguard in yellow, the blue regiment under Winkel, major-general Count Brahe.

The German regiments: Colloredo, Chiesa, Savelli, Gallas, Holk, twenty-eight squadrons of Hungarians and Croats under Isolani, twenty-four squadrons of cuirassiers under Octavio Piccolomini, Strozzi, Gonzaga, Coronini.

From misty morn until evening, for eight hours the armies heaved against each other among the mill-races and canals near Markranstädt and Lützen, southwest of Leipzig; on the gallows-hill rise, fourteen of Wallenstein's giant howitzers. As darkness fell and on into the night the two armies remained on the field, tearing at each other.

Gustavus Adolphus was killed, as were thousands from every regiment of Swedes and imperials.

Chainshot swept Count Pappenheim to his death.

Unconcerned about opinion, the Duke went purring back to Leipzig, and out of Saxony.

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The Swedes made only feeble efforts to pursue him. They were too weak to move. Days passed. They lay in fear. Croats scavenging for cannon were chased off. Those who had been around Gustavus swore not to let themselves be scattered. Oxenstierna took up the reins. The army would be led by Bernhard of Weimar. Winter must not be allowed to ruin them; they were determined to show no fear.

Into wintry Prague came Wallenstein, and pronounced judgements. Gifts of eighty-five thousand guilders were bestowed on Count Merode, the Marquis of Grana, the regiments of Comargo, Breuner.

In front of the Council House in Prague, on a black-draped stage, eleven officers were executed, all of distinguished family, most from Sparr's regiment. Some were hanged on the newly-built gallows, some had their sword broken beneath the gallows as they were declared rogues; the names of forty fugitive officers were inscribed on the gallows.

Finns – the brown swarming rats Tilly had faced – and Stålhandke's cavalrymen found the ponderous body of Gustavus Adolphus, the lifeless face crushed into the mud.

Four hundred Småland horsemen, sabres drawn, all that remained of the regiment at whose head he had fallen, escorted it through Weissenfels to Wittenberg, to Wolgast, where the funeral ceremony took place at the edge of the sea over which he had sailed with cogs galleons corvettes, the flagship *Mercury* with thirty-two guns, behind it *Västervik*, *Pelican*, *Apollo*, *Andromeda*, *Rainbow*, *Stork*, *Dolphin*, *Parrot*, *Black Dog*.

Here by the salty restless sea, as winter storms raged, a silent company composed of metal wood cloth had gathered to await the rotting eviscerated corpse. Tall silver altar-tables, wax candles wreathed in flowers, in the church a *castrum doloris*, an elaborate catafalque. Living people and animals crowded around the unconscious objects, the body that last had feelings months before at Lützen and which now was no more than another object amid those that had been carved sewn forged for it. The hundredweight shrouded leaking mass of flesh and bones had been stuffed into a coffin of cypress wood, placed on a satin-draped hearse. Lifeguards preceded it, drawn sword tucked under the arm, warhorses followed, bloodied banners, adjutants, marshals, bodyguards with reversed guns, heralds, drummers, the coat of arms. The corners of the coffin-cover were held by officers, cavalrymen in drab, gloveless beside the creeping cart, bodyguards holding reversed flower-wreathed partizans. Behind the hearse came marshals with staffs, ministers, mounted courtiers, officials, heavily-veiled women led by the hand, followed by trainbearers. The queen, dressed in grey and white.

No coffin like her dead consort's had yet been constructed for her. She joined the procession horrified. In a cypress coffin in front of her under a black satin blanket held taut by officers lay a bloated thick mass, leaking, its face blueblack, on its arms and legs hung something that reminded of flesh and was supposed to be Gustavus Adolphus, strong singing irascible husband, father of her little leaping daughter. It disgusted her. She could not run away, they were leading her. She felt nauseous, she was being violated, she floundered blindly on the arm of her court ladies, trembling in her leg muscles.

Into the dark high nave. Buglers blared out: "In peace and joy I journey on."

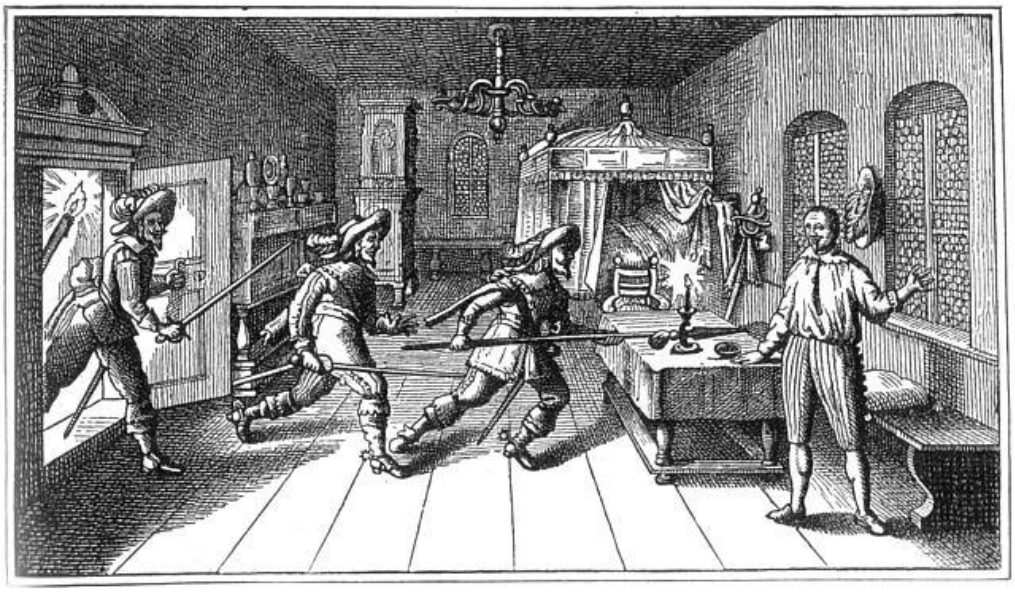
Behind the huge sumptuous busily looming *castrum doloris* a metal man of sorrows on a cross; hands and feet nailed, groans from the open mouth, trickles of blood before the ears, ribs squeezed by gasps, the body hollowed out.

Roar of cannon-fire.

END OF BOOK FIVE

Book the Sixth

Ferdinand



46. Carthage must be Destroyed

WALLENSTEIN REMAINED in Bohemia. The pleas that issued from the counsellors in Vienna even as he marched past Leipzig – that he should not come into Bohemia, should spare the Emperor's hereditary lands – were in vain. No response came until the entire army was already spread across Bohemia; and it was hardly comforting: Here is the safest place, best for keeping an eye on the foe, and for most rapidly re-assembling our forces. The Empire offered better regions for quartering troops than the hereditary lands; but the Duke declined all negotiations. He even extended the quartering over Moravia. In Vienna they had expected nothing else; but all were shocked when it happened. The Duke had become as logical as Fate. He meant to bring the Emperor to heel as quickly as possible. He would squeeze the income the Emperor drew from the hereditary lands – his only income – and thereby turn heavy debts into actual poverty. The cruel usurer and moneygrubber would lord it over them.

That winter, supplicants made visits to Prague and Jičin: the abbot of Krems-minster; Breuner; then Trautmannsdorf himself, who was a guest of the commander in chief during the holy period of the Twelve Nights. Together they enjoyed the local traditions: children ran with blackened faces from house to house, collected cooked tidbits, men crept solemnly from tree to tree along the avenues, wrapped them in straw to ward off evil. Trautmannsdorf observed the Duke as if he were an interesting natural object, then undertook to lure him in, speak tender words so this strange great phenomenon would not be lost to Vienna. What an endless pity, he said often, that they couldn't be friends. Mistakes had occurred, misunderstandings. One might think of straightening things out, putting them back on a sensible track. Clever imaginative man that he was, he worked himself into an almost cordial mood as he spoke, but soon reverted to a respectful observant distance. This had no visible effect on the Duke; but it seemed his interest was piqued. For days they did not meet, then at new encounters the Duke was the same as ever: courteous, false, inclined to threaten, inscrutable. Nothing changed with regard to the occupation of Bohemia and Moravia. The Duke insisted it was his right in accordance with agreements to withdraw into the hereditary lands. Trautmannsdorf realised that Wallenstein had formed this plan at an early stage, and looked at him in admiration.

Claiming to lack ready funds for remobilisation, Friedland demanded the swift amassing of specific sums through the Imperial Court Council. Before Abbot Anton accepted this evil measure he consulted the Spanish ambassador on the reply to be made to Prague. With the utmost discretion he learned that Madrid was inclined, and had so promised the insistent gentlemen Eggenberg and Trautmannsdorf, to protect the Emperor from any attack by Friedland, but as yet the situation was not critical, the Duke not insubordinate; best wait and see his attitude to the Spanish Army of the Netherlands that would soon arrive from Milan.

With a sigh the abbot saw that once again Spain looked only to its own interest. The sums had to be amassed. Treasurers and comptrollers were ordered to make payments to Friedland. Lower and Upper Austria had to levy previously unknown taxes on carriages and coaches, sleighs. Every tun of Hungarian wine brought in fifteen kreuzers for the Emperor. Bankers and Jews had to pay a two percent property tax, every builder, organist, schoolmaster, musician,

minstrel, churchwarden, chimneysweep in any of the hereditary lands had to pay five guilders, the peasantry in Upper Austria a monthly contribution of fifty-two thousand guilders. And when they were at wits' end to find more resources, the sums raised being insufficient for the needs of the Emperor and Duke Leopold, there came from Jičin a mocking incitement: confiscations on religious grounds should be given priority. Anton and the other counsellors rebelled; only the Jesuits snapped their jaws when they heard it. "How the Duke has changed," they laughed. "Just how hard did he push for the restitution of clerical properties." In some offices of the Emperor's court the crisis took on an immediate urgency; tempers flared.

An imperial decree at the New Year specified that in the Duchy of Austria below the Enns, any members of the nobility not adhering to the one true saving Roman Catholic faith must within fourteen days present themselves in person to the custodian of the Court Chamber on pain of the loss of noble liberties, the highest imperial disfavour, and physical and monetary penalties. Recalcitrants to be exiled, or required to sign an undertaking to quit the realm without delay; a part of their property to fall to the Emperor. Non-Catholic foreign merchants to be summarily expelled, their trade goods confiscated, along with a certain proportion of their monetary possessions.

Most counsellors were laggard in enforcing these measures; they flinched from the calculations of the finance people. Only a few at court knew that negotiations with wealthy men were already in progress, driven by Wallenstein, for the sale of towns in Hungary and elsewhere – towns that had placed themselves under imperial protection, imperially protected towns – a deeply shaming action from which everyone recoiled.

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He had slipped away from Nuremberg, the man the Swede called 'Majesty' and 'Royal Grace of Bohemia': the Palatine Frederick. Had slipped away because longer acquaintance with the Swedish overlords would bring no joy. He and English Elisabeth made their leisurely way to Frankfurt. Swedish patrols became fewer; he calmed down, managed now and then to look at his wife. She was full of complaints about leaving the Swedes, and where's Frederick wandering off to now, he's not as young as he was. They traversed a sad autumnal landscape in their open carriage; Frederick lay facing backwards, covered to the ears in sheepskins; she sat upright glancing left and right, her expression peevish and unhappy. She yawned often, tapped her foot. "It'll be better in Frankfurt," smiled Frederick.

And she was mollified when, in the fine lodgings that this rich free city placed at their disposal, her old friend, the gallant greybeard Louis Camerarius, who had long resided in Hamburg and Stockholm, called on them. No doubt he had an urgent task to perform on behalf of Sweden: to assure himself of the Palatine, and take care not to let him defect. A smiling teasing man, clever, interested in everything, pleasant, he fussed about his Palatine charges, showed them Frankfurt's curiosities, bought horses for the lady, rustled up money for her from unknown sources, brightened the lodgings with ornaments, arranged entertainments for her ladies in waiting. Meanwhile, with help from little determined Rusdorf, he kept an eye on the Prince-elector's correspondence, especially as it appeared that Frederick, without letting a word slip out, was writing to various relatives with whom he had long had no contact – men who had some connection to the imperial court.

Rusdorf was beside himself: “It’s all the King of Sweden’s fault. The prince was amenable to the king in all matters. But the king overstretched his bow. The prince is not unmindful that the Swede obtained for him some recompense in terms of his outlays and sacrifices in the Empire, but it seems to go deeper than mere recompense.”

“How can you say such a thing,” Camerarius’ smile was reserved, “first, there’s still fighting, and a Peace Congress is a long way off.”

“And he’ll never bring us over, when base self-interest and selfishness triumph. His Serenity of Saxony has already sniffed out the Swede’s real goal: to bring us German Protestants under his wing. Our gracious master doesn’t want this. And tell me, Camerarius, is he not right?”

“The war is not over, not by a long stretch. Everything will come into balance. One should not give up the good in search of the best.”

Rusdorf stepped close to Camerarius, who stood by his chair stroking his grey beard; he whispered heatedly: “I have received from Sweden no less money than you. For sure. Don’t look so surprised, I know he’s paying you. He’s been paying me a long while. I don’t have much to show for it. I’d be a rich man if I had everything our gracious liege owes me. That’s the only reason I accepted it. And I know that’s what you’re thinking when you take the Swedish gold: he is our liege, and we’re not as unhappy as he. But you overdo it: you have no need to serve the Swede the way you do. What we cannot prevent, we cannot prevent. If the prince seeks an alliance with the Emperor and the Emperor is gracious: God forbid! We have endured enough. We have both grown grey.”

The other man, shaking his head, stepped across the room, checked that the door was shut tight. “All right. We are in accord. He’ll find no alliance there.”

Rusdorf, clenching his fists: “And is it right, what the Swede declared in Nuremberg to be his first and final word?”

“What was that?”

“How much he’ll benefit from the Palatine possessions on the Rhine?”

“Well?” He loomed until the little man’s mouth fell open. “We shall not yield more than we have to. Maybe it’s not so foolish to let our master engage in a little correspondence with the Emperor. And to let word of it slip out.”

Rusdorf spluttered: “The Swede is nothing but an extortionist!”

“Not so loud.”

“It is time to speak out loud. He’s no better than those British lordships who cozened us, me and Pawel.” Camerarius squeezed his hand. “Unity, Rusdorf.”

But Frederick wrote seldom, seldom opened a letter. He amused himself in the city, drank, was cordial to his lady Elisabeth. Then news of Gustavus’ death in Saxony reached the Palatine quarters. At once all was thrown in turmoil, everyone flailed in bewilderment.

The princess wanted to travel on to The Hague, demanded a return to England, cursed the Empire. Now Frederick took up his correspondence with Vienna in a livelier manner. He threw parties unconstrained, the English lady channelled her agitation into pleasures,

ostentatious outings on horseback, sleigh rides, and high jinks that had the whole town whispering.

Towards Christmas Frederick felt a curiously intense urge to broach to his drinking companions his views on dead Gustavus, the war and whatever else. But no one came; they were scattered about the town making merry. He sat alone with his Fool, who soon fell asleep on his little chair. “I had so much to talk about with them, wanted to open my heart,” thought Frederick; he had no idea why; it was all going so well, he would regain his realm. Such an upheaval in his breast.

As grey day dawned he sat in the enormous salon where beakers and hats and swords lay scattered, picked up a tankard and began to drink. The others will soon be here, I’ll wait for them. He drank. He sat on a throne-chair he had shoved into a corner. Sat there brooding.

The sun was bright when Elisabeth opened the door behind him. Short nose reddened by cold, tall black fur hat pulled down over her ears, stray blond wisps falling over her eyes. She tripped on a sleeping lackey; three small stools lay upended, three rugs were rumpled to thrones on the parquet. Lifting in both hands her gown of silver-grey silk set with pearls, she stepped across to the throne-chair; a hand dangled down one side. Her grave bold gaze rested on his face – for days she had not seen it – and her heart leapt with tender joy. She removed her white gloves, brushed back the wine-spattered hair, dabbed at the fat sweating neck under the crumpled Spanish ruff, took his chin in her hand to kiss him on the mouth as he gazed back mute and grave. His neck was limp and heavy, the head slipped a little sideways against the back of the chair. Bending over him, fur-lined cheek against his face, she called behind her: “Steward, footman, wine.” Rejection from the mouth: “No, no,” and from the body that pushed her away, tried to rise to its feet. He beamed lovingly at her, arms out, eyes fixed on her. His mouth opened, he seemed about to laugh, or cry, or weep piteously. Nose and upper lip lifted in a sort of sorrow. He fell back with a thump. His throat, his head flushed red-blue, swelled as the cheek muscles twitched gently and then more violently, and as the blue eyes dimmed the head lolled from his shoulder onto his chest. The legs were caught under the chair, the body seemed about to collapse to the floor. Loud snores, the left arm fumbled down at a chair leg. The princess cried out in fear through clenched teeth. Then with a brisk motion the head flopped back onto the shoulder, the cheek still twitching, pale eyes sightless and unfocused, the whole body rocked gently.

She stood there hesitant, chewed a finger, waded slowly back through the salon, arms lifting and falling of their own volition, and only at the door did she turn around at the sound of groans and thumps. The man in the corner had tumbled head first onto the parquet. She went blindly across the courtyard, rubbed her nose, shook snow from her skirts. Every four or five steps she looked back, looked down, shook her skirts. She saw a groom emerge from a stable and whistle to two ladies looking on from a window; he pointed frowning at the floundering woman. The pale trembling ladies took hold of her flailing hands. She cried out, ground her teeth, after a few groans threw herself into their arms.

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With Gustavus and the Palatine both dead, the war mood in Vienna intensified. Even the well-informed at the top made no attempt to rein it in.

The successes of the imperial armies resounded across Europe. In Rome the Holy Father, having just coldly spurned Vienna, almost caused a breach with Spain too when Cardinal Borgia, the brutish Spanish ambassador, accused him in the Consistory of being heartless and dilatory in pursuing Catholic interests. Urban, big bushy-bearded warrior, well aware how the luck of battle could turn, dug in his heels, chased the cardinal out of Rome. Now this other barbarian, this Friedland who had allowed Mantua to be destroyed, was taming the Goths. It almost seemed he would become master of the German situation. A pontifical letter arrived in Vienna, which the nuncio read out at the castle before Emperor Ferdinand and his proud court in all its finery. Under the seal of his fisherman's ring, the pope conveyed, in this the tenth year of his Pontificate, what great blessing had been brought to all by the death of Gustavus. The complaints and lamentations of his sons had reached to the throne of His Holiness, plunging his soul into a constant state of sorrow. All Christendom felt satisfaction, having watched with horror as a king, an enemy of the very name of Catholic, defiant in his armed might and his victories, with fire and sword laid waste to all from the shores of the Baltic Sea to the foot of the Alps, and boasted of his swiftness in bringing the whole territory to subjection. "And therefore, in the Church of the German Nation of the most blessed Virgin Santa Maria dell'Anima, We celebrated with the greatest joy a Holy Mass, and, together with Our beloved sons the Cardinals of the Holy Church and a large congregation of the Roman populace, conveyed Our thanks to God for this great mercy."

Ferdinand on his purple-decked bench listened in friendly silence to the throaty orator; as he stood up kissed the hairy hand. Wordlessly, as if thinking things over, he stood a little while blandly facing the expectant man, then slowly uttered the words: "Let us proceed in humility, and order affairs in submission to God."

Behind him a triumphant clamour. The nuncio, playing an unenviable role, perceived with unease what waves the excitement was stirring up; he found it necessary to ride away. The Fathers of the Jesuit Order, wherever they could gain admission at court, demanded war to the finish, total destruction of the Swedish army. The dismaying reports from Bavaria roused them to utmost fury. Wherever they could gain access – to the confessors of the Emperor, the Empress, young Ferdinand and his queen, any lords of the civil administration, especially Count Schlick, president of the Court War Council – they insisted that in all conquered territories the highest tolerable contributions must be extracted as compensation; every Protestant property in those places must be confiscated. They were not at all confident of the Duke of Friedland and his advice on the confiscation of religious properties, and thought, making the best of their position, that they might now force him over to their side. He had felt their power at Regensburg; he should not believe he could continue to follow his inscrutable whims and his merely military policy.

The worthies of the College formed a special deputation comprising the Provincial and a few rectors and prefects, who set down in writing how the war must be prosecuted to a conclusion redounding to the fame of the holy Catholic Church, whereby neither blood nor treasure should be of any consideration; how their involvement and intervention at this moment cannot be deemed presumptuous, especially if one shares with Azorius, Cornelius a Lapide, Santarelli,* the idea that mankind's goal is transcendental and that priests represent

the highest earthly king, namely the Pope. Their words reflect the view of the General of their Order. And if what they have mentioned regarding the ending of the war is already assured, then so much the more regarding Saxon matters. And then came a flood of vituperation about the negotiations His Grace the Duke of Friedland was conducting with the Elector of Saxony, a princeling and supporter of heretics in the Empire on a par with the Swedish king now swept away by God and the Virgin and plunged into the very pit of Hell.

Learned disputants came pouring out of their residences hostels colleges, sharp-faced broad slow men, hot eyes, stern gaze, determined mouth. Long black gown, open cloak, very wide sleeves, underskirt like a cassock with an open outer skirt, flat-brimmed hat, the brim held high by cords left and right, black four-cornered biretta. They flooded into the great hall of the College House. Its walls were of white stucco, wall paintings thee feet wide depicted fantastical gorgeously-coloured saints in radiant sun-discs. The Virgin stood more than life-size, face golden, white silk garments, heavy jewelled chains beneath a ruby-studded crown on a striped marble column behind the pulpit by the wall. They sang a song of praise to Mary, once they had settled bareheaded onto the creaking benches.

The waffling father confessor to young Ferdinand's wife, the Queen of Hungary, spoke: Wherever Jesuits come into the Empire they should point out to princes and subjects the dangers in which the Empire is embroiled. As the great Mariana* explains, the greatest source of violence lies in the common people, who must put their understanding to the proper use. Leaders and rulers, like anyone else, can err and can fall into sin. Armies are there to serve not the rulers and generals, but the entire population. He who commands an army can make unconstrained use of it only when he is sure of the people's confidence. But should he act against the will and happiness of the people, then the people, and with them the army, must turn from him and a curse must be uttered over him. Double-faced like the heathen idol Janus is the supreme imperial field-marshal von Wallenstein, Duke of Friedland; one face looks the holy Church and her consecrated sons amicably in the eye, his hands strew gifts like few other princes. But the other face has fangs protruding from the mouth, it glares and grins greedily and full of spite; the hands on that side wrestle with those of the other, and one to whom a bushel of grain was given is now robbed of two three bushels by the same furious iron arms. This lovely mouth recites the Ave and the rosary, this head bows piously at the blessed offering; that ferocious maw finds only joy in the gloom of the heretic, praises their wicked desires and demands, and the head is filled with assaults on the freedom and power of the sweet Catholic Church. Such a man is he, arisen from Bohemian soil; only with effort was he torn away from the false confession,* but the horrid weeds were not hoed clear with sufficient resolve. The drunken heretic who to the sorrow of every pious person wears the Electoral crown of Saxony, Johann Georg by name, believes he has a claim on properties and districts that he and his predecessors stole from the Catholic Church in its time of weakness.

"Oh measureless the sorrow when we were robbed of these foundations, monasteries and properties; many lost hope in the soundness of our frail vessel. Measureless our rejoicing when our properties were to be restored through the decree of a wonderful wise just and pious Emperor. But the man with two faces intends our ruin. He will reach an accommodation concerning these thefts with the heretic in Dresden, and make a timely exit from the war with

his winnings. Victory and defeat mean nothing to him. We hear this from every side. Yes, he wants peace, even if that peace be sealed with the impotence and shame of our holy Church."

Then they stood and sang a Latin hymn. They chatted in groups. During the oration the big limping Luxemburger, confessor to His Roman Majesty, entered the hall, stood at the door, mingled with the groups, listened. His face was weary and indecisive, and he spoke not a word.

When they had settled down again, their whispering was drowned by the sharp provoking voice of a rector. He began with a fanfare: "Ecclesia militans! Ecclesia militans! Such are those who serve the Society of Jesus. We ourselves! A company of soldiers, our blessed founder called us; we form the Pope's assault force in the struggle against the heathen, abroad and in Christendom. No peace! Battle is our cry, until the Pope shall be victorious. We confront the most momentous fate: the Emperor's mighty warrior would compel us to peace. We must cease to be. The Church must be crippled. We shall not cease to live, his wealth shall not kill us, poverty shall be the bulwark of our Company. Couriers have come to us from Saxony, couriers from Bohemia, who make clear that the battle for existence or annihilation must now blaze up; the Emperor's warrior has declared it. He wants to unify the Empire. We are Catholic and shall remain Catholic. On this fact, unity can only founder. We lay bare the superficiality of his religious peace: it is a cover for the defeat of the one true faith. Ecclesia militans! Provincial, professors, masters, adjuvants: the armies of the Bohemian Wallenstein are marching against us. I call out to you: will you count for less than his chief of artillery, his generals, colonels, captains, lieutenants and cornets? The soul against armaments! Blessedness against politics! Under the sign of sainted Ignatius we shall master this Friedland."

They murmured happily, formed gesticulating groups as they stood up from their benches. The Bavarian Dr Leuker was in Vienna, accompanied by young Küttner. Maximilian had only reluctantly released his young aide, who could not bear the helpless sitting around in the imperial confines of the palace at Munich, could not bear to see the dreadful isolation in which his sovereign found himself, and without considering that he was the only joy his prince could find those long long weeks, he broke loose, rode off to Vienna, to Leuker, in order to attempt something on his own. He relished the Jesuit spectacle, the fathers understood the moment, but lacked power. He tried to flush out those who might help Bavaria.

As the equally perplexed Leuker wandered among the worthies of the conference organisers, the Court War Council and the Chamber, the canny envoy found that he was positively provoked to speak out against the Generalissimus. As if they found satisfaction in hearing such complaints. And they wanted something from him, as a secret ally against somebody. He looked left and right: something was afoot at court against the Duke. No one spoke with clarity.

During those days, in the corridors of the castle an encounter occurred between the Bavarian envoy Leuker and the supreme head of the Bohemian administration, William Slavata. Slowly they strolled through courtyards into the town. The count drew the Bavarian along with him. He spoke pleasantries, tried to assess the other's mood. They pushed on aimlessly into the crowded inner city wrapped in heavy furs, several times circled the Plague Tower at the Graben, evading ruffians of the Watch who eyed them suspiciously, on to the High Market where they vanished among the cries of hawkers.

How has his Electoral Serenity of Bavaria overcome his severe losses, wondered pretty Slavata, and what remains to be done. The Bavarian muttered a furtive lament: That's exactly our misfortune. Bavaria is allied with Habsburg and so everything's hunky-dory, but who can deny the alliance is a joke. Seriously: never have things gone so badly for Prince Maximilian as during this past year's campaign. All who were with him at Nuremberg bewail the situation. He launched into a wide-ranging recitation of the injuries Friedland had heaped on Electoral Bavaria at Nuremberg, and even earlier from Eger. Maximilian had told his father that the vengeful man had tormented him half to death.

"A misfortune indeed," the other said concealing a smile, "to fall into the hands of one's enemy, for you can't blame Friedland if he does not so easily forget the Regensburg Convention."

As they made their way among chicken baskets and pigs across Lobkowitz Market, they bumped into Küttner shuffling merrily through the snow in a plain unplumed cap, swordless; he confessed with a laugh that he was off on the prowl, was heading for Red Tower Street where a hot-sausage shop had the finest mead. It was scowling Slavata's first sight of this ruddy-cheeked person. They touched fingertips. After a few brief words Küttner wanted to be on his way. Slavata suggested they all head for Red Tower Street. A few paces on Leuker took his leave, for the Bohemian grandee was giving all his attention to the insignificant young jackanapes. The Bohemian had become snagged on Küttner, something drew him to the lad.

Outside the sausage shop, loquacious Küttner began to purr; how he'd first been led here by the strange dwarfish professor from Genoa, Licetus,* who'd shown him all kinds of pocket tricks and so on. When asked about Maximilian he grew quiet, then burst out tearfully how he had abandoned the Prince; to think so much misfortune could befall such a pious clever deep man. There he sits back in Munich, for how long, and the Swedes will be there again from whatever direction; who could bear to witness it, he'd almost run from the place. Seated in his dark nook, fur cloak across his knees, Slavata took this in with lowered eyes; now and then his dull satiny gaze darted swiftly over the agitated youngster. He had nudged him onto the desired path, and when he seemed unable to proceed, remarked with an ambiguous private smile, playing with his gingerbread, that they were no farther forward than at Regensburg a few years ago: Carthage must be destroyed. Küttner found this naive and Jesuitical; hesitantly he asked if there were no concrete measures that could help.

Again: Carthage must be destroyed.

The Bavarian acknowledged pleasantly that even the House of Habsburg might be deposed; but what should happen first.

Is Carthage to be destroyed, or not?

Well now, the Bavarian laughed and took a swig: stick to the point. But the dogged slow dignitary would not be drawn; first they must agree the principle. Now, faced with such unmistakable insistent certitude, Küttner for the first time felt unsure, put down his tankard, stared penetratingly at the delicate man with the bowed head. What, then. Slavata noticed the change of mood, stared back from beneath lowered brows: How, at this point, does it stand with Carthage. Maybe it can be destroyed, it seems the Bavarian Prince wants this also.

'Can', 'maybe', 'seems', His Serenity in Munich has no words stronger than these; one cannot, one must, one will have to. Or else?

"So, my dear clever young friend, you even have an 'or else' in mind. This 'or else' has something of the Deluge about it. Know that I do not dream of this 'or else'. God has not granted me such great foresight."

"That's how it stands, you think."

"Many men have grasped it already. They've waited so long and have so looked forward to grasping it that there's nothing left to grasp."

Küttner, stooping over the barrelhead, tapped rhythmically with the index finger of his left hand on the wood for a while. "Go on," he muttered. Slavata stood, threw a silver coin onto the counter; they stepped into the rapidly gathering dusk.

As the Bohemian made his way alone back to his quarters he puzzled over this sudden wintry adventure: sitting in a hot-sausage shop, this Küttner cheeky, strangely cordial and childlike. How had he been drawn into conversation with the lad. There was something lovely, sweetly lyrical about it; he felt compelled, and in him there still surged something of the joy, the strange invigoration of the encounter. As if he himself walked with a jaunty youthful step.

Such were his thoughts as he sat in the dark oriel. It had almost nothing to do with Friedland, he thought, gazing tenderly at his reflection; it is sufficient to itself. As his face smiled into the darkness he thought and dreamed: I shall entangle Friedland in the lad, he's my weapon, what other weapon do I have against Friedland. I'm just a nightingale, flitting about the lion. What a curious death it would be for the lion, were I to kill it. And he relished the lovely mellow notion. And what is it I want from the strong tawny lion; what is he doing to me. How much it would take for me to idolise him. But I stand ready and willing to kill him. Wheels, how strange, are in motion, heading in that direction.

47. The Final Act Begins

AT SHROVETIDE a masked ball was held at the Wallenstein palace. Throngs of Turks Hungarians savages goblins. Red-costumed Satan slipped among them, his tail lashed horribly. A green-haired water sprite was tried by a Jester's Court on a stage on the heated mezzanine: he refused to recognise marriage among humans, and at last amid yells and whinnying was sentenced to wed a plump muddy weasel. And then Count Trčka, in Hungarian costume, led ponderous Count Schlick, president of the Court War Council, just turned up from Vienna, to greet Friedland. The Duke, a dreadful sight from his ailments and his restlessness, was pacing about behind a clump of palms, his lanky body bent and cadaverous leaned on a pair of crutches. His cropped hair was snow-white, the pointed beard grey and white mixed, blue-red bags under the small aggressively darting eyes, nose drooping over thick lips. The duchess and a few notables sat on cushioned chairs around a table. The Duke drew the visitor to him.

While they were engaged in lively conversation, a villainous figure came from the salon towards this group. He had a long blond beard, tangled hair down to the shoulders. He strode along in hip-high tawny boots, musket in the right hand, which he brandished as if intent on

murder. He was decked out in the biggest white ruff and an enormous plumed helmet, and with his left hand dragged a brown mutt by the scruff. He grabbed a tankard, drained it. Then, just before the table, he stood the musket on its rest and with a drunken laugh made as if to fire at the Duke or the count.

In an instant Trčka kicked away the rest. He tussled for a minute with the grunting laughing gleeful figure – it burbled away in Czech – then the wretch crashed backwards into the palm trees in their huge containers, sent them skidding and swaying. The duchess in her wide red dress, white Spanish ruff jumped up with a scream. Masks bobbed closer. Guards in the hall came hasting, roughly cleared a path with their partizans, and as more and more arrived formed a ring around the ducal party. Two piqueniers dragged the whooping drunkard away; he tried to grab his tyke, jeered at the masks.

The Duke stood leaning on his crutches, roared, his eyes flashed: "Beyond all bounds! Count Schlick! You see, beyond all bounds." Schlick murmured something. "See! Who's behind it? They tried to come at me. Failed. Haha." Friedland's face savage, twisted; he was dreadfully short of breath, felt his way to a chair, gazed around at the company. Half the salon was blocked off from them.

Schick, huge ponderous man, head tucked into his shoulders, sat gloomily; his beard long and white, black bushy eyebrows raised. His arms lay slack on his thighs. He sat mute, grey and weatherworn as if made of porous stone. He grunted soothingly: Strong ducal lifeguard! Wallenstein, hands on the heavy crutches, his breath still laboured, vehement: One must take every precaution, at home no less than in the field. You never know from what direction an attack will come. And by the way, does Count Schlick believe what people say, that the Swedish king was shot by his own bribed people.* The guest nodded: Perhaps Swedes or a German did for him; no bad way to wage war, killing the leader; saves on cannon.

I, purred Wallenstein, do not favour that method; there's something despicable about it. He sent Trčka to find out from the captain of the lifeguard what they had learned from the drunkard. Schlick's shoulders hunched even higher: Heinous or not, who can choose the means; everywhere temporal power is exercised basely, through murder and arms; and everyone knows that princes exist by the grace of God.

What? Your lordship approves the murder of one's own master and prince?

"No, no: I say such murders are inevitable. Now and then. When the holy faith requires it."

Wallenstein's eyes narrowed shrewdly, stared steadily at the cringing hunk of flesh: So, so, my lord brother follows the pious Jesuits. I rejoice to hear it, for I too adhere to their salutary teachings. Yes, came from the ponderous mass, power is everywhere exercised basely, everywhere one must find support in what is better to justify one's actions.

The Duke, taking a swig, interrupted to send the still flustered Isabella out to dance, and began to talk of Bernhard of Weimar, who after the Danish war had come knocking again at the Emperor's door, a bold young prince, and now he cleaved to Oxenstierna. How lightly one speaks of treason. Let Schlick take care that those at court do not drive people to desperate measures by their obdurate malicious utterances.

– What does his brother mean.

– This flare-up of religious politics. Protestants in the Empire must be recognised.

– So it is said.

– Sleeping dogs should not be stirred up.

– Crimes know no statute of limitations.

– There can be no progress on that basis. This war is imperial war, not Catholic. The Jesuits should shoulder their own sack instead of trying to drive a donkey.

When Schlick made no reply, Wallenstein drew back, biting his lips: The lies of the quill-pushers: is Sweden now out of play, is France not waiting in the wings.

Schlick smiled for the first time: My brother really does not like the Jesuits.

Friedland chewed his moustache. The grey man stared dumbly at the floor: Anyway, as far as Bernhard is concerned, any prince of the Empire will know what treason is.

Friedland let his crutches fall against the table edge, reached for his sabre: Well, he too is a Prince of the Empire. He received his authority honestly and legitimately from the Emperor, he represents the monarchy – or so they all shout at him – and observed at Regensburg what princes of the Empire are capable of. He felt their power in his own body. And so with all due respect he sings this song: let no one step too close and hold his imperial title as nothing; the foundational fact is that the Empire is nothing without the Emperor, but is also nothing without the princes of the Empire.

When Wallenstein after a long pause said no more, Schlick replied: The Duke once spoke otherwise. One hopes he will soon retake his Duchy of Mecklenburg from the Swedes.

This, or something similar, will happen, by grace of the Emperor. He strives for peace, peace, nothing is more important. They should put their heads together to consider how blessed peace can be brought nearer.

The duchess and her sister, accompanied by Trčka, came up, still masked, giggling about the goings-on in the salon. The Duke at once grabbed at a crutch, shouted: “Away with you!”

After Schlick left he sat glowering at Isabella’s side: “They’re paying me back. Enemies, enemies, ever more enemies. And that’s to be the end of me.” A momentary weakness caused his head to droop, he blinked: “You think me wicked, Isabella. I see it. I have done bad things in my life. God will have to grant me much mercy. I mean to give rein to my wickedness a good while yet, and bring peace to the suffering world.”

He let spring arrive, April passed, and he made no move out of Bohemia. Rumour said he was driving his creditors and himself to exhaustion. Everyone knew what the treasuries were saying: the army cannot remain mobilised for long; the Empire faces ruin, the Duke is planning a decisive blow to bring a decisive turn to the war, because he surveys every circumstance and in particular because the House of Habsburg is fast approaching bankruptcy; then, somehow or other, he will retire with his overweening power and his continent-spanning financial supremacy. This we know from him and from his friends Michna and de Witte and the mighty money houses that stand behind them; they think to snip the threads of war by denying credit. The pressure exerted by these financier folk on sympathetic money exchanges would surely bring the desire for peace to a breakthrough; those in the know

watched events unfold that year with the greatest excitement; everyone said the dice were about to roll. And the excitement grew to match the mounting influence of the Jesuit party at court, their insistence on helping the one true saving faith to victory, and their aversion to compromise. In Hamburg and London they said: It will avail the Duke of Friedland nothing to be victorious, he will have to quarrel with the imperial court – or the court will quarrel with him; the year will bring either the Duke's dismissal, or peace.

Influential men and the citizenry of great towns tried to intervene in these fateful developments. Pious Catholic men from middle Germany entered into correspondence with bishops, concocted an audacious plan to drain the Jesuit pressure at court. They strewed pamphlets and illustrated broadsides among the people, had them distributed to mercenaries, sent them to rulers and governing corporations, missives that breathed forgiveness, lamented the calamity of war, in glowing words swore to those responsible that the Empire would not be allowed to drink the cup to the last, to the very dregs; ruin stood at the door; the hour of Beelzebub's triumph was nigh. Bishops who dared the journey to Vienna to seek out the fathers were accorded a hearty welcome, albeit with hinted allusions to country-bumpkin ineptitude. They shrank in the face of the fathers' superior dialectic, their warmth no match for the scorching fire of the fanatic; some of the visitors found their own opinions wavering. The Jesuits knew only one goal: pure faith; they were dreadful in their undeviating consistency, impossible to close your eyes to them, they beguiled people on all sides, Christendom their watchword; how to save yourself from them. In many places those in the know burrowed themselves away: lamenting for Germany, on whose soil the awful decision would be sought, and secretly blessing that land whose people felt impelled to bring on this great battle.

In May the Duke sluggishly roused himself from Prague in all his former pomp: fourteen dress coaches-and-six, forty knights of his court, a hundred and twenty servants in new livery; baggage wagons; ten trumpeters ahead with silver-gilt trumpets. Near Königgrätz was the mustering ground: sixty regiments totalling four hundred and eighty-five companies. Then all of a sudden the whole lot set off east, northeast; a small force covered northwest Bohemia.

They headed for Silesia, towards Glatz. There, Imperials under Matthias Gallas faced an enemy force, the core of Electoral Saxony commanded by Hans Arnim von Boitzenberg; with him were the white-haired Bohemian leader Thurn, and Colonel Duwall. In silence Friedland settled down across from them. Feeble skirmishing, back and forth.

Ten days later peace negotiators in Heidersdorf signed an armistice.*

The gigantic machine had come to a stop.

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Shrill many-voiced outcry, in Vienna.

They bent together like willows, came whistling erect. There he stands, stands! in Silesia, gigantic force, countless companies, masses of artillery munitions paid for by taxes squeezed from the Estates, not a move, not a twitch, not even out of shame for what is happening. Here's the proof, he doesn't want to, goes his own way. Scoundrel traitor to every hereditary land, every one of them, to the House of Habsburg, to the Empire, the Catholic faith. He must be punished, compelled. Army taken from him. A new head should be placed over the army.

Friedland, the arch-villain, must begone.

The endless roaring of Jesuit priests filled every office, they scurried about by routes direct and indirect, calm was banished from their monasteries. Not one who did not realise in a flash that at Heidersdorf the die had been cast, for each of them; Friedland would sooner or later be at their throats. No compromise was possible. Standing there a Colossus, exposed, he was to them more horribly menacing than Sweden and Saxony and all the Protestants. In their excitement the Jesuits made a leap: they tried to assure themselves of the man who heard Friedland's confession; but it turned out he had no regular father confessor. Messages were delivered through friends in the Silesian camp to Dr Stroperus, Wallenstein's physician: money, extravagant clerical promises, if he would consider the troubles of the Church and see how the holy Church trembles in danger. Achieved nothing except to make the little doctor, already nervous, even less reliable in Wallenstein's eyes, and to cause the patient, as soon as the spiritual sermon commenced, to burst out in a great laugh.

They thronged about the man they deemed the most competent, president of the War Council, successor to Collalto, squat ungainly Schlick. Who stared bull-like from devout questioning eyes; he agreed with them, but there was no life in it. What was he supposed to do; the Duke will give reasons.

– He must be brought in, someone must go to his camp.

Deep furrows wrinkled the man's brow: Bring him in; maybe he would come – with the whole army; they don't see the whole picture.

They pressed him further; unmoved he pointed them to the abbot of Krems-minster, Breuner, the Exchequer. These provided much intelligence. And armed with this booty they withdrew, teeth gnashing robes rustling, made delirious plans, egged one another on determined not to give up, swarmed out afresh, fell upon civil dignitaries of the imperial household. These were unwilling to concede that the Duke might march on Vienna itself, retreated from the fathers, who pursued them. The members of Privy Council were more than the Jesuits dared. Icy silence around those lordships. Prince Eggenberg uttered hostile remarks: hewould not let the fathers wrest the grip from his hands.

A shudder ran through every continental capital as the Duke lay immobile facing the Saxon army. The Duke has taken up the struggle. The final act has begun.

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In only the loosest sense consulting the imperial court, Friedland had sent the enemy a formal peace proposal. He would negotiate, he had told Vienna, not saying what why how. No one was prepared for such shocking autonomy. Meeting with Arnim in the little church at Heidersdorf, Wallenstein revealed his hand: hostilities between the armies of Electoral Saxony and the Empire should cease; both should unite to turn their weapons on any who attempted to disturb the Empire further and limit the freedom of religion. They sat side by side with Trčka in the front pew; Arnim took notes on his tablet.

"My brother has seen the army I brought from Prague, and the army of field-marshal Gallas. He knows how matters went with Saxony last year. I can destroy him, today or tomorrow. Being my friend he knows my mind: I want peace. The Emperor allows himself to

be stirred up by priests." And again: Join forces, swiftly and without fuss; tie down any who work against peace negotiations.

In discussion, Arnim made no allusion to Friedland's standing with the Emperor.

"I have no desire," said the Duke, pacing stiff-legged before the altar with its piles of violets, "to sacrifice even one silver ha'penny or one soldier more for any foreign interest. Tell their Serenities in Saxony and Brandenburg that my authority extends to this, I have the right; I knew what I was getting into when I took on my commission."

Later the Duke ventured a comparison with Bernhard of Weimar: "Since I became a prince of the Empire, entitled to remain covered in the Emperor's presence, I have been my own master. I support the Empire to the extent, no more no less, that it matches my aims. Between me, Bernhard, and the Bavarian who offered his neutrality to Sweden, there is no difference. Anyone disputing this is a scoundrel." On that point, declared Arnim, he would pass.

At table during those days – Arnim and Colonel Duwall attended – Wallenstein pursued these thoughts tenaciously. It seemed to both the Swedish colonel and Arnim, as far as they could make anything out through the blaring trumpets, that the Duke was worrying away at his rage against the imperial court. While the others relished the luxuries laid out on the ducal table, the Duke himself sat behind baked rolls, crumbled them, sipped with a sour face at the water poured for him. He bored away at the weak points of imperial policy, the family interest of the House of Habsburg; the Empire was shoddily constructed and therefore shoddily governed. People should discuss openly whether with the title Prince of the Empire they had the best use of him. He would fight like a lion for his rights. If necessary he would fight on the side of Sweden. Colonel Duwall was commissioned to commend the Duke to Bernhard of Weimar: "A forceful gentleman; I regret he is not with me." Lively applause for the Duke from the colonels around the table.

Arnim set off for Saxony. The armies lay quiet facing one another, but this was a gnawing, a wrestling, a squeezing down. They drew in reinforcements, bent about, twisted, shifted position. The Saxon army became restless, Holk had already taken himself off cursing, heading to Saxony with his cavalry. As if there were no peace negotiations he began to plunder and murder. Pestilence broke out now among his own regiments. Holk himself and thousands of his people succumbed at Adorf. The Duke groaned for a week, the dead man was his favourite, he had fled away to war. He applied ever more pressure on the Saxon army.

Breslau was not far off; good astrologers were said to reside there. Senno was summoned from Jičin: what chances did one have, given particular eventualities or shortly after; he should contact his colleagues in Breslau, a week will be time enough for the casting. Senno returned to camp with one of the stargazers, who by his appearance was born under the sign of Mercury: goat-eyed, dark, lean. He reported in a reedy voice: Saturn, harbinger of disaster, is now caught at the threshold of the House of Gemini; the situation is not bad for taking action, since the star does not stand in any effective aspect to the horoscope; but neither is it inviting.

At the last moment, roused to great agitation by the weeks-long wait for Arnim, the Duke made contact with Oxenstierna, asked him to name a go-between. A major-general* came, with whom he discussed all sorts of matters in full view of the whole camp; he meant to

squeeze the Saxons in a pincer. To enhance confidence in the negotiations, the Duke took the go-between – scion of a Bohemian emigrant family – to Jičin. There'll be no peace in the Empire as long as Habsburg rules, the Swedish envoy declared. The Duke warned of fickle Saxony; he'll make Saxony sweat money if it won't lean towards peace. Returning with the go-between to Nimptsch* in Silesia, he sweet-talked him with promises of the Bohemian crown.

Summer faded. Now Arnim, weary and slow, made his way to the camp with his bugler. The Duke was lodged in the castle at Nimptsch. Arnim, most apologetic, complained of the lukewarm attitude in both courts. Friedland retorted with an evil laugh: So no one trusts me, I'm supposed to produce proof. Me, to the Saxon. Must I really. Who had compelled him to languish in Silesia month after month; was that not proof enough. He pressed Arnim harder, finally laid the death of his man Holk at the Saxon's door. In the course of the conversation, the Duke gradually came to see the import of the responses: the Protestants still hoped for a Swedish victory. They were like the Jesuits: it was all about their religion. Stupid children; donkeys. The Protestants were not yet grown up, they were too proud.

Suddenly he grabbed the field-marshal by his sword belt, stared hard at him: So this is how we shall make common cause. You must go not against the Emperor, we must give him time to reflect, but against the Swedes, doesn't matter which of them: Duwall, Thurn, or whoever. Arnim swiftly made his getaway, Friedland, furious, demanded an answer within twenty-four hours. Followed by an ultimatum delivered by a colonel: "The Swedes will be attacked within three days, or else not a man of my brother's army will remain standing."

Near Strehlen on the way back to his camp Arnim was in danger of capture by Croats, sent by the Duke in pursuit. The sexton of Strehlen, busy clearing pigeon nests from the roof, saw the approaching band; threw stones from the tower to warn Arnim; he and the bugler escaped.

Friedland's army was at once on the move. Count Gallas to Saxony, on Arnim's tail. Wallenstein took up the rear, near Goldberg he hurled the Croats under Isolani at Saxony, veered east, heading for the Oder attacked the Swedish camp of Count Thurn, aimed seventy cannon; six thousand men surrendered, entered his service, he had Thurn and Duwall in his hands. He released Thurn, let Duwall escape. Glogau and Crossen fell. Away from the Oder towards Lausitz; Görlitz plundered, Bautzen. The army on to Brandenburg, Frankfurt taken without a fight, Landsberg, the Croats to Pomerania. Wallenstein halted before Dresden.

Bernhard of Weimar, on his flank with the Swedes, sped away behind Friedland's back.

Now, as if down a steep slope, the Swedes rolled south to the Danube, Regensburg attacked and taken, Bavaria threatened, hereditary lands in danger. The Duke nonplussed, faltering, casting around. He left Saxony alone. Ten days forced march took him from Leitmaritz via Rakonitz Pilsen to Furth at the Oberpfalz frontier. He had slowed towards the end, lay in Furth sullen, calculating. He refrained from attacking the Swedes.

Without a word he turned back. The year was far advanced. He headed for winter quarters in Bohemia.

48. Grist to Slavata's Mill

NO ONE KNEW what was up.

Six and a half regiments of foot, thirteen mounted were at the Bavarian's disposal, joined at the last moment by Aldringen's troops which, however, on the Duke's orders were to do nothing. Opposing them the Swedes, always and ever the Swedes, on his land like bluebottles on rotting meat. Maximilian roared for Wallenstein. Unprecedented scenes in Braunau, whither he had once again fled: the Prince-elector accused his counsellors and officials of treason, dereliction. Because of them he had lost all influence with court circles in Vienna. How he had stood over them just a few years ago, Vienna had trembled before Munich, every fit of temper by the Bavarian envoy became a political matter. He had concluded treaties with the Emperor that granted him, him! the upper hand. When Bohemia fell and the Danes appeared, it was all 'The League! Bavaria!' Now only blubbing crawling grovelling.

Rumours came of revolts among the Bavarian militia; these proved true. Executions ordered by the Elector amounted to six hundred.* One Friday noontime the despondent snow-white Marquis Pallavicino, his chamberlain, reported an urgent request for an audience from gentlemen of the Territorial Assembly. Of the august committee there appeared Valentin von Selbitz, Hugo Beer, Rieter von Kornburg, Hans Hundt. They can no longer put on a brave front, a dreadful calamity is about to break over them, for sure they will all perish. He interrupted, asked who they were. Then, rising from his chair, he shouted towards the door: Send in the abbot of Tegernsee, von Metten, the provost of Vilshofen, the deacons. The gentlemen were struck dumb, then some whispering, but nothing changed in Maximilian's expression when: There's no one there. The Elector stamped his foot, impatient and irate: Go and look, in the corridors, the courtyards. They shrank back as he hastened out with a courteous word to the puzzled men: Let them be patient, he will return shortly. Barely a quarter of an hour later he stood again by his chair, gazed from one to the other, breathed very softly: "No, no." Eyes half closed, mouth crooked:

And who were they.

Representatives of the sixty-four.*

"You are the Assembly committee, and you and you there? You represent the Estates? Who summoned you to assembly?" He held the request for an audience in hands that shook. "You are not the Estates. You are Herr Hundt and Herr Kornburg, Selbitz. You must follow the formalities. You must not trample my laws underfoot. It is I who summon the Estates. My summons, where do you have it, Herr Hundt, Herr Selbitz, you sir." In mounting rage he named them as they shrank back waxen-faced. "You have nothing," he screamed. "Chamberlain, Signor Pallavicino, these gentlemen have deceived you. Say they are the Estates, they are liars. Chase them away, lock them up." Pallavicino with a pitying smile opened the door, guards with muskets dragged the men, who uttered not a sound, out onto the landing.

He made open threats to Vienna: Not the French this time, but now in desperation he is driven to stake all on a single card. If no swift decision comes, he will set his whole army on

the move – against Vienna. With the Swedes. Meanwhile his disconsolate letters shrilled and howled: he has been left in the lurch by the Emperor, has been betrayed.

Now Küttner, trembling at the memory of Maximilian's face, unable to obey the call to follow him to Braunau, took the lead from hapless Leuker's hands. At Küttner's side came pretty blooming rejuvenated Slavata, eyes hooded, clinging to the young man's arm.

The Bavarian's blond hair bobbed on his shoulders; they were in the wintry garden of Slavata's quarters. Küttner, his sword toying with the gravel, recalled Maximilian's dwarf and his fight with the stork: "I must feel revulsion," Max had said.

Slavata sat on a bench: "You will achieve nothing with your petitions and quarrels and deputations to the Roman Emperor and his counsellors. I too am a counsellor, will be one especially for Bavaria, for Küttner. The Emperor is far away. I don't know how far. We are agreed: Carthage must be destroyed. Our council is now in session – or are you too distracted?"

Past the long pale nose beside him came glances from big slightly sentimental eyes: "The session can begin. I was thinking of my gracious master, how innocent he is of this calamity."

"Since, you see, Carthage cannot be destroyed at once, it is good to weaken Carthage and strengthen ourselves. Leave your sword; stop thinking of Munich, and yet think more of Munich. Let us go. Are you thirsty? We find Spain's wishes congenial. We have long planned to be of service to Spain, when finally they mean to come up from Milan. You'll have to join us."

"What could we do?"

"Join us, I said. Think of Munich. Don't dream of it, Küttner. Were you listening to me? I said: Spain is coming up from Milan, or means to, or would like to. Heading for the Low Countries. They mean Bavaria no ill. But the Duke of Friedland can't abide them, doesn't want them in the theatre of war, not even to march through; they're to place themselves under his command. You see, Küttner, difficulties of authority, jealousy, ambition, the old song."

Küttner smiled: "Maybe Friedland fears Spain will spoil his game. My Electoral master cannot have enough of such rivalry."

"Well then, set yourself behind it, make a tasty dish for him. First it must be seasoned. To destroy Carthage, all you need is fire and kindling. This dish requires skill, talent. Not too much. Say, for example, you couldn't care less about Habsburg. Your own cares leave you with no inclination to take revenge on Vienna. And I've heard that your master's letters have such a tone. Such a bad tone: Prince Eggenberg complains, says the Bavarian goes almost too far. Now, we do not under any circumstances want the Spanish army here, we must not want it; it is of no matter, as imperial counsellors it must be of no matter to us whether it be commanded by an Infanta or by a governor of Milan. In this we are allied with our Duke of Friedland. We mustn't spoil his mood."

"He is an affliction. Why can't you follow through?"

"Now look. See how cunning I am. I'm an imperial counsellor; you must follow through for me. My hands are tied."

"But you counsellors appointed him. I beg you, Count Slavata."

“We appointed him, he appointed us – we’ll make no progress that way. But you fit the bill in a most laudable manner, my distracted cavalier.” Küttner turned to face Slavata, both hands resting on his sword, the red silk sleeves fell over the hilt, he laughed openly in the Bohemian’s face. “My blessing on your plan. We are to call on Spain. And you will say nothing. They will come, and we shall wage war behind them on the Swedes, before them on Wallenstein, and to the left on Saxony. Fine grist for your mill.”

“Laughter is always good in a young man. No one who hears you laugh could be your foe.” He led the fine-faced man towards a young cypress growing in a huge pot set in the black soil behind a marble bench: “Have you met my young cypress. I love her like a puppy. You wouldn’t believe the care she requires. Let’s sit here. When you plant a little seed, you don’t soon abandon it. When you nurse an infant thought, you don’t easily let it wither. The grist in my mill is not so bad, though it may cost me dear.”

“Count Slavata, your intentions are good. You favour us Bavarians, the Elector spoke well of you, Leuker praises you every time I see him. But we cannot take your bait. The Duke, at least for appearance’s sake, is our friend. Your plan would make him our enemy, and then we would truly be lost. You, you, you are our support. He is your general. We are allied with you.”

“So much does my corn cost already. You should urge the Spaniard on. This you should do, if needs must, over our heads. What, my young cavalier, do you think we shall do then? You think we shall keep quiet. It’s possible. The Duke of Friedland always considers it better to keep an eye on a man’s fist rather than his mouth.”

“So you will –”

“Keep mum. At least. For sure.”

They stared at one another in silence, eyes flicking left and right. “Think of my cypress,” the count began. “When one plants a thought, one does not easily let it wither. You are in danger. What that danger is you yourself know. You can do whatever comes to mind. I know that Eggenberg and Trautmannsdorf think no differently. No one can deny you that. Spain awaits an invitation from Germany.”

“You’re sure of this?”

Slavata gave a delicate smile: “I have taken my bearings. You can use your freedom of manoeuvre to the full. We at least shall not hinder you.”

A broadbrimmed hat of tan satin was perched well forward over Küttner’s long blond locks. A gold star and a ball hung from the left-hand brim; the fingertips of his raised left hand played rhythmically with them. He was again lost in dreams; from far away he gazed askance at the dark Bohemian: “The Spanish are pious Catholics. They will understand my gracious master when he asks them for help.”

“Think of your situation. Know,” his head leaned in, a whisper, “we are waiting for you.”

“Again? For Bavaria?” The young man’s face brightened.

“Look at you,” the Bohemian whispered.

In his red doublet and loose purple hose with white flashes, the lanky Bavarian bent his knee to the other: “If only you will stand by my gracious master.”

"We shall not abandon you."

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The communication from the Spanish governor of Milan, Duke Feria, reached all of them at the same time: Count Schlick, president of the Court War Council, Prince Eggenberg, and ambassador Oñate. He declared: Intelligence from special envoys of the Commander of the League indicates that this Prince, whose services to the common cause have been of such note, finds himself now in a precarious military situation. Reliant on a force of just a few regiments, supported by imperial regiments unfit for battle under the command of His Excellency Major-general Aldringen, the League now faces the entire military might of Sweden. And this at a time when the Bavarian lands are in ferment, when sources of support for the League on the Rhine are blocked by enemy occupation, and the imperial field commander-in-chief Friedland has shut himself away in Bohemia with his entire army. In weighing up this situation together with intelligence reaching him from the German theatre of war, he has concluded that before long the causes of both the Empire and the League will be in utmost peril. Wherefore the mobilisation of appropriate counter-measures cannot be much further delayed. He, Duke Feria, has for some time now, as is already known, been making ready in accordance with orders from His Spanish Majesty to move into the Roman Empire in order to transfer troops to the Low Countries, where Her Majesty the Infanta lies near to death and is expected daily to expire. He himself desires, and now proposes, to bring his Spanish and Italian regiments to bear in this emergency. He then described the route he planned to take without delay, and did not close before alluding to current and foreseeable difficulties of command which could impede his activities and which must be resolved.

"I gave this advice to my gracious master," said gleeful Küttner, squeezing both of Slavata's hands. "Dr Leuker was hesitant. You will not leave us in the lurch."

"You'll know from me all you need to know, my young cypress."

In the gloomy corridors of the castle, Count Slavata mingled with the fathers of the Jesuit college who daily importuned Count Schlick, their ally, to take decisive measures against Friedland. Slavata found the Jesuits repellent; he detested their attacks on Wallenstein, his Wallenstein; he would not engage them in conversation. They gazed on him gently trusting; he felt disgust, often thought of letting go the business, but ever and again was swayed to continue by a sentiment that ebbed and flowed within him. He felt compelled to see the matter through, it seemed predestined; he tried to withdraw, again it engaged him, it was a game between him and the business, he was lost in it. He came smiling to Count Schlick, thought how easy it is to be an instrument of Fate, and really this has nothing to do with Wallenstein. Schlick, the papist, slow and ponderous in his chair, declared himself unable to hinder Spain's action. The grey man seemed to think it was his own idea to make use of the situation to counter the Duke.

The Privy Council debate that ensued laid bare the difficulties of the situation and the incoherence of opinions. Outraged Questenberg wanted to attack Bavaria. "Since clearly Bavaria has called on Spain behind our backs, we should proceed against Bavaria. Such an action is unheard-of, an extreme insult to the imperial House. It borders on treason. Of course, it's what we've come to expect from Bavaria."

So what does he propose.

"We have a field-marshal. Spain should immediately place its forces under his command, obey his orders. We must issue the decree."

"Yes, we can issue a decree," smiled Trautmannsdorf.

Schlick: "It is possible we shall have to issue a decree, for it says as much in his commission, the Duke's commission."

Eggenberg: "That would be the tidiest approach. We are agreed that a decree must be issued placing the governor of Milan and his forces under Friedland's command." Questenberg reinforced their desire by repeating this. Schlick gave a non-committal nod. Slavata and Trautmannsdorf, who enjoyed private chats, exchanged glances, smiled. Suddenly, as if at a signal, they looked away. With a yawn Schlick said he would at once draft a document to reflect their view. Just one question remained: Who was prepared to take the letter to Friedland and discuss it with him. All eyes turned to Questenberg.

Their unanimity suddenly made him uneasy. He looked at the floor, struggled for words: He will of course undertake the task gladly; but why – he added after a long pause – why will discussion be needed, the letter will convey the views expressed here fair and square; any courier can do it. Trautmannsdorf, cautiously mild, countered: No, no, a courier is no more than a man who knows nothing, hears nothing, says nothing; and the Duke will have questions, he has no doubt Friedland will have questions.

Such as?

Perhaps: what is the position of the court?

Well, that's easy. The letter will be clear enough on that point. The court requires Milan to come completely under Friedland's authority. Trautmannsdorf eagerly confirmed this; suddenly he caught another glance from Slavata and asked: "Why do you smile at me, Slavata?"

"It is your eagerness. I see you are all as complacent as ever."

Eggenberg and Schlick heard this in silence.

Now the rather confused, even bewildered, Questenberg felt it necessary to turn to each of them and ask if it were really so as they had discussed, and where then might any difficulty arise. At the word 'difficulty' and Questenberg's queries, the mood in the chamber became grave and formal. Schlick insisted: "In this respect you must make clear to Friedland he is our only support, that we possess no means of coercing Milan if, as seems likely, they march in."

"It is patently obvious," Eggenberg's tone was hostile, "that we are impotent against Bavaria's efforts to draw in foreign support. Bavaria is in the same situation as the cities along the Rhine: we cannot help them, and so cannot complain when they look for help elsewhere. And anyway, in this regard you can remark to Friedland that Bavaria's action is his own fault. For he was also meant to be our protection against Bavaria; he commands an imperial army."

Questenberg's smile was bleak: "I doubt I shall say anything of the sort."

"So find other words. But at some point our view must be conveyed, there's no way around it. What is Friedland up to now, what did he achieve last summer, why are our own sources of revenue being swallowed up by him? As you know, gentlemen, I am no spokesman for

Bavarian policy. It was not from me that Maximilian received the Electoral crown; but we have more than paid him back for that. We are all starting to pity Prince-elector Maximilian."

"You'll have to give me one more man, the encounter will go easier then."

Eggenberg, pacing about the room, heard this and retorted sharply: "We shall really be talking about all that's happened between ourselves and Friedland. How it cuts us to the heart that a Spanish force should march uninvited, unsolicited, into Germany. How horribly it demeans the Empire, and Habsburg. We are powerless against Friedland, we know it. But he should not drive it to the limit. We are not so powerless here that we surrender unresisting."

Schlick's droning voice interjected: "I agree entirely, Prince Eggenberg. I shall accompany von Questenberg to Friedland's camp. We are not so powerless that we must keep silent."

Trautmannsdorf, eyes glinting, begged leave to speak: What do they all intend, where is it leading? Schlick deigned to reply: "We are fed up with keeping quiet, we need not keep quiet."

"Need not?"

"No, my noble friend. If it must be, we have Bavaria and Spain on our side. We'll be able to fend off even Friedland, once we are done with the Bohemians and others."

The hunchbacked count pulled back, whistled: "So, it's war."

"No, a decision point. We've been at war for two years."

Trautmannsdorf, taken aback, looked for a chair: "Pardon me for taking up your time. You speak of a man I have learned to esteem. I am not so swift to change my opinions. I have not so swiftly thought it all through. You will be so good as to demonstrate to me the necessity for seeking a so-called decision point."

Schlick, leaning ponderously over him, gazing out from big baggy eyes, pressed down on the chair: "I shall be glad to share my opinion. I consider Friedland a traitor. He is no better than Bernhard of Weimar, just more cunning." Trautmannsdorf kept his seat, laughed, he felt dizzy. "That's what the Jesuit fathers say. They've been preaching it for ages. What about it."

Eggenberg softly, interrupting: "I don't consider him a traitor. But he a danger to us. He must make a choice."

"Don't do this," Trautmannsdorf begged.

"What?" asked Eggenberg, almost tenderly.

"At least just send Questenberg on his own. Better that Count Schlick stays here. What on earth is supposed to come of all this."

Schick: "We shall find clarity."

"And," implored Trautmannsdorf, "you will by your actions find clarity in entirely the wrong direction. Clarity that, but for you, would not have become clear."

Now, since Schlick would not yield, they agreed that he should accompany Questenberg, and that these two were to limit their task merely to clarifications. Finally they settled on the matters that must be put to the Duke in writing, and agreed that the trip to the camp at Pilsen should be delayed a while, although of course for not too long. They wanted first to see if the Spanish were serious about marching.

Slavata swept out at Trautmannsdorf's side. "What do you think," asked the Bohemian. "You are almost in tears. The Duke still lives, he's not dead yet."

"They'll kill him. They want him out of the way. Count Schlick is no man, he's a monster. Better if Friedland were to rule here, totally, unconstrained, and nothing moved against him."

"You think so," sighed Slavata, dreamily contemplating the notion. "Why dwell on such impossibilities. In reality everything is being flung against Friedland. There is something elemental in it."

"Slavata, you are my friend." Trautmannsdorf turned suddenly to face him. "Let us work together. We must help the Duke. I can't just look on. For months it's been going against him, Schlick has it all in hand, Eggenberg won't say no, the path is almost laid out."

Joy surged through Slavata; what the other man proposed was so congenial; how strange that it fell to him of all people, but why should he not help the Duke for once, help him, save him. A whispering twitching within him: together with the count I will help the Duke, we'll both play with him, but still I shall have to be rid of him. And at this moment it blazed in all clarity through him, filled him with bliss and gladness: he really did mean to kill the Duke. The flames soared high within him: I shall kill him; he warmed himself at this fire, drew himself up proudly in its glow.

In gratitude he squeezed the little count's arm: He has heard nothing better all day than these words of Count Trautmannsdorf, the Duke must not be abandoned to Count Schlick, no, they shall go to him themselves. Trautmannsdorf stared at him; in his semi-reverie Slavata failed to notice at first, then: "Why do you stare so?"

"We're to go to him ourselves?!"

Slavata looked at him; his mouth had said so, no retraction possible; what had his mouth done. Pulling himself together he said in a whimsical tone: "I must smack my mouth for speaking out of turn. What did it say. Such a maverick. I would go to the Duke, set out the danger he is in, guide him."

"Just what I'd like to do. We should help him." The other man's honest pain and concern was to Slavata like a strong sensuous perfume.

Seated at his writing desk, he wrote. He informed Friedland of the machinations at court, that the tone was set by Schlick and the Jesuits, Eggenberg going along out of fear; that many were against him; soon Schlick and Questenberg would tackle him; important personages at court suspected him of treason, important key persons. He gave as he wrote no thought to explaining his conversion to the Duke's cause, and what the Duke would say to it.

49. The Hermit

THE EMPEROR kept to his castle. He observed the goings-on around him with irritation. A strange vibration had set up in him already at Wolkersdorf; it impelled him to sniff about at his surroundings. Reports had been made of the fears relating to Wallenstein, couched in the same terms as those that led to his being relieved of command. The Swede was gone, now they must be on their guard against the General. So they said.

He no longer hunted. He grew increasingly anxious and troubled. He concealed from himself how he was unable to linger before images of saints and crucifixes, that he was driven from them in torment. He could not remain at Wolkersdorf, one morning almost fled away to Vienna, where he demanded that now this, now that gentleman of the court should attend and make a report. He sent his personal secretary scurrying around, then subjected him to endless questioning. In recent days a sense of dread held him fast in the castle; he strove unhappily to maintain his composure.

The Empress, who led almost the life of a widow sequestered in her apartments, drew nearer to him. They exchanged words on matters to do with religious orders. She rejoiced that he too was now pained by this Wallenstein, and was wrestling with it; this information had reached even her through her confessor, but she declined to bring influence to bear on the Emperor. She felt drawn once again to stay close to him; her grief over Mantua had abated somewhat; the husband at her side seemed tormented. Suddenly she noticed that the more she changed, the more he avoided her. He was astonished by her; he felt: She sees I am losing control, she wants to help, I don't want her help, such impudence. She had unmasked him, his disquiet deepened, he shrank away, heard her out uneasily. She wooed him, now and then he happened to see her.

Eleonore of Mantua: at Regensburg she had fled from him. Once they had stood side by side before the gold-glinting monstrance depicting the Tree of Life. Her deep red dress, crown of pearls on her stiff brown hair, thick dark brows, the sash with his signature about her hips. Then he had burst in upon her; they had – how strange – crept apart like two green toads, croaking side by side. In confusion now he sometimes held her gaze, they embraced, he was happy and insensible, in her lay his joy and his desire. No trace in her memory now of the pasty-faced suffering creature she had first encountered in the church at Innsbruck, glaring mistrustful from its shell, the mute power-gorged monster of Regensburg. He had undergone another metamorphosis: now he looked at her. Only now did she know, as she slipped from her widow's quarters, that he was her homeland. Mantua is lost: there goes – there creeps – Mantua! When she found her way to him from her widow's apartments, this was her only feeling; it lived in her, insistent, burrowed deep inside her.

As soon as the many reports had given the Emperor a sense of the unstable situation, he felt an urge to speak in the Empress' presence with the big Luxemburger, the limping Jesuit. An obscure feeling drove him to let matters work on him in the presence of the Empress and Lamormaini, to take hold of things together with them. Week by week he felt more helpless. At court they saw: His mighty Majesty is seized by a weariness, unable to settle, feels misled, obstructed, provoked, his position unnatural. It wafted fitfully through him, spread, fragmented him. At times he felt impelled to shuffle off the whole tangled burden in order to find his way again to his own power. His old inclination – to avoid difficulties by fleeing them – now and then reared its head. It pushed him, gently now, towards people, to Eleonore. They must suffer it all with him. What would they say. Oh, he wanted to be tied down. He feared himself, feared what lay before him.

When Lamormaini came creeping, Ferdinand, sinking into his armchair, reminded him of the peaceful days in Regensburg, and how events had turned dreadful, dreadful because every

human relationship had proved precarious; what had they made of his Wallenstein, who was no traitor; he often had the urge to summon the Duke and clear it all up; distrust, malice: these were the progenitors of the present mess, much blame must attach to them.

Lamormaini, tracing lines on the floor with his cane – they sat in a spacious glass-walled gallery overlooking a courtyard; paintings and sculptures along the silk-covered inner wall, bright chandeliers overhead, the court often gathered here – Lamormaini, too, often thought of Regensburg; the Ascension of Mary, yellow-red wheels of flame rolling across the walls of the music room in the quiet episcopal palace. Like one receiving a blessing, the Emperor had laid aside all his power, exposed its feebleness and triviality. Now the dogs he had unleashed were coming at him, attacking the hunter. The priest, his voice dull: Eggenberg made great effort to avoid difficulties and conflicts, but events took a course that was almost predictable. Ferdinand uneasy, tugging at his grey beard: The father should not speak so, no bad intentions should be ascribed to Wallenstein; he does not believe the events could have been predicted.

Lamormaini fixed his confessant, fidgeting unhappily in his chair, with a long kindly look; he looked across too to the Empress, chin in hand, arm supported on an arm of her chair, leaning forward watching them both. Then perhaps His Roman Majesty was right; a perilous course for the Duke was determined at least in part by external factors; since Regensburg one is justified in saying so. And when the Empress lifted her attentive head, flashed him a questioning glance, let her arm drop, he insisted: Yes, since Regensburg, since the dismissal; since then Friedland is no longer to be trusted; he follows more and more the wrong path.

"Since his dismissal," whispered the lady from Mantua, her face flushed, she settled back in her chair; "but they were right to dismiss him."

Lamormaini, grave: For sure, he was appointed by the Emperor, and not for life; but the human heart is at bottom quite simply a quirky organ, it lacks any sense of legalities; here one party was unconcerned with who is Emperor, who a subject, he wanted to satisfy his greed, and would not be driven off.

"What is this?" Ferdinand leaned forward, hand at his mouth. "Driven off. At Regensburg. The Duke of Friedland had become my friend. His rage when he is here has nothing to do with Regensburg." Lamormaini: Everyone tells themselves it dates from Regensburg.

Ferdinand: In Regensburg the Empire was restored to order, conflict among the Electors was ended, the Empire secured as never before. Friedland had pressed for the fortifying and securing of the Empire; why do they mention Regensburg. How is Regensburg meant to have affected him, him of all people, so badly.

His deep kindly gaze unchanged, Lamormaini sat hunched over, measured out his words, brow furrowed; spoke softly, cautiously: "In Regensburg he was dismissed."

"Of whom do you speak, Magnificence?"

"Of the Duke of Friedland."

"Exactly. It was no lackey or barber who was dismissed. It was the Duke of Friedland."

"What difference does it make."

"Say what you have to say, Magnificence, for Jesus'sake."

“He was dismissed with the greatest lenience by His Roman Majesty. He was Field-marshal of the imperial armies, had defeated the Danish king, pacified the Lower Saxon circle.”

“I was more than lenient with him. I sent him presents, not a week went by without a friendly word from me, he was always my commander in chief, I was always gracious and benevolent towards him.”

“Good for you, Imperial Majesty. You were gracious and benevolent to him. But not so, he to you. For he was Friedland, the Duke, Wallenstein; oh who is that, Wallenstein. And he was insulted, forced to leave, forced to make way for His Serenity of Bavaria.”

“We’re talking in circles. The Empire demanded it, as the Duke knows. I meant him no ill.”

The priest, still calm: They say he had to give way to the Bavarian Elector.

Eyes blazing, arms angled across the arms of her chair, Eleonore glared at the Emperor, whose face in its torment seemed smaller; her voice held something of a threat: Everywhere they say it was not the Emperor who dismissed the Duke, but the Bavarian.

Ferdinand leaned forward, his gaze penetrating: Do you think this? She shrank timidly back: It was just a question.

Ferdinand hoarse: No questions, Eleonore. You think too often of Mantua. His expression changed as he looked at her; more gently now: “You don’t know how it happened. I never intended ill to Italy. Nor did Friedland. I would gladly have brought you joy, Eleonore.”

She breathed almost tenderly, lowered her flushed face: “I know, Ferdinand. Forgive me.” They fell silent. The castle guard marched across the courtyard, chanting a slow song; bright winter light filled every corner of the warm wide space. Lamormaini, seeming to bend an ear: “What fine worldly songs there are, out there.”

The Emperor had been brooding, now he gave a start as if throwing something off: “So it seems I am to blame for the situation, the entanglements. Maybe, no, I am to blame for Wallenstein’s so-called treason. It makes no sense to me. I say it ten times over. Even if they contradict me ten times, twenty times over.” A pause, then heated gestures towards Lamormaini, who sat up straight: “And if I am to blame. let us not talk of that for the moment. How long ago was Regensburg. I cannot even call it to mind any more. Regensburg is almost merely an idea. What do they mean by Regensburg. Once I dismissed the Duke it was all made good again. If he was insulted, now he is again field-marshal, he has what he wanted. What does he want?”

The lady from Mantua pressed her long fan into his fidgeting arm: He must not excite himself, everything will soon be smoothed over.

“Smoothed over. I don’t know. I don’t know what it all means. What lies behind it.”

Eleonore, guarded: “Behind what.”

“Now understand this, Eleonore. I’m sure your Magnificence understands. Listen well now. There’s no reason at all for the Duke to act against me. I’ve given him no cause. He heads the army with the most enormous plenipotentiary powers; we have no dispute about that.”

Lamormaini sighed: “He is unwilling.”

Ferdinand's face tense, imploring: "What do you mean, Father. What do you know."

Nothing, except that the Duke is not satisfied just with his plenipotentiary powers and his army; he is insatiable.

So what is it he wants.

He never forgets his dismissal at Regensburg. He does not let it lie, it is as important as any other factor in his dealings. And now he allows us no rest.

"The new command we have granted does not satisfy him?"

"The Duke?"

"Well?"

Lamormaini gave an amiable laugh, exchanged glances with the Empress, who smiled. "Imperial Majesty. I shall not make an analogy. It would be hard enough to find an analogy for the Duke. Really all one needs is to see – a stone flung onto a marble floor – an edge breaks from the stone: the edge is gone for all time, only God's decision could restore it to the stone."

"And?"

"The Duke knows who he is. He became aware of it in Regensburg. It does not suit him, he cannot forgive being what he is, our – the Emperor's – field-marshal, and nothing more."

Ferdinand chewed frowning on his knuckles, his index finger worried his lower lip; he exclaimed: "Look here, Lamormaini, is it your impression that someone has placed an obstacle in the Duke's path?"

"Not at all," Lamormaini's laugh was complacent.

"So why do you laugh," sighed Ferdinand. Imploring: "Tell me, do, what is going on."

The Jesuit, with utmost gentleness: "Your Majesty wants to know what obstacles have been placed in the Duke's path. None. No one would dare. He enjoys all his power alone."

Ferdinand relieved: "Well then." Lamormaini had to suppress the hint of a smile: "It is not enough for him." Ferdinand uncertain, gazing intently at the face, the hands, the whole black strong figure of the Jesuit: "Not enough for him."

And lurking in the background he felt something stir, quite unexpectedly it pushed up from the horrid depths, a thing with a thousand feet loping, loping towards him, he going to meet it, bracing his body against it. "Pooh, pooh," he spat. That thing again. Away, away with it. He stood, Eleonore's dress rustled at his side, a strong scent at his side, she had drawn close when disgust disfigured his face.

They walked arm in arm through the carpeted gallery. Lamormaini leaned against the balustrade. As they passed him they slowed a little, Ferdinand whispered: "It is not enough for him." His twisted face. He held Eleonore tight in both arms. The lady almost tearful: "He is a devil." From Lamormaini behind them, grave, sad: "No devil. A poor human creature."

He kept the Empress in his embrace, gazed into her eyes as if they were strange objects, the disordered hair, open mouth turned down at the corners. He raised a finger: "That's it, that's what human creatures are like. The priest has said it." Again the thousand little crablike feet scrabbled over him, the long scaly body, it loomed so close over him he felt like crouching.

“What do you say to that?” Her eyes filled with tears, her voice breaking she pulled him along, tried to lighten the tone: “It wouldn’t be hard to act against him. We need not worry about that. Tomorrow we shall ask our Eggenberg and our dear Count Schlick. They’ll explain what must be done.”

The Emperor let go her arm, dropped into the wide abbot’s chair. The carved figures that flowed over the arms welcomed him, men children women, slid away, raised themselves; he asked Lamormaini: “Magnificence?” Who stomped nearer, his cane rapping, planted himself behind the chair, clutching the back: “It is nothing new to us. The Church has for a long time understood human beings. We take account of them as they are. We have to break them, one way or another.”

The Emperor was seized with a trembling: “Such are people. You’re right. No doubt it goes for me too. We can change only by submitting ourselves to the holy Church.”

The priest spoke softly: “People are wicked. They partake of the primal sin.” Stretching his arms out from the depths of the chair, the Emperor turned to Eleonore, whispered: “You see. We are fallen creatures.”

“This I know, Ferdinand.”

The long scaly reptile scurried swept clattered over him, horror on Ferdinand’s face. “Friedland is paying me back. Am I any different. Tomorrow morning we shall invite Prince Eggenberg to attend us.”

Lamormaini smiled, raised a heavy fist: “Have no fear. He shall be pulled down, the traitor.”

“You see, you see, it’s good.” A tremulous hesitant whisper from the Emperor, whitish eyes peering up at the other two. He chewed his moustache. Coursing through him; he suffered it, it made his shoulders weak, filled his mouth with tepid spittle; he was speaking someone else’s words, none of it had anything at all to do with him. He had been foiled; Friedland was a mighty field commander; what do such commanders do: he could not pin down his thoughts. For half a minute he thought: the Electors will declare themselves satisfied, I shall dismiss Friedland. But he was in Vienna, in Vienna. Again he chewed his moustache.

That night he stood in his nightshirt by the bed, raised hands to his forehead, wielded his elbows, snorted loud enough for the valet to hear: “Make way, make way.” He strode across the almost dark room, rubbed his face against the metal body of Christ, groaned, menaced. He beat his bare chest with both fists, as if trying to bring himself to his senses.

Next day in Wolkersdorf he dressed in his grubby artisan’s clothing, told his valet what he planned. They strolled aimlessly through the woods, but clearly the Emperor was seeking a path. They came to a charcoal burners’ clearing, and a little farther on encountered three men, two fat peasants each with a sack of piglets, and a cheery Dominican. They fell in with them. The monk told long funny stories, until by chance it came out that his two peasant companions were adherents of the new religion. He turned aside, crossed himself, clapped his hands together. They responded with defiant mocking words, placed a pale piglet on each of his shoulders; their squealing drowned his laments. The valet chided them gently, the Dominican thanked him and turned eagerly, face flushed deep red, to the peasants, asked whether they were inclined, in this lovely God-blessed natural spot, to hear him out, let him

speak. There followed a debate about the right of piglets too to be heard. Then they dropped the creatures back in the sacks, the Dominican addressed them. He spluttered:

So what is it they want. What is it about the old religion that doesn't suit them. Maybe they've outgrown it, like an old shirt. Ah, and yet it suited so well. So why only the silly new fashions. Have even peasants learned how in the towns the fine burghers stroll up and down in French fripperies. Such tomfoolery. They, sturdy peasants, piglets in their sacks – and New Believers! If they hadn't said so, no one would credit it. Why not ask the piglets if they have a different religion from their parents and grandparents and all their ancestors back to Noah's Ark. By Jesus, such creatures are far above the wise wise human. You don't throw things willy-nilly into the ashes. Always gentle, always careful, everything still has its use. Who would throw it all away on a new religion when the old one is as good as ever. Ha, is it not still good?

The peasants replied only that he had such a gift of the gab they'd gladly hear more. The valet nodded.

"Ah, nothing is more forgiving than the well-tempered ancient Catholic faith, which adapts itself to all needs. You can go on believing in it even if you believe something else. No one will interfere, who would jump up cursing, who would not allow a fellow to believe a little bit in whatever he likes. The Catholic Church is like a little lamb or a blind man, guided on a leading-string; it follows wherever men take it. See now, I'll show you how the lamb lies down and makes a pious face. Catholic Christianity wants nothing from people, no coercion, not the slightest use of force. But Lutheran preachers prate vaingloriously of the 'conviction' and 'inward belief' and so on that Christianity demands. Anyone can demand, but who need be burdened by it. Who has time for such stuff? How many desire to devote themselves to such lofty and even difficult matters; in their simplicity they should fear to grapple with them. So good pious Catholic Christianity asks only a little of its followers: hands clasped in prayer, a Sunday stroll, some whispering, a bending of the knee.

"And is it hard? In sooth it is not so hard as carrying those sacks, or the crosses one has to bear when contending with family quarrels. A little stroll, oh how much more is demanded by the magistrates, and by the schoolmasters of a child; a child is tormented by them. True, true, one sometimes has to fast. That, I grant you, is not to everyone's taste; but for ten brass farthings, or twenty, someone else fasts in your place, or the priest relieves you of the obligation. Catholic Christianity allows every adherent to feel at ease in the most exalted company of martyrs and saints. No deceiver could find a simpler or more effective means of rising high and higher, and no one could set up a higher target. What a mighty power is the holy Catholic Church. And does any power more gently exercise its might? She could perhaps allow the most part of humanity to be skewered, boiled, burned, stewed, in this world and the next. Instead she sets up lovely pictures in lofty houses of God, and all you need do is look at them. She plays the organ, and places the most practised, the finest singers in the choir, and all you have to do is sit and listen, and as you do so you forego swearing and blasphemy, which anyway never sounds lovely. The Church provides everything for people, sets riches before them, even royal palaces. If you look at it aright, what else is the Church but a princely court, to which everyone, peasant beggar nobleman knight and count or baron all the way to the Roman Emperor himself are invited, to their delight. Everyone can join in the pleasures,

everyone can picture himself a prince, he's in his own house. You dolts, what do you mean by it. You've no need to pray, no need to trouble yourselves. Everything is lifted from you. We are the keepers of the gate of Heaven: you have only to ask and we open up. The Kingdom of Heaven cannot slip away from you. We have inherited so much grace, the martyrs have left us so much of it, that we and our faithful adherents can live comfortably for thousands of years in dulci jubilo. And doing so we need not count the pennies, really. And where does all this chafing for forgiveness lead? Sometimes it pleases us to throw a little bone to the Protestant wretch cowering under the table. And you – you can go on doing whatever you want. Anyone who is Catholic can blithely follow his own path during his time on Earth. It's all taken care of for him. It's all made ready; no need to bother yourself about it. Go wherever you want, no one will take anything from you. You have the ploughing, the manuring, cattle to feed, horses to groom, one of your kids is moody, your neighbour picks a quarrel. For you there are so many lovely and important things, wine music dancing merry young ladies card games whack-the-hen the parish fair. And the scrapping, showing the neighbour your teeth. We won't interfere. We already watch over your heavenly possessions." The Dominican wagged a complacent finger: "So, a fine religion? What do you say to my religion?"*

"Alright to listen to," the peasants said. The five of them sat in a hollow on the forest floor; the peasants produced ham and bread. When the munching peasants jokingly begged for more funny or pious stories from the Dominican, Ferdinand and the servant slipped away.

They came to a desolate spot.

The Emperor posed all sorts of questions to a singing beggar; the valet stood aside. The beggar led the Emperor on; when they came to a little mountain path he parted from them singing. Head low, Ferdinand followed the path. Trees came; the Emperor peered unseeing between the trunks. He awaited his companion, wondered where to find the cave of the hermit, pious Jeremiah. They sat on the ground. A young girl with a basket came by. They followed her up a tree-lined path. She ran across a rocky outcrop. When she came back the Emperor gave her a handful of coppers: she was to tell pious Jeremiah that a poor man wished to meet him. She ran off; when she returned said: The pious hermit says he's a poor man himself and has no need of money. Ferdinand stroked her little head: she can keep the coins, go once more to the hermit, he wants to hear his words.

Now there appeared behind the rocks a bareheaded lanky young man with a brown beard, who stood a long while silently regarding them. He blinked into the sunlight, his gaunt face was dreadfully pale. Stones clattered. Softly, looking warily from one to the other, he asked as they drew near what they wanted. Ferdinand stammered something. The servant withdrew.

And when Ferdinand lifted his gaze, the man's right ear and half his cheek were eaten away, stumps and holes, ulcers and peeling skin, dark red with a greasy coating; the man had a thin nose, one nostril partly eaten.

"Far enough," Ferdinand indicated as the hermit led him to a cave resembling a cowstall; "I shall sit here and look at you." Into his slack hand, after a few indecisive gestures, the hermit placed a rosary. Ferdinand sat on bare earth, the beads rolled away. The young hermit stood before him, eyes clouded, his face weary, without a word he vanished into the darkness, from which soon emerged quiet murmurs and groans that gradually grew louder and faded again.

Two hours later the servant came back to Ferdinand. The hermit darted from his cave. They said their farewells. Full of pain the holy man sought the eyes of the other, whose expression had not relaxed. He gave him the rosary again, crossed himself as the other turned away, knelt praying at the spot where he had sat.

The Emperor trudged slowly down the tree-lined path back into the forest.

Suddenly behind him the wide forest path was filled with wingbeats. He closed his eyes, stood still, faced rigidly ahead. Wingbeats, mighty wings, pairs of wings whisking up sand, a draught preceded them. He was almost blown off his feet.

He endured a few moments. Took hesitant steps. Again the draught, wingbeats of giant swooping uprearing eagles behind him. His heart stood still.

When he had gone ten paces, his utterly stony face looked around for the servant – who was calmly ambling back and forth across the path. He went arm in arm with the stricken man. "This is more than anyone can bear."

50. Thundering in the Wrong Direction

SWEDISH ARMIES strewn across the Empire. Oxenstierna kept them on a short leash. In Thuringia, Wilhelm of Weimar. In Bremen, Leslie. In Magdeburg, Lohausen. In Silesia, Colonel Duwall. The Upper Rhine and Electoral Rhine circles, Georg of Luneburg. Field-marshal Horn in Alsace and the Swabian circle. Flung against Wallenstein's flank as he began to move was a young prince, Bernhard of Weimar, formerly a colonel in Gustavus' mounted lifeguard regiment, when Wallenstein turned his back on them at Furth thinking they had forgotten him. As the Imperials vanished behind the wall of Bohemian mountains, Swedish colonels, officers and common soldiers began to devour German land. Parts of Bavaria, that masterless Electoral land, Wurzburg, Bamberg were torn away, allocated as compensation; Sweden retained suzerainty. By virtue of Bamberg and Wurzburg, the title Duke of Franconia, in law a fief of the Swedish crown, landed in high-flying Bernhard's lap. He swore an eternal and irrevocable confederation with Sweden.

Friedland lay silent in Bohemia. Now Oxenstierna, the same as ever, subjugated the four northern circles. The Saxon, bitterly contesting foreign control of the Protestant Directory, tried to pull the southern German imperial circles to his side, but Oxenstierna had the upper hand. The Germans had to pledge at Heilbronn that they would maintain the necessary armies for Sweden. Oxenstierna, a Swede, appointed himself Director of the confederation and supreme arbiter in all matters of war.

Escorted by French envoys, accompanied by English gentlemen, at this wintry congress in Heilbronn there appeared a black-veiled lady with glowing eyes, languidly full figure; she settled beside Feuquières on a particular bench, listened to the debate. Then a long vehement speech was delivered on her behalf by a little fellow: Rusdorf. He recounted the fate of the Rhenish Prince-elector, elected King of Bohemia, Frederick, who had lived as the conscience of this war. His woes began with the encounter by Prague, and ended soon after the death of the blessed King of Sweden. He lived and died a good German and Protestant Elector. His cause must not and should not be allowed to moulder with him. This congress cannot evade a

resolution on his cause. It must not be allowed to appear that one has one's own purposes in serving Prince-elector Frederick, as slanderous adversaries put it about. In everyone living as a Protestant in the Roman Empire there continues to live the majestic figure of this ruler, who was the first to grab the snake by the neck and who never recovered from its bite.

Taking his seat he glanced at the lady beside him. She stood, head low, lifted the veil. English Elizabeth smiled a friendly smile, her expression impishly bashful. Her cheeks as always were red and round. She said, barely suppressing a giggle, that learned Herr Rusdorf had spoken well and fulsomely; she was glad to see again the noble company who had stood by her husband of blessed memory and had often been their guests. Then, gazing silently from downcast eyes, smiling more broadly into the hall as she recognised various noblemen, she all at once turned aside, held out her right hand and squeezed Feuquières' hand; he nodded, stood up and delivered a precious prating sentimental oration, praising brave Frederick and declaring as a main goal of the war the restoration of his House and the avenging of his fate.

Despite Swedish efforts, day-long debate did lead to a resolution, urged especially by the Frenchman, who would not allow Sweden to grow excessively mighty. The German Estates, harrassed by Rusdorf, demanded a resolution: they wanted a conclusion - of some kind. Oxenstiena's people knew that Rusdorf was the only instigator of the whole business with the princess turning up and the Frenchman's intervention. Rusdorf knew his life was in danger, but the grey-haired little man agitated bravely among the Germans, carried every little new twist and turn back to the elegant Frenchman. Conquered Rhineland-Pfalz was wrested from the Swedes; it would be transferred with immediate effect to Frederick's princely House. But the Swedes refused to relinquish control over fortifications and clerical estates. When the resolution was read out, Rusdorf said aloud that he would accept it as representative of the Palatine House; for the moment he declared himself satisfied, but he would never rest until every last limitation was removed. As he was about to declare that the resolution would occasion malicious laughter at the uselessness of the foreigners, Feuquières hushed him, sat him back down: the Swedes had taken the point already.

The entry into the sweet gentle Palatinate of the princess and Frederick's brother, phlegmatic Louis Philipp of Simmern, was both sad and joyful. And when she first saw again the smooth shining mirror of the Neckar and recalled the ceremonial voyage with Frederick in the bridal barge and the sudden disaster that had arisen and rained down upon them, Prague, Danes, Sweden, war, endless war, everyone forced on, harried year after year, the fading memory of her splendid Frederick whom she had almost spurned – now she wept hysterically, for hours would not continue on, she would return to England, to her brother King Charles. She had had enough of Germany.

Even Rusdorf's heart was moved at the sight of the dark mirror of silent meandering Neckar. He comforted her, feigned enthusiasm for the lovely apartments awaiting them. Later he had difficulty tearing her away from the gun-shattered charred ruins of the palace. Grown mellow in his joy, he hastened from village to village, installed officials, retied old threads. Wrote to his old suffering friend Pawel in Dutch exile, invited him to return, an end to all grieving, soon the Electoral Palatinate would be free of all foreigners. Teasingly he praised his own tenacity, compared himself to a horsefly.

Exactly one month after his return to Heidelberg, he was found nailed to the door of his lodgings. He was still alive, in agony as they pulled the nails from his palms; his feet could not be freed as the nails had gone through bone. This was Swedish work, he declared dying; he begged them not to pursue it, there was no point. Pawel found him already expired. He organised his friend's burial. Many notable figures from the Rhenish circle attended, they praised the determined little man, lamented his surprising end. Rumours of the circumstances of his death were suppressed.

Pawel requested the door to which his friend had been nailed. He pondered a long time if he should yield to the princess and the Administrator and become Rusdorf's successor. Then among Rusdorf's papers he found notes showing it was Rusdorf who had almost murdered him in Vienna, ashamed and dejected at the hopelessness of their task. Letters to a preacher with whom the dead man had shared the secret revealed that he had long been haunted by the mad notion that he really had murdered Pawel, and sought help to overcome the guilt.

Head low, Pawel declared himself ready to step into the dead man's shoes.

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Rumours that the Duke of Friedland, at the head of a large army, meant to abandon the Emperor spread abroad, stirred up Bohemian exiles and the restless in Prague and in the countryside. No one understood this man, who had openly invited the Saxons into the kingdom and then driven them back out, had conspired with Count Thurn, taken him prisoner, released him. The black-haired fanatic Sesima Raschin was ordered by the Dresden exile committee to go to the Duke. In Prague he saw familiar sights: the army scattered in winter quarters, headquarters frantically recruiting more, making financial plans. Several fresh faces around Friedland: Swedes French Saxons bustling in and out of the palace.

Raschin was admitted; the suspicious Duke heard him out. He had thought the envoy came from the Saxon court; when he heard it was the Bohemians, he swore: So that old fool Thurn, that loudmouth, must be behind it. Again and again Sesima assured him that everyone was ready and eagerly awaiting him, the Swedes would help, there was favourable news of Bernhard of Weimar, who was minded to install the Duke as ruler of Bohemia. "Rogues and rascals all," barked Wallenstein, staring out from only one eye, the other, inflamed by gout, was covered by a thick black cloth. "You must think me a corpse, to believe I hold you lot good enough for any skulduggery. Sort out your wicked dangerous business by yourselves; you're probably already deep in the mire; expect me to haul you out."

Sesima's audience was brief. As soon as he emerged, deeply annoyed and disappointed, his arms were grabbed by Count Trčka and another count, Kinsky; they detained him in the palace. They knew his intentions, and seemed to have detailed knowledge of Friedland's plans; they asked him to stay a while, all was in flux, events were moving towards peace, he must not carry discord back to the Bohemians, to Saxony. Count Kinsky told the young attentive Bohemian in confidence: Don't let on, but the French too have offered the Kingdom of Bohemia to the Duke. Sesima should stay in the background, the Duke is undecided, no one knows what he's up to. That he wished the Emperor ill on account of his dismissal was certain. Everything hinged on holding the Duke tight in a pincer so he couldn't move, and so would be freed of his doubts. The hour was approaching when the standard would be raised. Sesima,

delighted with all this news, asked how the Duke would be caught in a pincer. Not an easy matter, opined Kinsky, a sly vain elderly cavalier with a pale wrinkled beardless face; the point was – well, to help the Duke; Friedland was undecided, they should make use of that, bring it to the point where the imperial cause became totally unacceptable to him, then there'd be no more need of dithering. Raschin, astonished, pricked up his ears; remarked: A high-stakes game! Kinsky tittered smugly: What high-stakes game; I'm at home in Paris, always in and out of Fontainebleau; Father Joseph and the great Cardinal play quite a different game, cunning, bold, and – godless. This pleased him greatly: Godless – yes, such are all French diplomats, but that's the true, the correct, the only school. And he advised the Bohemian not to come too much in Wallenstein's sight, to stay at court, continue calmly with plans in Bohemia and Saxony as if the Duke meant to come over to them. "You can start to look out a nice chunk of Lower Austria or Steiermark; what do you say to Graz – tasty, a tasty morsel, no?"

Kinsky – who owned a castle in Teplitz, lay under an imperial ban, migrated between Pirna in Saxony and Paris, conducted Wallenstein's French negotiations – made it a matter of pride to bring his cause to a glorious conclusion with the grandees of Fontainebleau. Rich as he was, he dropped French ducats into his pouch without a word of thanks; no payment was adequate to his work. To draw the Duke away from the Emperor: a splendid task, not at all hard; he was such a lucky beggar to have it fall to him. He revelled in the acclaim of the noble conspirators at their conventicles; events drove one this way and that, one took up arms, sacrificed great sums for weaponry and clandestine recruitment, the hour approached for the great stroke, the victor over Danes and Swedes had made their cause his own.

When the Duke handed Kinsky the curious letter from Slavata, according to which the Duke was threatened with danger from Vienna – Wallenstein nodded darkly: "Perhaps my cousin intends something against me himself" – Kinsky drew his own conclusion: there was certainly something in what his old friend Slavata wrote. Smirking at the thought, he hit on the marvellous notion of entering into private correspondence with Count Slavata, imperial Privy Counsellor, renewing their former acquaintance. "I engage in my own politics," he told himself in delight, as he despatched the first swaggering missive to Vienna, declaring himself a particular intimate of the Generalissimus. He meant to drip poison into Slavata's ear, drop by drop, until he had brought the unwitting Duke to the desired point where his hands would be tied. "We'll make war on them," he sighed, beaming at his reflection in the blade of his sword, "we'll make war on them. Those grandees on the Seine throw themselves over-eagerly at one's breast. It is not necessary. It is superfluous, gentlemen. Just have a little patience." He spoke aloud as he rose from his writing desk, in his voice an incisive note: "Cardinal Richelieu, Armand du Plessis! Father Joseph! Look here, now then, look here."

The moment when the Duke made known his inclination to enter into a vaguely specified alliance with the enemy set up a seething in his entourage. Mere servants and train-bearers became actors no longer satisfied with minor parts, they conceived a desire to emancipate themselves, form a coterie. Outsiders came, lured them, lured with money, their vanity, the wish to outstrip others. Always Friedland interposed himself with a mighty fist. As the earth is smoothed by a rainstorm, things swiftly settled down, the swarm closed in, bobbed about him. He needed them, set down nothing in writing: people gossiped.

Blond naïve Count Trčka got moving. Over that hard uncertain winter he tweaked Arnim, the Saxon field-marshal. First he sat in Arnim's quarters, tried to entice him to come over to the Duke without asking the Saxon Elector, because Wallenstein intended to withdraw from the Emperor. Arnim would not hear of it; he enjoyed the trust of his Electoral master and would not betray it; and then he found that Wallenstein's conduct the previous summer and autumn bordered on deceitful; the door had been pretty well open if Friedland had only pushed at it. The Duke had devastated Saxony; his Electoral Serenity had sworn an oath of several thousand sacraments following those heinous events, and would hear no more of such deceiving cant.

When Trčka smiled a superior smile, shook his head, skilfully wove together the latest facts according to which almost nothing was left to Wallenstein but to withdraw from the Emperor, and, well, before long Wallenstein would decide, would perhaps be forced, to put all his cards on the table, Arnim declared that he, while inwardly always loyal to and revering his master, was ready to listen to Trčka; grasped his hand almost fearfully.

But, the Bohemian coaxed, the overture must come from Arnim. The parties confront each other with suspicion, unable to move; it would be most awkward for the Duke if he must take the first step, his only possible step in fact: come to Saxony, throw their armies together. Behind Wallenstein lies nothing, no ancestral lands attach to him; at present he is free as a bird; one must put oneself in his shoes, and who doesn't know of his rage against Vienna.

With a heavy heart Arnim did as the skilled negotiator proposed; he sought out his prince. No hint of machinations from Friedland's side as he stood before his jovial fat master and the sharp-nosed chamberlain. Arnim risked everything; any subject who toyed with his loyalties was in Johann Georg's eyes a disgusting contemptible idiotic beast. Disingenuously Arnim explained what he wanted: he felt compelled, ensnared in Friedland's web. After much struggling and choking, Johann Georg irritably granted him new powers of negotiation, but Arnim was not to bring the army into an adverse position. Sweden's brutal tactics at Heilbronn, the way defenceless Palatine families had been defrauded, irked him greatly; he wished to distance himself from Sweden, hoped to restore his loyal princely connection to his gracious master, the elected Roman Emperor.

"Closer, closer!" cried Wallenstein, sitting completely blind on a bench in his darkened refectory; both eyes were covered by hot cloths, changed frequently at the stove by silent Dr Stroperus. "Are you alone, Arnim? Who's with you?" – It was ruddy-cheeked cheerful Colonel Burgsdorff, a Brandenburger. The Duke was pleased, he was a blind hen that had come upon two grains of corn. – "But will your Grace peck us up?" No, at present his beak does not aim so well, this devilment in his eyes and feet; do they not know the Emperor means to tie a rope around his legs so he cannot hobble off to them.

They came to the peace conditions. Cavalry captain Neumann read out Wallenstein's draft: Bohemian insurgents to be amnestied and granted immunity, Jesuits expelled from the Empire, religious freedom, compensation to the Swedish crown.

Burgsdorff, Arnim: All very tasty, but there's no certainty it'll be brought to the table.

Why not.

That Catholic maxim: no promise to heretics need be kept.

"'Od's blood! How I detest those Jesuit villains for that maxim. I wish them to the devil, I'd never pull them from his jaws. If I ever say otherwise, God shall have not a jot of my soul. And if the Emperor doesn't want peace I shall force him to it. And the Bavarian prince set the game rolling. His land shall be ruined till no rooster or hen or human being can be found there. Because I mean to establish an honourable lasting unequivocal peace in the Empire."

Both were greatly comforted by these words. Alongside Neumann, sitting astride their stools, they noted the points on their tablets. Meanwhile Friedland presented a curious sight, hanging on Stroperus' neck, shuffling with him across the hall. Stretching out his grey unkempt head he seemed to be trying to see through the cloths. He made a dreadfully disconcerting impression on the two visitors as he was led along the wall, jaw sagging as he took his bearing from sounds, head turning. His red mouth cavity lay exposed, and his throat almost; the swollen tongue curled in wet saliva. His voice was laboured, snarling; the face long, grooves at the temples, cheeks. Led to the table, coming to a stop leaning against its edge, he asked with an arrogant sneer what the gentlemen thought of his proposals.

Still scribbling they replied: They offer fair sailing.

"That they do. Let's not worry what others think. Ask too many questions, get too many answers." He listened to the scratching of the stylus. "What do you think of the Turk?" he asked suddenly. "We must keep an eye on him. Here we are on the heaving slopes of Etna. The Sultan didn't soften to the Swede just because he sent an ambassador. The Roman Emperor found his ambassador no better received. The Turk is not well-disposed to any of us. He enjoys our wars." Then off he marched again with Stroperus, spoke grandly of a common Christian front against the Sultan; that would be fun; the Crusades coursed still through the veins of European Christendom; he flung out plans of attack all around. As they took their leave he drew Trčka aside: "You there, Trčka?" – touched his face. "Young lads, young lads. No promise to a heretic need be kept. So, one must be a heretic. And no need for a christening, hoho. Such heroes. We make war, I trip him up, the honourable miss sighs: That is unseemly; I never learnt that; we did otherwise at Mother Ulrike's." Trčka tried to wave Neumann away; Wallenstein detected it, roared: "That's my blood, let him be, don't order him about. Sit me down, Stroperus. What do you have to say, Trčka." He was thundering in the wrong direction.

51. An Unprecedented Insult

THE CAMP NEAR Pilsen. Around the town walls wooden huts, tents, hollows in the earth, farmyards, encroaching for miles on nearby villages punctuated with stubbled fields and copses. Near the town, surrounded by swampland, fringed by trenches and booby traps, accessible only by bridges, the artillery – noisy smoking smithies, patrolling sentries, cannon on wheeled trolleys, here and there black heaps of cannonballs on straw, covered by sailcloth. By the huts mercenaries slinking strolling riding, swarming about the watering holes, cursing, beating back oxen and swine. Platoons of musketeers training, women by fires outside the huts and earthen caves cooking, laughing, yelling at children. High wide travelling carriages, canvas-covered, with a mounted escort, heading for Pilsen across the fields, with officers.

In the cold morning sun, sleepy powder-monkeys shouldered wrenches, longhandled shovels, logs for levers across to the artillery park. In little lean-tos, fletchers at clamp benches twisted sinew for bowstrings. Occasional outbursts of barking, shrill human shouts.

Music: military march, slow tempo, across from the town wall, deep bass soldiers' voices:

To war with a laugh and a curse, To war with a laugh and a curse,
We had neither secco nor purse.*

To Sevengates town we came, To Sevengates town we came,
No bread nor wine to our name.

We came to Friuli sweet, We came to Friuli sweet,
And not one with a bite to eat.

Tatarata, tatarata, mi la la mi
Come now to muster, signori.

The ensign marched alongside the plumed captain, a long pole braced at his midriff supported the stiff cloth of the standard on which was blazoned the captain's colourful coat of arms: fledglings stretching their necks from the nest. The captain disappeared into a cottage, the company broke up.

Three musicians continued to play in front of the cottage, bells drum fife, legs lifting daintily, loose hose to the knee edged with long strips falling at the sides, pointed shoes with ribbons and buckles. On their heads big wide-brimmed tasselled hats. Children and dogs chased about them.

Over the drummer's right shoulder, the leathern button-studded strap from which the drum hung by his left leg. As one hand lay slack against the glinting rim, tapping rapidly, almost automatically, now loud now soft like a gurgling nightingale, the right hand lifted elastically, whipped back and forth to make sharp reports. The left hand incessant; the right now and then joined in its long rim-rhythm as if pulled along, then rat-tatted so vigorously on the skin that the drum shook against the raised knee and transmitted the vibration to the drummer's teeth. He smiled, eyes twitching.

The bell-player was a mere lad. His left hand rested languidly at his hip. The flowing silk scarf fluttered out behind him. In his right hand he held the yard-long pole, at its tip the glinting star with its hanging bells. His eyes wandered over the children as if he played for nobody, seemed free as the air. He stood rock-steady in a graceful pose, nothing moved, not head, foot, rump, just the two eyes, their lids, the right arm. Even that stayed mostly pressed to his side, lower arm raised, wrist turning. With the slightest twitch or turn he could make the bells twitter clang boom, blare proud and enticing like the noise from the beaks of a thousand birds; and when he swung his pole high as if raising a standard, shifted his legs, he lowered his head, gazed defiantly at the points of his shoes. The fife took the lead; it rested on the bandolier over his right shoulder. The piper stood still, attending to the melody. His mouth, his nimble fingers gambolled, lifted, pressed onto the hollow tube. They excited it, soothed it, caressed it like a beloved pet. He gazed soulfully from dark eyes.

Under a dull sky of rain and snow, two visitors came to Pilsen: Questenberg, and Count Schlick. On their first day they had to endure a meeting with dear Count Trčka and cavalry

captain Neumann, who were under orders from the General not only to ascertain where they were staying and their demeanour, but to discover their intentions. Escorted by Trčka to meet the General, the two visitors experienced the same dreadful feeling as once Emperor Ferdinand: this man is wrestling with Death, and it's inflicting great damage on him. Every movement impeded; joints aflame, the body dry; the Duke tossed wine and water down his throat, steamed like a hot pan. No trace of helplessness or rancor; but outbreaks of rage and gnashing teeth came more often. Questenberg saw with a shock, as he squeezed and stroked his old benefactor's weak bony hand: Wallenstein is blind to what's happening to him.

Schlick, gloomy bigot, sat slumped in a glowering stupor on the unusually high stool someone had shoved at him. A room in the Dutch style in this Pilsen dwelling; dull daylight through many low windows, white and red tiles on the floor, pictures of ships on the dark brown panelling, apples and grapes in glass bowls on the square green-draped table. Tucked against the wall a huge low bed, the posts holding up a sky of smooth green silk. The Duke by the bed, weatherworn, shivering. A beaker of wine at hand, the only object on the bench. From the bedside, with his old noisy vigour, lips noticeably slack and long, red eyes protruding, he asked after them, their journey, His Roman Majesty, with whom he thought soon to have another audience. And is it true that His Majesty intends to withdraw from political affairs. Schlick muttered about foolish gossip-mongers.

The Duke leaned forward: So, the Emperor is still in charge of business, concerns himself with it, takes part in discussions. – Schlick very calm: As always.

How wonderful. For he was thinking to himself, how could they have come to him, so far off the beaten track. And it was always His Roman Majesty's way to send a little personal letter, at least he had before, – or perhaps they did bring one, and have forgotten it?

No, they have no letter from the Emperor; everything was discussed by word of mouth. A long silence. Count Trčka drew near to the Duke, who glared at Count Schlick. After exchanging glances with Schlick, Questenberg mentioned the difficult financial situation of the ancestral House, at the end almost humbly posed the question: might the army not be better quartered in Thuringia, so that the ancestral lands could begin to recover somewhat.

Whether this originated with the Emperor.

It has been discussed on many occasions by the Court War Council and the Privy Council.

The Duke, not looking up: So what quarters do they envisage for him.

As said, Thuringia.

They do know that, under his contract, he is entitled to withdraw into the ancestral lands?

It's a request, they do know this.

No one is thinking to meddle with the contract? He fixed both with a stern eye.

Not at all; a request only. "So no one will lure me with a contract onto slippery ice, only to trip me at the decisive moment?" Then: He would think about it.

Schlick, even-toned as ever: There is no twenty-four hour deadline, we can while away a few days in this agreeable town. Wallenstein: I'll arrange entertainments for you in the camp, Italian singers, sleigh rides if the weather allows.

Schlick, coldly: He's but an old man, just carrying out orders. And actually it won't be irksome to spend a few days in the camp. They'd like to become acquainted with the newer officers, know what spirit lies in the younger generation; it will be invigorating.

Suddenly Questenberg spat, stood up: Nothing he hates more than paperwork, he has no desire to look so deeply into the camp, it might make him want to shoulder a pike again. The Duke purred amiably at him, a little mocking: Who wouldn't want to; but all things considered it will soon be thirteen years since they all began to scramble so about the world. So now he'll look about and make it his business to end the war.

Happy Questenberg: God's blessing on that. Schlick's low forehead furrowed now, head held high, neck stretched like a lantern-bearer hoisting his light on a pole: His understanding does not extend so far, he cannot yet see an end to the war; battles will continue to be fought until the enemy triumphs and rejoices at coming away so well.

Oh, oh, smiled the Duke, it's a long while since you, sir, stood at the head of an army.

Schlick, still seated, believed his experience remained adequate. War yesterday being no different than the day before.

The Duke: No, but the leaden plates on the shoes they wear into battle have grown heavier.

With leaden plates, growled Schlick, louder, you can stand on the spot. With leaden plates you can maintain an army at home. With leaden plates you don't need an army.

The Duke, still coolly amiable: That, in some circumstances, might be for the best.

So, no army is needed. – No.

Then, then, – Schlick struggled not to break out in a rage, – it's all superfluous, all of it.

You include me in that.

The other man waiting, simmering, glaring at him.

Wallenstein forced a laugh. "What are we talking about. What say you, Questenberg, Trčka. We're cobblers, talking of leaden plates on the shoes." Pacing by the open window, Trčka, spur-jangling, decked out in silver and satins, tossed back his curls; laughed, his face unusually tense, eyes moist, unwittingly aping the Duke: Leaden plates, he knows a fairytale, would you let me tell it?

With an almost hateful glare, Schlick retreated into his shell. Wallenstein gulped wine, crowed: Tell away, we'll gladly let you. But make it amusing.

"There's a black woodpecker, it's hard to find the tree where it nests. When you find it you must mark it well, and wait for the bird to go broody. And when the brooding time is by, you must climb up when the bird is away from the nest, and bung the opening tight. Back comes the woodpecker, and as soon as it sees the hole is bunged up, away it flies for half a day, finds a spot where a plant called spurge grows, and brings it back. Now you must quickly climb a ladder to the nest, your face covered with a red cloth, holding a sprig of green in your fist, and keep nodding nodding with it and tapping your foot, just like him tapping on the tree. Now the woodpecker's frightened, thinking his young are a foolish unnatural breed, or else there's magic afoot; he squawks, drops the spurge, squawks again and flies off. Now you must gather the fallen spurge in the red cloth and carefully wrap it, you can use it to open locked doors,

anything glued or soldered, break chains." Trčka, animated, gave a hoarse laugh, leaned across to Count Schlick: "I'm done."

Wallenstein: "You have such a plant, Trčka?"

"No, Serenity, not I. But I suspect our dear Count Schlick has such a thing and such a power. Maybe intends something with the leaden plates Your Serenity wears on his feet." Roars of laughter from Trčka, joined by Friedland and Questenberg. Trčka stammering: "And having heard so much of this magic plant, I'd really like to see it, what it looks like and feels like. Must be small and tidy, for such a tiny creature to hold it in its beak. I'd beg and beg for a sight of it, if you have it in your bag."

Wallenstein held his sides groaning as he laughed; then waved his arm: "So let our noble brother speak, you've said enough. I am most eager."

The ponderous phlegmatic being seemed little perturbed by the conversation. He has no idea what His Ducal Serenity is eager for; he and Questenberg have already touched on everything that needs saying; in fact all they lack is Wallenstein's response. Trčka almost jeering: "You touched on the point that the army doesn't do enough fighting."

"Touched on that, certainly, as was my commission, and my opinion."

"That's it. It means you must have that plant with you that will make my cousin jump."

Schlick stood up, menacing: "Now I must ask His Ducal Serenity who I am dealing with, whether the Field-marshal general, or my lord Duke, or the cousin." Wallenstein directed a long hard look at Trčka and Count Schlick. Softly he asked his cousin to lay off the buffoonery.

"The feeling in Vienna," Schlick, "is that His Imperial Majesty committed a great injustice when he left the Prince-elector of Bavaria in the lurch against the Swede. He aroused our conscience, more and more strongly, in view of the great benefactions we have received from Wittelsbach, renowned across the whole Empire. We could not stand by as he fell prey to the enemy. In Bohemia and in a thousand other contingencies he saved the ancestral House from mortal perils. A noble Emperor should never forget this. Even the Privy Council could not escape this conclusion. And so it was decided, after much deliberation, without prejudice to any decision of Your Ducal Serenity, to press for the expediting of military action."

Wallenstein, softly: "Enough, brother. What do you want."

"Break out of winter quarters. Your army is scarcely weakened; the aborted attack on Regensburg amazed the world, all laughed at the conduct of our Imperial Majesty's armies."

"Who might they be, who laughed? Who was amazed?"

"The Italians mock us, the Spanish. Brother, set this aside, what do you intend, speak out, are we to let the Bavarian be ruined and destroyed."

"Italians, Spanish. What have the Fathers of the Society of Jesus said. For surely they did not keep silent."

"Set that aside, brother. Say what you intend."

"The gentlemen of the Company of Jesus lie behind it. They've gained control of the holy Church, and think they can control the army and make policy. But we know for ourselves how

we should march." Questenberg tried to speak; Friedland wiped his reddened weeping eyes, lowered his voice, spat out word by word: "There's been enough of war in the Empire. Enough ruin and destruction. They can all be content with it, soldiers and clerics. Be sure of this, gentlemen: endless ongoing devastation is not my business. I'd be a tool of Satan if it were. My last word: we steer towards peace. Regardless of griping from whatever quarter."

Questenberg:"Nothing could be more welcome."

"My lord Questenberg. Soldiers are not the only warmakers. I shall have to wage war to bring peace."

Questenberg, mildly: "Count Schlick has outlined the business that brings us here. We would discover what Your Serenity's intentions are, and we certainly don't misprise the difficulties of the situation."

"I know. But ask our brother here what the fathers of the Society of Jesus demand."

Schlick drawn up to his full height, roaring: "I am here on the commission of His Imperial Majesty. We have imperial commands to fulfill."

"And here I sit, dear brother, with the commission of the selfsame Imperial Majesty. For a long time I've led an imperial army, and achieved victories. Let my brother show his authority."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"It means I know it was signed not by Ferdinand the Other, but by – perhaps my dear brother himself, or my old friend Eggenberg, or Trautmannsdorf."

"My brother may see the authority. It is signed by His Majesty."

"I should like to form my own judgement. My brother may sit. I regret having upset him."

When all had remained silent a good while, grey Schlick growled, blunt and calm, not raising his eyes from the flagstones, that they would hold themselves ready over the next few days to receive the Duke's answer to the request, the written version of which was yet to be conveyed. The visitors took their leave with all formality.

Where Friedland had sat, Trčka and Neumann, after seeing the visitors to the entrance hall, found, as they cautiously came back in, a clothed corpse on the bench, slumped against the bed; head, hollowed face flung back. It was roaring with laughter. An endless torrent. The room echoed, the Duke filled it with his roar like a wild beast, and lay amid the din he made. Uncanny toneless laughter that shocked them and drove them in painful embarrassment back towards the door. The manservant put the Duke to bed.

Readmitted to the room they sat again at the green-draped table. A growl from the bed: "Do you realise what's going on. They're looking for a repeat of Regensburg. And because dismissal is not so easy to achieve, they have another little plan: ruin the army. What is he, this Friedland, without an army."

Trčka, astride the bench by the bed: "Their plan will fail. It's the Bavarian behind all this."

"True, Trčka, the Jesuits and the Bavarian, that villain. He means to rise again. Wants to bite me because I didn't listen to him at Nuremberg. Too bad if the Swede lays waste to his realm. Leaves not a cock or a hen standing."

Neumann, imploring: “Will Your Serenity give way again?”

There were tears in his eyes, his master turned his gaze on him: “What ‘again’?”

“I mean like Regensburg.”

An evil laugh from the Duke: “There was no giving way at Regensburg. I was only shoved aside until next time. Until I would come back to them. The Bavarian bested the Emperor. Now he’s at it again. I – shall not give way, even if Satan drags me down to Hell with his tongs.”

Neumann, quietly: “The army will stay put where it is.” His face brightened.

“Yes. I’d sooner attach it to the Swede, so we can prevail against the one who started this war, the wicked Bavarian, it would be my pleasure.”

Now Trčka had retrieved from the doorway a sealed scroll that in his haste had earlier fallen from his arm. He flourished it with a whistle: “Hey, look at this. Read it out, Neumann. Questenberg gave it me when he arrived, and forgot to mention it during the meeting.” It was the written confirmation of the Emperor’s request to the Duke. Complaints about the poor outcome of the summer campaign, the sad fate of Bavaria, then hopes for the early liberation of Regensburg, relocation of the winter quarters. At the end a codicil regarding Governor Feria of Milan and the Spanish troops: the Duke of Feria is marching to the Netherlands, where Her Majesty the Infanta Isabella lies at death’s door and will expire any day now. It was requested of His Serenity the Duke of Friedland that he lay no impediment in the path of the advancing governor and his Spanish troops, that he afford them every assistance when he appears in the theatre of war. In accordance with the wishes of King Philipp, the Spaniard would attach himself to the beleaguered Prince-elector of Bavaria; it was desired that Aldringen and his imperial troops should now come fully under the command of the Bavarian.

Wallenstein sat upright, head tucked in, his expression flickering between scorn and joy: “We have them by the ears, those bold warrior heroes. They haven’t dared to give it up. It would have bitten me too hard, they think. By the ears. My old Questenberg, well well.”

Trčka: “A sad and extraordinary piece of roguery.”

“I shall have to talk to those beasts. I shall keep my sense of humour; they’ll have no idea where to hide their heads.”

Blond Trčka dashed his sword against the tabletop: “The Spaniard joined with the damned Bavarian. And Aldringen as well.”

“The Jesuits know what they’re up to. If it turns out badly they can find other priests, but the Emperor can’t find another realm. Trčka, you’ll have to send your little wifey to Kaunitz for a while. Things will be hot for a few weeks. You see how they force my hand. They stick the hunchback Feria in our faces. I’m not happy about it, I had other plans. King Philipp wishes to support the poisonous Bavarian: haha, this they set before me. Feria should not let himself be misused, he is under my command, he can take it up with me.”

From his bed the Duke dictated his order to the Milanese governor to keep his head down and not interfere uninvited in German military affairs. A German escort would be despatched to show him the correct route through Germany and out of Germany. Friedland lay back. “The Jesuit rabble sniffs a roast.”

Neumann, laying down his writing-tablet: “Ilow will arrive today from winter quarters.* We must put him in the picture.”

“Hot weeks, Neumann. Ilow will be in charge of the camp.”

“He’ll be delighted.”

The Duke placed two sleighs at the Viennese visitors’ disposal. They made no use of them, fearing they might not return alive from an excursion. They declined the theatre, tried, closely watched by the Duke’s discreet spies, to engage with senior officers of the camp. Trčka, and also the Duke, were pleased when they showed particular interest in Count Gallas, that stern worthy man highly honoured by the Duke; they gladly allowed access to him. But Gallas had little to tell inquisitive Trčka about the conversation; the visitors had asked him only about the camp’s provisioning, and how firmly officers and colonels adhered to their Field-marshal.

Count Gallas failed to report what the two imperial envoys, not daring to risk being overheard, had conveyed to him in the form of written notes: that there were doubts about Friedland’s attitude in respect of certain information that had reached him. That there were fears he would make use of the army in ways inimical to the Emperor. Whether they might have confidence that Count Gallas would be mindful of his oath. The notes were Schlick’s work, undertaken in the face of Questenberg’s teeth-gnashing opposition. Hard narrow-browed Schlick had dragged fat Questenberg through the camp like a child; each visit revealed to Questenberg the dreadful truth: a hostile spirit was abroad in the camp and in Pilsen; the strange stiff watchful attitude of Trčka Neumann Kinsky – of Kinsky especially, who despite the imperial ban moved defiantly about the camp; the Duke should have clapped him in irons. “We’ve gone about this stupidly, the Duke has become nervous of us,” groaned Questenberg as the ground sank away beneath his feet; he thought of summoning someone to rescue them: Trautmannsdorf, or Eggenberg. But Schlick charged pitilessly ahead. It was all clear to him, he did not know Wallenstein, whirled like a barge adrift on the flood, tore bridge abutments loose, rammed the bank, overturned boats.

In his despair about Friedland, Questenberg brought himself to beard friendly harmless Count Trčka for a heart to heart, and talk many things through with him in confidence. He expressed his sincere love for Friedland; it was up to him to smooth things over, would Trčka help him in this task; Trčka could see for himself what an abyss would open up between the Duke and the imperial House if everything proceeded as it seemed to be doing. The other man was moved by the sincerity of the visitor’s tone, promised to take no action that would sharpen the conflict; he would approach the Duke. But then, on his way to see Friedland, Trčka was ashamed, the task was highly embarrassing, he felt too weak. In Questenberg’s presence he was ashamed of his failure to act, burbled about Friedland’s inclination to yield. The imperial counsellor was glad to hear it, thanked him profusely; Trčka lied the task out of his system.

And so Questenberg, trusting that his efforts had smoothed things over, allowed wicked wild Schlick a free hand, even against Gallas. He even managed a superior smile at the man’s activity, trusting to his counter-activity. Unrestrained now by him, bullnecked Schlick rampaged around Friedland’s camp.

The bold long clean-shaven panther-figure of Field-marshal von Ilow rode out from Bohemian country quarters into Pilsen. The two visitors kept out of the horribly coarse fellow's way. He learned on the first day what was going on in the camp, wanted to grab the pair by the collar. Against Trčka's protestations he let loose: A court-martial must judge them, it's Wallenstein's right as an imperial knight.

Following his arrival the Generalissimus called together all colonels and those generals who were present, to discuss under Ilow's chairmanship the imperial request concerning the relocation of winter quarters and immediate offensive war. The order turned even bold Ilow pale. His beribboned form bent over Friedland's bed; he stammered: The colonels won't dare.

"These gentlemen know that nothing can come at them other than me and my right as an imperial knight."

"The decision will be reported to Count Schlick?"

"To me, brother. But you should be at my side when I make it known to the president of the War Council." With great leaping strides to Trčka. Two voices raised in triumph, hands squeezed, dancing embraces.

Gallas was more of an onlooker at that evening's discussion, and the rejection of the Emperor's plan.

At the farewell audience, Schlick let not a word pass his lips about this unprecedented insult to the Emperor. Politely monosyllabic, amiably hypocritical, the visitors took their leave of Wallenstein, in bed, and his stiff challenging entourage. Friedland would put his decision about the Spaniards in writing.

They sensed rather than heard – Schlick pleased, Questenberg broken – as the Duke lifted his head from the pillow behind them: "The gentlemen of the quill profession will pay us no more visits from Vienna." And how the entourage snickered, and rattled their swords.

52. Slavata's Gamble

THE DICE-CUP was never out of Spanish ambassador Marquis Oñate's hand. He played with the most noble courtiers: Count Vratislav von Fürstenberg; Baron Breuner, chamberlain and comptroller of imperial finances, who never rendered his account. Court chancellor Count Johann Baptist Verda von Werdenberg, Italian upstart, found himself by chance in the Spanish quarters. Unctuous Oñate lost huge sums. He had made not the slightest move in response to the letter that reached him from the governor of Milan; preoccupied with his passion he attached no weight to the business. Feria took his orders from Madrid, the rest was military nuts and bolts.

Dr Jesaias Leuker, learning that Spanish-Italian regiments had set off from Milan, pressed the marquis to give the wavering governor's courage a boost, and order him to speed up his march. Leuker's inept attempts to influence the subtle haughty Spaniard against Wallenstein by bringing him gossip took no hold. The noble gentleman allowed him to bring news during his bath or on the way to Mass, saw through him, kept him at a distance. Only once did he lose his temper, when Leuker discreetly alluded to an alliance between Spain and Bavaria;

whereat His very ceremonious Excellency could not control himself: Does Counsellor Leuker think him weak in the head; let him not introduce such weevils under cover of his pastries; it's punishment enough to have to listen to him. Feria's a fool to become mixed up in this, and will be told so. No doubt His Serenity in Munich deserves sympathy and pity, but the Crown of Spain is quite enough to pull him out of his ridiculous snivelling. And he so cordial once upon a time with King Louis, though earlier in Brussels he had no love for such an alliance! Enough with the boasting and bragging! Such a wetnurse could poison a dozen children.

The Bavarian slunk away without a word. Next, young Küttner thought to try his hand. He was totally under the thumb of William Slavata, who allowed him out of Vienna for no more than a couple of days or half a week to report to Maximilian. The elegant young man wanted of his own accord to accomplish a bold task: prevail on Oñate to force a blow against Wallenstein. For a long while Slavata was undecided whether to bring him together with the Spaniard; perhaps Küttner's rare sweetness would persuade Oñate to hear him out; but during these momentous days the Spaniard was fully immersed in his dice games. No more ploys were available; so respectable pretty Slavata took a seat at the gambling table, opposite Oñate.

With no change of expression they played for ever higher stakes. Slavata began at once to place huge sums; he observed the lethargic obsessiveness of his partner, who played, played, and could be drawn out only by some monstrous turn. The strange pleasant mood that had come over him these winter months – after meeting Küttner he had no wish to leave the court, his heart had been snared – was reinforced by the sight of this haggard face with the black high-slanting eyebrows; wake up, wake up! he silently urged, we're in the game!

When the dice kept rolling badly for the Bohemian, the Spaniard ground out the words: "Why, sir, do you persist so? You are at a disadvantage."

"My luck may turn." The marquis, gravely "As you will, sir."

As Slavata's stake mounted to the thousands, the Spaniard became hesitant; he was on tenterhooks, uneasily asked the other: "What's up with you? Are we playing or not?"

Slavata hardly heard the numbers he called out, so intent on watching the effect in his opponent's face. He smiled in delight: "I have more." Licking his lips, the Spaniard braced for a leap: "As you like, Herr Slavata. I am not your guardian."

"What do you think of Spain?" Slavata began.

"What about Spain?"

"It must be nice for you. I'd like to be a Spanish ambassador."

"Slavata, my dear sir, what would you do differently from me?"

"What?"

"Next play."

"I don't know for sure. Say three thousand."

"Three thousand it is, Herr Slavata. You stake your own head. There, fifteen, you've lost."

"No matter. I don't betray my Saviour by losing. But I know what I'd do if I were the Spanish ambassador."

“How much?”

“You go.”

“Three thousand.”

“Three thousand. My lord, pretend I’m not here. I’ve not suffered here one single moment.”

“You Bohemians are all strange coves.”

“I came here in the interests of the court.”

“I keep an eye on your interests well enough.”

“My interests are nothing. I am losing so boldly to you. No, see, this time it’s you.”

“Still, I’m right.”

“An exception, my lord. Five thousand, then.”

“That I cannot match.”

“Play, Señor Oñate. Shake, shake.”

“Five thousand!”

“Not a penny more. You should keep an eye on the court, it would often astonish you. You would not sit here so long.”

“Count Slavata need not care where the Spanish ambassador sits, or to whom he loses all his money.”

“Five thousand.”

“I will not stake five thousand.”

“Six thousand then, my lord.”

“I am in the game, my lord count, I assure you I am in the game.”

“Why exercise yourself about my property. Yet I am a beggar.”

“What do you say?”

“What, Herr Oñate?”

“You, a beggar?”

Slavata gave a friendly laugh. “Ah, you think my money bad, or tied up long. No, whether I have still more is not the point.

“It’s still at six thousand? Six thousand guilders?”

“Thalers, my lord.” Oñate let the dice-cup fall from his slack hand under the table: “No.”

The Bohemian, grave and melancholy: “I must confess, I am toying with you. I do not love my property like a youth who addresses a veiled nanny-goat as if it’s a maiden. I am already a ram to my nanny-goat.”

Deep-voiced, leaning forward, the Spaniard: “Forgive me for enticing you so far along.”

And when Slavata calmly brushed it aside and insisted on continuing, the Spaniard sat there very thoughtful, slowly retrieved the cup and asked in a hushed tone how much the gentleman would stake and on what. And then threw, not letting the other see, onto the

table's edge, covered the dice with a hollowed palm, at once stood up and with a sad expression said: "We should break off."

By a quirk of fate, next day Slavata found himself at the same ebony table, losing throw by throw in the same large amounts until he grew afraid, sorely and deeply afraid, and had to set about raising money, had to ask leave from the court. He could not let the court know what he was up to. Only on the road did the enormity of his losses sink in, make him faint. He would surely lose his rank. Full of gloomy thoughts he headed for Prague, where he gathered ready cash, dejectedly cursed himself, Friedland. Once he limped to a conventicle of nobles; and as he rang the doorbell suddenly felt a blow in his breast; he seemed to be cast out, pushed away by the bell. He had no business here; his business was his own. He left, had to fetch his carriage, journeyed on. He seemed to be restored to his true self; had to carry his body to Vienna. And along the way he woke up. Again it coursed through him, he felt filled with it, life flowed through his breast and arms. Küttner, Oñate, the monstrous Duke of Friedland – these existed. In Vienna he encountered the marquis at the gaming table. He was happy to sit there and find his way back to himself. When the very first throw showed that fortune did not smile on the count, the marquis, for the first time standing up to leave a game, invited the calm man to take a stroll, join him in fencing practice.

Oñate never again sat with Slavata at the ebony table. They changed tables, places, he tried to wean him completely away from gambling. Slavata tolerated it in a curious bittersweet confusion. He felt: he was on the way.

Soon he was on very easy terms with the Spaniard. Slavata saw himself treated as an invalid. He had gambled away half his possessions to the man, thanks to unlucky fate. Shaking his locks the Bohemian gazed delighted at the Spaniard's sallow face, as he stood shaking clinking gold coins from his green purse and pressing them on him. He could easily have sleeved them from the table; he had not foreseen the Spaniard had a notion to pay him back.

They spoke of Friedland, he bared his soul, it happened all of a sudden. "You too hate the Duke," queried the Spaniard through gritted teeth, eyes blazing. And Oñate began to tell of the shameless assassination attempt of some years before, to draw him out, admitting with a smile that he had been blind to a view of Bavaria's part in the situation. But one must surely spring into action should it happen; and he whistled through his teeth. He spoke frequently with the distinguished Bohemian, whom he found pleasant; he was glad they were in accord that Friedland was a wicked dangerous creature of whom one might from time to time, and with due circumspection, make use. He was most eager to be of service to Slavata.

Now he was an easy target for observation by the Jesuits, for attack by Count Schlick. The governor of Milan on one occasion received a passionately worded notice from the Spanish chargé d'affaires in Vienna to stick to the route prescribed by Count Schlick as president of the Imperial War Council, and in particular to maintain good contact with the seriously endangered Bavarian Prince-elector, and also to reject any other orders. He was urged to progress with the greatest expedition.

Within a few days the Spanish army crested the foothills of the Alps, tramped up the passes in severe frost; the recruits from Naples suffered greatly. Three weeks later they had crossed the highest point and descended towards Germany.

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THE BLACK-GOWNED gentlemen who wandered the halls of the imperial court and in whose mouths the names Azorius Vitelleschi Bellarmin resounded most decisively, debated at length the outward manifestations of heresy. A theologian called Eymericus had suggested that a pale face was the sign of a heretic, wild glances that of a sorcerer. They weighed the exemplary general and special instructions of the Bavarian Prince-elector regarding witchcraft trials: nobody who had once confessed under torture must be allowed to recant. This wise stipulation left them speechless. For how nonsensical it would be if, after the resistance of the flesh had finally been overcome by the violence of torture, the easing of pressure were to allow the possessed flesh to speak once more, and naturally to make denials. How the Devil would whinny at such foolishness: fine warriors these to stand against me!

High officials of the court came more and more into their sociey; even Eggenberg dipped a toe in. The old man could not decide. What Count Schlick reported from Pilsen, confirmed under pressure by Questenberg, presented Habsburg with a ghastly task. They had fattened up the Duke of Friedland, had almost been overwhelmed by the superhuman authorities and powers they had granted him. Now the crisis had arrived: Friedland had sloughed off his reverence for the Emperor, Chronos was to be devoured by his own children.

Eggenberg was tired, brooded a great deal, thought hopelessly of the dreadful days in Regensburg when Wallenstein was deposed. Fear and apprehension all around, he himself almost eaten up by disgust; had avoided the worst; Friedland had not resisted. Now they had to face up to this. So tired; the heavy bottomless fate of the empire, the ever-renewed tumbling towards the abyss exhausted him. How long would they keep struggling on. He crept behind the Jesuit fathers. Here was optimism and the power to act; he wanted to carry some of it away with him. In his uncertainty he tried to draw Trautmannsdorf with him. They held long discussions. The misshapen count declared that ever since Friedland had set up the dreadful new contract, they knew where they stood with him; and now the inexorable crisis was upon them. Eggenberg admitted that ever since the inspection of the new army at Rakonitz alongside Wallenstein he had thought of this; but had also thought it might turn out differently; maybe Wallenstiein would die, maybe he, Eggenberg, would die; and now pitiless Fate will not relent.

When they spoke with Count Schlick, Trautmannsdorf was blunt: the gentleman was given too free a hand, he was jealous of the Duke. For all their talk there was no escape: they were in a cul de sac: the Duke was not waging war, not fighting, had plans none could divine; he prolonged the war unbearably instead of striking at the enemy, they cannot keep him on. Almost in tears Trautmannsdorf admitted that they themselves had almost no room for manoeuvre ever since the Bavarian was left so ruthlessly in the lurch, and since Spain had made its view of Wallenstein so crudely clear. And so they dogged the footsteps of the Jesuits and Schlick, Eggenberg reluctantly, the hunchback with strong distaste. They shuddered, and could not come free.

Together with Abbot Anton they formed a committee to handle the Wallenstein affair in greatest secrecy. They felt so torn that they drew in Oñate, and on occasion Lamormaini too. Schlick they excluded. Nothing must and should happen, they insisted from the start in

utmost decisiveness and fear, that they had not specified and approved. They declared too that Count Schlick, on his visit to Pilsen, was not authorised to sound out generals and officers as to their attitude towards Friedland. Possibly it was this that had provoked Friedland's embarrassing decision to allow his colonels to debate imperial instructions. The situation was so delicately poised that nothing incautious or drastic must be allowed to happen. They arranged for the War Chancellery to send friendly respectful letters to Pilsen; even the Emperor, whom they thought to make happy thereby, was swayed to write to his great General as if nothing was the matter. Oñate's wildness made no headway; they heard him out, in horror bound him tight into their conclave.

Little Abbot Anton held quiet passionate conversations with Baron Breuner, not daring to bring into the committee anything he said.The burden of guilt on the ancestral House had grown enormous. With great eloquence Breuner, a calm noble cavalier not of Schlick's party, indicated that the sources of income for the house of Wallenstein would be systematically blocked; unlike earlier he now sent none of the contributions on to Vienna, he tucked himself away in Bohemia, Moravia; Austria had to be sucked dry for him, for him; and therefore he must be tackled, for the sake of the most exigent imperial requirements. "He has us by the scruff," Breuner indicated. "He is no donkey. When it comes to it he can throw us aside as if we are nothing, so rotten empty and flimsy are we."

Anton, who had no flowers with him and whose fingers missed the soft petals, paced about wailing, tugged at the little room's curtains. What is left, Breuner mocked, but to pawn the crown jewels to him one day, the ancestral lands are already secured to him. "I wager he will turn up with ten twelve regiments demanding payment, if we press him too hard. We have no idea how we can fend him off."

"He cannot do more than set himself on the throne."

"My god," groaned Anton.

"My god indeed, my dear abbot. Our Lord God demands that we act. We must know our duty. We are dreadfully, dreadfully in the mire, hardly anyone realises. Prince Eggenberg refuses to believe it. You all know it. Once Bassevi was of help to us., now Friedland has him in the bag. The Jews leave us in the lurch, will give the Emperor nothing. We cannot go on."

Anton groaned: "We have nothing."

"What," roared Breuner, "we have nothing? The Duke has cleaned us out. We have been cheated and plundered." Unhappy Anton rubbed his hands together. "Now – at this moment – Habsburg has actually suffered a defeat."

"He has us in the bag. He won't get away with it." Breuner ground his teeth, prodded Anton in the chest: "He is the most ruthless, most shameless of men."

"What will you do. He is a fiend in all he does."

What should they do. What should they do? With him? Strike him down. Patience, begged Anton, my lord Baron must pull himself together. What would come of such railing.

"You know me for a peaceable man. I've pondered long over this. We must defend ourselves. We cannot prevail against him. We are the masters, he the servant. The water has

risen already to our chins. Are we the House of Habsburg only so that we allow ourselves to be thrown aside by him as by a footpad, and it's all our fault?"

"Habsburg has bloomed across the centuries. It has enlarged Christendom. Unthinkable that it should go under."

"It shall not go under, Magnificence. There is not much left to us, but we are not entirely weaponless. We shall defend ourselves with our teeth."

Anton: Might the Baron in his agitation hold it possible that the Duke will refrain from an annihilating use of force; that perhaps he will desist from unseemly action.

"Such dialectic is unknown to Friedland."

"Yet he must desist. He must see that Habsburg and the house of Friedland cannot quarrel as matters stand; it would be madness."

Let my lord Abbot hope so. He, Breuner, predicts: this Bohemian nobleman cares not a fig for the status and longevity of the House of Habsburg; and, speaking confidentially, he's right. For nobody need care a fig for one with an empty sack, who can be shot down like a dog. "You lack the courage of high counsellors, gentlemen. And you do not see clearly. Keep babbling and debating; Friedland gives you plenty to chew on. But do not prevent others from viewing the House of Habsburg and the holy Church as something more than a topic for discussion. He may be proceeded against, as he means to proceed against us."

The abbot trotted off sighing. Later he crept again to Breuner, as hesitant and fearful-curious as Eggenberg to the Jesuits. And Breuner came always back to the point: there is nothing else to be done; they are lost without hope of rescue even if Wallenstein commits no crime; they must master him, bring him to heel. "We cannot spare him this, though you love him as your own child; he must today or tomorrow be convinced of it with all his worldly wealth. You gentlemen must decide, you see the matter more clearly than Prince Eggenberg or Trautmannsdorf or Father Lamormaini. He does us the favour of throwing the question out himself: Habsburg or Friedland. He throws out the question; he does. But, Magnificence, even had he not, it would be of no help to us; we would have to catch him some other way. We must set a trap." Anton, horrified: "But if the man who has rendered us such services commits no crime?"

"We must entice him to do so. He must swim into our net."

A Jesuit set Baron Breuner straight: Equality before the law is a nonsense. At least before the moral law, people are nowhere near equal. It depends on the estate, on the individual. In certain circumstances a nobleman might kill, where a common burgher might have no such right. A noble class in danger of becoming compromised might anticipate the compromising or the contumely by murdering the evildoer. Who would label it skulduggery. To be attacked from the front by a very strong assailant is courageous. But when someone lacking strength has to kill, should he refrain because he is unable to attack from the front? Perhaps because he will not be seen by the populace as courageous, as a hero? Such clinging and sticking to syllables. Who would chase after such cheap judgements.

Schlick and the Jesuits were kept abreast of the curious conspiratorial activity in the Pilsen camp by spies, and latterly via a strengthened exchange of messages with Saxony. The fat

pugnosed Italian Piccolomini,* once captain of Wallenstein's life guard and latterly general of cavalry, a sweat-stinking fiery creature, remained these winter days in Vienna in order to sound out Schlick about his promotion prospects. On a leisurely ride around the bastions, during which Schlick alluded to the tense strange relations, he offered his own services; he resented Wallenstein for having placed him under his Danish favourite, Holk; there were rumours that Holk's death in Saxony occurred not without help from this extravagantly coiffure future Duke of Amalfi, in the form namely of a handy poison. On the boggy ground of the Lower Werd, the sad-eyed monster, the ponderous bigot Schlick, gave him the task of watching over and impeding Friedland's correspondence with Saxony; any increase in Wallenstein's power must by all possible means be hindered; he must be isolated and held down. Schlick forbade the general, as they headed back to the city, to enter into contact with anyone at court; a tepid vacillating spirit reigned there; it was this tepidity that had first engendered the evil.

Before he departed the Italian received, pressed into his own fleshy hands by the dour president of the Court War Council, a decree naming him Imperial Marshal, together with a secret order not to reveal the appointment until the agreed moment. A mere five days later the Italian was able to report to Vienna that he had arranged for a reliable squadron of his countrymen to kill two Saxon couriers; letters in cipher addressed to Count Trçka had been discoverd, which he enclosed.

Schlick had forcefully to repel a storm of attempts by the Spaniard Oñate and several worthy Jesuits, who urged on him the immediate toppling of Wallenstein. He indicated to them the difficulties of the situation. One must proceed step by step, there was a risk that the Duke would present himself to the world as a martyr. He must be allowed good time to show his true colours, whereupon the ground beneath his feet could at once be swept away.

Around this time Count Slavata, still the pretty blooming man, left Vienna, court and Küttner to return to Prague. Küttner kept him company for half a day along the road. "Do not forget our business, sir," smiled Slavata as the young man seemed ready to ride on beside his carriage. "There are no laurels to be won in Prague, but they grow splendidly in Vienna's climate."

"I shall pray that when the Duke of Friedland falls, you should receive the crown of Bohemia. You are the best man in the land."

"Home now! Küttner! Quickly! Take care no one grabs me by the collar! Strong currents are swirling. Away, dear Küttner, best most elegant and loveliest servant of his Bavarian Serenity. This is no time for daydreaming children to be on the road."

The ribbons of Küttner's hat waved for a long time at the tip of his uplifted sword.

But Slavata's carriage suddenly turned aside. He rattled off in the direction of Pilsen.

53. The Hermit, Again

IN THE EMPRESS'S green hot quarters the dance demonstrator in her blood-red gown stood up rustling and slowly tripped around the room as the lady from Mantua looked on. With

hand gestures, enticing ring-decked fingers, she invited to her the lemon-yellow second dancer, who was crouching by the Empress's side. Hands joined, hands about hips, they glided over the carpet. A clear bright voice sang by the stove: strapping Countess Kollonitsch, her pensive black head looking down at the floor, both hands at her eyes.

And when they finished their dance she sang on alone by the stove, the lovely song of Ursula, virginal daughter of the king, who agreed to marry the pagan prince only on condition that he bring eleven thousand maidens to Cologne to be baptised.*

From the floor where the lady from Mantua reclined, sighs rose like tenuous smoke: "How lovely! Please sing it once more." Then: "Lovely, again."

"I shouldn't sing any more," begged the countess; "His Majesty the Emperor is waiting in the next room."

"How you fuss. Come," and the lady from Mantua, linking her arm with Kollonitsch's, beckoned to the two ladies.

Ferdinand smiled at them in surprise. "I heard the singing. But I am immune – I have the diabolical Passau Charm."* The trembling woman let him lead her to a chair. "I am utterly and completely impervious. Nothing can touch me. Did I not tell you once, Eleonore. Thank you, ladies, red for ardent love, yellow for envy. Where is green for courtly love?" And when the ladies left he grasped her hand: "I've asked Trautmannsdorf to come; he wanted to entertain me. – Come in," and he pulled the hunchbacked count in from the antechamber. "Yes, laugh. I'm singing your praises. You are my partner."

The Empress tried to catch Trautmannsdorf's eye, draw him into her power; she smiled half in despair: "How can the world be so wicked. For we are all Christians. Now the world is of two kinds: the old sinful world, and Jesus the Saviour. There should not be so much talk of evil things." Ferdinand came close to her, stoked her shoulder benignly: "How well you put it, Eleonore." Beneath all her finery she almost broke down. Her eyes blazing candles, lanterns swaying in the wind, the whites hypnotising.

Now Trautmannsdorf began: One should not speak of evil, and one cannot keep silent if evil is to be defeated. Evil itself does not speak; it is there, it acts, alters, confuses. The Saviour did not go over to evil; evil drew him into the world.

Ferdinand: "Just so. Speak, Trautmannsdorf. Take a seat."

"Why must I stay and listen, Ferdinand?"

"You don't want to, Eleonore?"

After a long pause she said: "I will;" tried again to draw Trautmannsdorf's cool eyes to her imploring gaze. The little count spoke of political matters. Ferdinand listening, absorbed, was carried away by the tumbril of events, slumped facing backwards, hands and head lolling.

Count Oñate, concluded Trautmannsdorf– the Emperor's hands lifted, warding off – has been apprised of developments; His Catholic Majesty wishes, in the interests of Habsburg, to see the swiftest and most decisive end to these dangerous confusions. Swiftest and most decisive end, the cool count repeated, fingers playing at his belt; Emperor and Empress turned to look at one another, sought, knocked, fled to one another.

The lady from Mantua roughly enquired of the count why he had not answered her question: the world split in two, Jesus Christ born to the world to overcome evil; without the Saviour no Christians. “Answer her,” Ferdinand indicated. Now Trautmannsdorf sighed: It was surely necessary to hold themselves Christian, when using violence to avert treason or threatened treason, for this was now required.

I must hear – the thought rose in Ferdinand – how it’s all going in the world these days. “You should think,” Eleonore, eyebrows erect, “not to allow any treason to arise that might require dreadful measures from you. There is no need for Jesus to have lived, if you can do no more than respond in that way to evil.”

“I know, I know. How good that your Majesty feels this way. But the task of the statesman and politician is no better than that of the hangman or the knacker’s lad. My only consolation is that the Gospel does not quite break the rod over us; for it is written there: Render unto God that which is God’s, and unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s.

“How cunning you are, Count Trautmannsdorf. You ply a bad trade.”

“We have no desire to do the Duke of Friedland harm. He will allow himself to be swayed. How horrible it was at that convention in Regensburg. We pray that God does not forsake us.”

“But I,” Ferdinand slowly raised both hands towards him, “would ask you, Trautmannsdorf, why then must we use evil violence, if the Duke is betraying us.” The count remained silent. “Can you answer this, Trautmannsdorf?” He stammered, tried to smile, glanced at the pale empress: “Yes, no, I have a poor understanding.”

“Gather your thoughts, Trautmannsdorf.”

“I find it hard to know how I should answer.”

“If the Duke means to betray us, must we submit to him?” Eleonore sat bolt upright; Ferdinand gazed triumphantly at her and the count.

Trautmannsdorf reddened, stammered: “I regret that our old Prince Eggenberg is not present. Perhaps he would have a readier answer.”

“I know. I invited you without him. I want to hear from you.”

“Your Majesty will lose his throne if he does not submit to the Duke.”

“Trautmannsdorf, attend now. You too, Eleonore. My dear friend Prince Eggenberg gave the same answer. Now Trautmannsdorf will address the question: to whom is the emperor subservient?”

“Only to God.”

“Not to the Duke of Friedland?” The count kept silent. “And beyond that, am I subservient to the throne? It seems I am to lose the throne.” Eleonore too followed with rapt attention. “But if I am the Emperor, am, and have no desire to submit?” The little count’s grey head inclined in sympathy; then softly, slowly: “Let Your Majesty attempt it just once, to be so – so unsubmissive. As I have already said, success will not be so pleasant for us. The Duke will fall on Vienna, we shall be stuck in Vienna, perhaps in the dungeons, perhaps under the ground.”

Ferdinand raised his hands: “I shall not lie under the ground.”

Eleonore, bitterly: “How can the count say such things. He should not be permitted to daub such ghosts on the wall.” Trautmannsdorf, almost mocking: “Ghosts is what we shall be.”

Ferdinand rasping: “Now look here, Lamormaini has already said the same. And so a nonsense has arisen: I must now make war on the man whom I have to thank for my life, my crown and much else besides. For I would long since have become a ghost, according to your theory, if he had not protected us.”

“”We want,” the count, with a slight bow, “to render unto Caesar only that which is Caesar’s.”

“Unto me?” shouted Ferdinand; his voice rose, he screamed: “It’s all to happen because of me? Of me? Eleonore, because of me! The Duke freed us from – I shall not say what chains, he took us on his shoulders and raised us high. I shall not lie under the ground. It has come to this! How, how?” The count had stepped back, Ferdinand’s pallor was that of a corpse, knees trembling, roaring at him: “I – will – not – have it!”

Trautmannsdorf, very softly: “As Your Majesty commands.”

Ferdinand, arms high over his head: “You won’t listen to me. I shall not submit. Let no one dare draw me into the game. I will not concede. I shall stand at his side, if you dare something. I am the Emperor!”

The Empress flung her arms around him, weeping: “Go, my lord count!”

Ferdinand did not lower his arms: “Not – on – my – account!” She stood before him; Ferdinand, over her head: “Why have I been driven to such madness? Nothing should happen on my account. You torture me to the point of dishonour and abjectness.” The Empress, over her shoulder: “Go, my lord count.” She escorted him swiftly to the door.

“That’s brought him down to earth.” The Emperor scornful, rooted to the spot with an accusing expression; “Out, out. What are they thinking, that I must do it all. Nothing else is left to me. How I had to tie myself in knots all those years ago to plead with Bavarian Max. But this!” He roared: “Serve! Serve! I – will – not!” Menacing.

On the cart, feet bound, dragging past stones and branches, hands and head jolting up, bouncing back.

To Wolkersdorf. The forest. Riding on waves, gliding, sinking, lifting. Feet scuffling against stones. Past the charcoal-burners’ camp, past bare trunks wandering for hours.

Mild dewy weather. The line of trees. The brown-bearded hermit, right side of his face eaten away by deep ulcers, asked outside the cave what he wanted. “To see you.” But this time the eyes of thiscurious workman held such pleading that the pious hermit stayed outside the cave and murmured a prayer under the little canopy.

After a while he asked: “What happened to you? Speak, good man. Unburden yourself.”

“I have no need to speak. I have come to you, I want to listen to you. Your face is half-eaten; is that why you came away from the world?”

“No.” The hermit crouched before him, grasped his chin, looked deep into his face, his eyes almost churning it, ploughing it. Ferdinand gripped his hands with a passion. The hermit drew him into the cave. Inside he had hardly resumed his seat on the high straw pallet when

Ferdinand set up a wild stammering, groaning: “What, what is it, you must tell me, what is it with Satan?”

“You think I can exorcise demons?”

“No, no.”

“You think I have sworn myself to him, because of my stigma.” – “No.”

“Why do you ask. You think I belong to his synagogue, that I hide myself away, have a salve, run around as a wolf. That’s why you come. You’re a soldier, I’m supposed to help you.”

“No.”

“Where is the treasure I am to dig up for you?” His knee touched Ferdinand’s. As his eyes began to gleam, Jeremiah’s face contorted, a piping pitched higher than a little bird’s came from his throat. “You have met him. I see it now, you are possessed. You know him.”

“I’m not sure.” Ferdinand whispering: “Brother. What is it with him.”

The other uttered a ghastly laugh, spoke rapidly: “No god could be so cruel as the one who made this world. You know that?” – “Yes.”

“You see, you see, you said yes, you daren’t say no.”

“I shan’t betray you.”

“Brother, you won’t betray me. It’s all the Devil’s work. You need not fear yourself. There is only one Devil. As for god, there is none. There’s the Devil. It’s so obvious, visible as anything to every eye. All the signs that signify evil have been fulfilled. The delusion is immense.”

Ferdinand threw himself trembling onto the bare ground. “You know this. So does the holy Church.”

“Be strong in what you seek, brother. We must endure it. Don’t tire yourself too soon.”

“I hear you.”

“Jesus Christ knew it, brother. It wasn’t Mary or the love of god that enticed him into the world: he had a premonition of evil, and of humanity, and wanted to help us bear the burden. See, Jesus was here, he took pity, no one can fathom the extent of his pity. He saw humanity, saw our sins, Satan himself went up to him; you must quickly pass by what Jesus and Satan discussed. Nobody knows, nobody has told it to us. His life among the apostles is veiled in darkness. He followed right on down his path and no one ever had a good look at his true face. Nobody knows it. I – brother – ”

“What’s the matter?”

“Sit beside me. I can talk to you. Yes, you too are possessed. You won’t betray me. You’ll believe me a little, you won’t think me a rogue or a fool.”

“I came to you.”

“I’ll tell you. When my cheek began to sink away, there was a fear I had, for an hour, half a day, a whole long horrible hell-seething day. I – saw – his – face, Jesus the anointed, his face -.” He pointed whispering, eyes staring, into the gloom, to the brown back wall of the cave where a root thrust out. “Here’s the root. Grab it, here. You can see it when your eyes adapt to the

dark. I'm a hermit, have no need for bright colours. It was here, a fine day, sun shining on the cornfields as I entered the cave all unsuspecting. Tomtits merrily twittering. He was there."

With a wild groan he grasped the root, little strings and chains hung from it, and without thought of his guest, as if driven, he bared breast and arms, below the throat craters, deep ulcerous patches, covered half his chest. He began to flagellate himself, arms tight against the chest, pelting up to the left, up to the right over his shoulders, was soon in total darkness as he retreated, arms working away, ever farther back into the cave.

After a while the beating stopped, and he reappeared, eyes closed, at Ferdinand's side. Blood seeped at his shoulders through the coarse shirt. He sat silent and panting beside the supplicant. Then: "Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"I shall tell you, brother. In a speck of sunlight there above the root. Stay, don't be afraid."

"Yet I am afraid," whispered Ferdinand.

"No, don't be afraid. I'm just going to tell you. Give me your hand. He isn't there just now. He was here, in the cave. It was so bright, my eyes were still blinded from the sunlight outside when I bent down to come in. Then I noticed a hole in that little speck of sunlight, a hollow, a depression as if soil had fallen from the wall or some animal had grubbed at it. I watch it, the light doesn't go, why is sand trickling from the wall around the hole, something's moving there. I think it's an animal, something longlegged, black, maybe a giant spider; it runs across the light. The trickling and rustling keeps on, the whole circle, it seems to me, brother, as if it's lifting, as if it's a sheet of iron bulging. I didn't dare move my head. All of a sudden as if my eyes had been opened I saw – his face."

"Whose."

"His, brother. But no. You understand me. It was so dark, with hair, ears, eyes, chin all in the light; the thin black cheeks quivering as if he was freezing or unable to open his mouth or his eyes.

"Brother, whose face was it you saw."

"And then something horrible ran across his mouth. I can't see it now. Ever since then I've been unable to leave this place. I haven't made a vow, I'm simply – nailed to this spot. I'd like to hang myself on the root, just so I can suffer, suffer."

His hair was a mess, tears streamed from eyes, and nose. "Brother, you won't be angry with me, you won't despise me because I'm godless. I suffer, I strangle myself, I lie in the sun to roast, so I can forget. Forget him. Over there." The brown-bearded man rocked dispirited as he sat, blubbed, stuttered: "Or throw myself at his feet; if only someone would tear me asunder."

Ferdinand too shivered: "It was Christ."

"He saw Satan, I can only sense him. I see the world, smell its decay, but he knew humanity too, souls. He sacrificed himself for us. He knew nothing would convince us so well as his terrible tormented death. Christ Jesus put himself in our place. Yours and mine. The greatest soul, he had to throw it into the balance.

"Against Satan."

“It drove him on towards Satan; freedom, autonomy, pleasure in life – he threw it all away. He wanted to scare Satan away from us, from people and animals. And -.”

“What.”

“You alone know what follows, brother.” His eyes bored into the Emperor, he shouted: “It was no use. Satan weighs heavier. Not a single keepsake of his has come down to us, no one knows him any more. No one knows. The Church has swallowed him.”

Ferdinand covered his eyes. “Oh brother, what are you saying.”

“No need to pretend. You know all about it. I know. People misuse his name. But you know different. You won’t betray me.”

“What are you up to?”

The hermit dropped down close to him: “You needn’t believe me. I’ve told you nothing new. Stay outside. Be pious. Are you my brother?”

Ferdinand’s hands came away from his face.

Ferdinand stood by a fallen beech in the forest and was assailed by oppressive feelings: two eagles stood high-legged behind him, their wings beat mightily, sent a wind before them, a shot cracked very near. The servant’s voice: “Save yourself, Sire, save yourself.” He crashed past into the forest, people emerged from behind trees; an elderly sabre-wielding fellow approached leaping, stumbled over his own sheath, grabbed at Ferdinand’s chest, pulled him around, stared into his face. A figure with a long gun ran close behind; strange creatures with pistols and clubs jumped out from every side. The elderly man, the leader, had a shrewd face; he asked the Emperor where were the rest of them. Ferdinand kept very calm. The band scouted around. Discussion revealed they had the wrong man; the Emperor and his trussed-up servant never learned who they were really after. They were patted down, then free to go.

Suddenly Ferdinand sensed the profound peace that had overcome him during the assault.

The hermit’s cave.

The spider. What was it. He saw it miles-wide, years away.

He could not leave. Ignoring shouts from the others he followed the leader, who was about to ambush some saddled horses. He felt under instruction to speak with the violent fellow, who was venting his rage on peasants standing beside the horses, evidently captured with them. Near Wolkersdorf, he said, he knows such and such a count – he mentioned a random name – tomorrow or next day he’ll set out on a big journey; was glad when the other took the bait. The servant was kept tied to a horse, Ferdinand whispered a farewell.

When Ferdinand was alone at the charcoal kiln he had no idea what he was doing. Hardly had a thought. Simply felt that a joy was being granted him. A special joy.

As if he were sliding madly down a greased track. “I shall not yield,” he sighed, kept the joke going, slid on down the well-known path he had somewhere so often descended. It was a freedom that seized him with ever more delight. As if he were grasping the end of a pole along which he could calmly move, eyes closed.

54. Peace is Nearer than you Think

THE ARMIES ASSEMBLED by the Duke of Friedland stood massed in Bohemia. Strong detachments under Aldringen with the Bavarians. Regiments under Schaffgotsch headed for Silesia and the March; squadrons under Marradas scouted south towards Budweis and Tabor. The troops were in the grip of a profound lethargy; among the officers a strange mistrust made the rounds. Not since the encounter by Leipzig, where His Royal Majesty of Sweden had taken leave of this life, had there been any activity that could bring fame and joy. Nuremberg lay far off in once-upon-a-time. Mercenaries came by with their songs: of the high ground at Zirndorf, stormed by Bernhard of Weimar; he'd had to give it back, lost hundreds of his men. Of Wallenstein, who'd chased the Danish king out of Jutland on to the Baltic coast, and grappled with the Bastard Mansfeld and Durlach and the mad Halberstadter, and so thoroughly broken them they couldn't save themselves. Squads of Italians turned up, recruited to Friedland's banner originally by bibulous dead Collalto at Mantua; they had plundered the place, the Duke of Nevers helpless against them.

Now they idled away the months encamped on Silesian soil, facing Saxon and Swedish armies. Artillery-masters piled up mountains of shot, sold it on the quiet to foreign dealers. Gun crews and master gunners fought furious losing battles with rust and dust. Arquebusiers went about with one long barrel and two pistols; when they knocked a sword flying, officers swore: why d'you swagger around with such big guns? Trebuchet crews trenchers grenadiers miners pontooners petardiers slouched through the mud of artillery depots, mouths hanging idly open, cursing grenades petards fuses cartridges. Slipped away to the Swedes, to Saxony. Asked where's the war. New recruits kept coming, were assigned to specific units. Pike practice was orchestrated by twenty-one commands, firing and loading at ninety-nine tempi, muskets needed a hundred and forty commands. Veterans looked on grinning, went grumbling on their way. Mistrust was planted even among the youngsters, punishments became more frequent, the estrapade, the wooden donkey employed everywhere. Old soldiers took grim delight; it was their only reminder of the old days. Recruitment proceeded with gusto, agents urged the drummers on: ten guilders to sign up, twelve kreuzers a day. As streams of newcomers arrived, the army melted from within; recruits filled the gaps, the gurgling trickle could not be staunched.

Acts of violence occurred. Master-gunners selling munitions and shot to Saxon and Swedish dealers were waylaid by informal bands of cuirassiers, their foreign coin stolen; some were killed. The cuirassiers muscled their way onto guard duty at the larger depots; there they too indulged in peculation and profligacy. Officers were drawn in; the business was kept hidden from the generals; officers and men risked position and life. Squads and gangs broke away to the Bavarian front and Silesia, waged war on their own account. Aldringen, like Count Schaffgotsch, was under strict orders to avoid any clash with the enemy; skirmishes and provocations must be punished. There was no restraining the men. Officers were glad when a gang returned from its wild excursion, and accepted the deliberately lenient penalty instead of just remaining with the enemy. Officers took to cultivating spies and trusted cronies in every regiment in order to gain advance knowledge of any mobilisations, a dangerous game that

often rebounded on the officers themselves. For now and then the snitches were unmasked, traps were laid for the officers, the unit has became unreliable, the officers must be replaced.

The ferment was greatest in Bohemia. Here was no enemy to confront, most officers were billeted in towns and villages alongside their men, supervision was stricter than on the front lines. To keep the troops firmly in hand, the Duke of Friedland had named the iron merciless stickler Christian von Ilow as inspector-general. Ilow was briefed by Chancellor Elz, then by Master of Horse Neumann, and finally and most intensively by Count Trčka: discipline must be maintained in the army by all means necessary; the Duke requires it to be prepared and battle-ready; no independent action must arise among the men; any recalcitrant officer to be removed, rebellious regiments disbanded and distributed among reliable units. The role of inspector fitted Ilow like a glove. He lent no ear to complaints from the many colonels: Troops aren't so many dead bodies, a soldier's not a stick or a musket to be leaned against the wall and taken up whenever you fancy; troops need movement, activity. To address the tall field marshal in such terms was dangerous; he would swiftly launch into crude invective, threaten the provost, military justice. The officers chewed lethargically on the bit by which they were tamed; now and then unrest twitched through the troops. Bohemia lay prey to hundreds of little bands, offshoots of the great army; sometimes they assembled people together and shot them en masse. There was no apprehending individuals; always they vanished back into their regiment, protected, it was said, by their officers.

Around the dread New Year time, as if at a signal the whole country seemed blanketed in a swarm of furious undisciplined soldiery. Whole communities were plundered and ravaged. It took a tour by Ilow with Wallenstein's life guard to force the army back into sullen menacing quiescence. But soon afterwards squads from Marradas' regiments near Budweis came upon errant bodies of Spanish troops, and fought with them on no other grounds than, as they said, no one else has shown up, we've had enough. The Spaniards were seriously weakened. Disarming the mutineers presented great difficulties given the unhappy mood of the troops. It reached the point where Marradas dared to issue weapons to only a few trusted contingents. Without a word to the Pilsen headquarters he took himself off to Vienna to plead for a remedy. There must be a change in the conduct of the war; the army needs military distractions.

He was not alone during those weeks in slipping away from his troops to head for Vienna. Generals colonels officers felt the ground sway beneath them. They too for the most part suffered poorly concealed frustration. An elite of eminent personages formed around the Duke, his confidants, a secret circle. A core of seasoned officers had been with the Duke on every German battlefield. To them came numerous mostly Italian gentlemen, as well as Spaniards Danes Scots, lured by Wallenstein's Europe-wide appeal; they wanted to learn war, take part in Habsburg's decisive blow against the Swedish coalition, embark on adventures and careers.

The Duke fed them money, and that's where it stood. Of Wallenstein himself they saw nothing. Always the same story: he's unwell. Rumours flew: his diplomacy has his opponents by the collar, he's ready to put out their lights. No famous battles, none of those profitable sorties to gather contributions that were the talk of all Europe; only confused idling in Silesia, a wearisome trek down to Furth to counter the Duke of Weimar, then skulk and sink away in Bohemia, winter quarters winter quarters, just as earlier summer quarters summer quarters.

Officers now cursed this imperial war as heartily as the men, and went over to Bernhard. But most stayed close to the feeding trough, and as they stayed developed a ruinous ill humour, a profound and anxious scepticism. They stomped and rampaged, colonels Montard de Noyrel, Sebastian Kossetsky, Petrus von Losy; these men, provided by the Duke with advances for a whole regiment, even with a fief, criticised the Generalissimus' policies tactics strategy. He was past his time, lamed by sickness, half mad, bull-headed. Wallenstein is simply a ruin; any who run to him are fools, he has nothing but the name: Wallenstein.

Among the Bohemian forces were several officers who evinced profound hatred for the Duke: they'd taken his side, and now, drowning in politics and diplomacy, he placed over them rude puffed-up fellows like this von Ilow, who had somehow wangled his favour.

Trčka and Ilow, aware of growing resistance in the army, tried as far as possible to pull the wool over the Duke's eyes. Whenever he did notice something he drove them to determined bloody measures: there was nothing he hated more than indiscipline, it disgusted him. But suppression generated counter-pressure: officers changed location, the fire blazed up elsewhere, or they disappeared and stirred things up in secret, in spiteful vengefulness.

Even before this, Friedland and the leading generals had been targets of assassination attempts by hotblooded gangs, or by officers. Now, arrived at Bohemian winter quarters, arrows flew in their windows and tents. Ilow's and Wallenstein's spies often found warning letters in antechambers or parlours where only officers could have placed them. On clear cold days Wallenstein had himself carried in his sedan chair through the Pilsen camp, inspected units, paused to watch squads exercising, called some or other soldier to him, questioned unfamiliar officers. There were no shortages in the camp; Friedland urged the quartermasters to bring in ever more of everything: the soldier at rest must be fattened up, else he'll rebel. And a dozen times he questioned Ilow and Trčka, as if he knew more than they did, whether officers, young, older, weren't muttering against him. He leaned close: Well, let them mutter; apart from the provost and the court martial there's another effective power: money, gambling, wine, women; just don't let them go to the bad, the army's earned the right to live high on the hog. He increased pay and stipends; his outlays were almost double those of any other army. But there was no letup in the ferment, or the desire to fall away from him.

Everyone knew he pursued peace with a passion, he needed the army where it was. His entourage found out what the army, especially the foreign troops, thought of it when one morning outside Wallenstein's lodging in Saxon-lane in Pilsen a banner flapped: Church colours red-gold, on it daubed the words 'Wallenstein Pope of Peace'. Once, aslant across his front door, a headless bloody cat hung on a string, below it a scrap of canvas with the words: 'We've been skinned, cannot scratch, might as well hang here.'

Only Neumann, Friedland's secretary, learned of the squalid fracas at Wolfegg near Pilsen, when a company deployed by Ilow turned up. The unruly troops enticed the new arrivals into a huge barn, on the pretext of a formal welcome drink. But the hall was bare of tables and decorations, men stood tight-packed, the newcomers were swallowed up. Here and there two or three scrambled one onto another, climbed onto shoulders, from this podium they raised voices, scolded, demanded an explanation. The mutineers too scrambled high to confront them; the curious human structures bumped and lurched against each other in a mass torn by

eddying currents, separated, waved arms, swords. Tempers quickly flared. Roars of "Traitor!" were hurled at the newcomers on every side. As they fought aloft, there came cries to disarm them. The tottering struggling beating human towers were assailed, tumbled over. Ilow's lot, they're Swedes, they're rabble, bunch of bastards out to fatten themselves at our expense, we don't need no more provosts, murderers. In the mad commotion the mutineers demolished most of the barn, made bonfires of beams, threw the muskets, pikes, partizans of the overwhelmed outsiders into the flames. Made ready to storm the town, press on to the Duke. Now Neumann, alerted by the camp watch, set strong guards at the town gates, had cannon brought up. He himself with a small escort intercepted the tumultuous soldiery while they were still in camp; he sought to prevent the uproar from reaching the Duke's ears. A sinister feeling told him that in the excitement every momentary trigger must be held down. As the torch-wielding mutineers surrounded him on an open field of stubble, he pretended to acknowledge their concerns, failed to notice the pierced hats and swordbelts of the disarmed Ilow troops they brandished on poles. He turned to berate the five captured lieutenants and ensigns from the newly arrived company: What did they mean by turning up in Wolfegg. Their reply – We were ordered here – was drowned out by his roar: They should clear off, such high-handed deeds would cost them dear. His own escort took up the captured officers and headed back to town. A handful of squads from the gate guard were sent to supervise the departure of the newly arrived company. The rebels withdrew with triumphant cries. Neumann, furious, rode back to town, confided the incident only to Ilow.

This event took place shortly after the visit to Pilsen by Schlick and Questenberg. Those in the Duke's confidence knew the imperial side was poking the fire, but could not ascertain quite how. All were of one mind: The situation cannot for long remain in the balance; there is a danger that mutiny might infect the whole army. Ilow demanded a major bleeding; Trčka agreed, but it should take the form of an active campaign. When Ilow shrugged in irritation and reminded him that the Duke didn't want war, Trčka gave a meaning smile; Neumann too smiled: It's just a matter of – against whom. In brief, a fight with the Saxons, perhaps even the Swedes, is nowhere on the Duke's agenda, for now at least. But there are lots of other enemies; one, hardly ever spoken of, that the Duke would dearly like to have at, a serpentine being against which I'd even mount up myself. "And this mysterious enemy is -?" Not hard to guess. And when Ilow still did not see through the smile, Trčka alluded to Count Schlick, Questenberg, their activity in the camp, how they were trying to spike the Duke's guns. Now the penny dropped: tall von Ilow's mouth hung open. He whistled, paced very slowly about: So, against Vienna. A devilish manoeuvre. Haha! And he took a long while to calm down. Then with a little laugh he cried out, prodding Trčka: "They're defenceless! We can overrun them!"

"Well then."

"Needn't even fight! Trčka, all we need do is march, and Marradas will fall flat on his face!"

"All the better."

"A joke, a comedy. Who thought this one up? Hoho, a fine game." But Neumann, contemplating the blade of his sword, declared with menace in his tone: It's no joke, we must be ready to jump any day now, at the moment we're still seen as an offensive force, but soon enough all we'll be able to do is defend ourselves.

In the camp and in Friedland's entourage no consternation was aroused by ever more circumstantial rumours: a large army, composed mainly of Italians recruited by Spain, had come from Milan across the Alps and was marching swiftly on the Empire. The Duke remained visibly unperturbed; he observed developments with keen attention: The Governor of Milan with an army not at all small has attached himself to the regiments of the League and Aldringen. The expected is now happening. Almost silently, while he sits in Bohemia, a new phalanx has formed. Against him. The phalanx he has been waiting for.

And soon spies reported from Vienna: another august delegation from the court plans to head out to Pilsen to convey precise instructions permitting of no evasion. At the same time it became clear that disturbances among the troops were being stirred up by a high, extremely high, personage. So close to the highest positions at court must this personage be that warning letters from supposedly loyal sources reached even Trčka. He became quite frightened and confused when he tore open the letters and read scornful words depicting him as the Emperor's spy. Events such as the relocation of a certain reliable company were blown out of proportion. A number of senior officers, it was said, along with certain common soldiers, were embezzling pay and contributions, dividing the spoils among themselves. And the Duke planned to make peace with Saxony and the Swedes, so they would bestow Bohemia on him and enable him quickly to pay off his debts to the army; he intended to turn it against the poor old Emperor. The strange dangerous element of uncertainty grew and grew among the army.

Then Trautmannsdorf and Questenberg arrived in Pilsen. Only Trautmannsdorf had declared himself up to this mission; having been assigned the task, he devoted to it the peace and quiet of his best hours. He needed Questenberg at his side as a trusted man with whom he could converse in confidence. When they arrived, von Ilow ordered every access to the camp barred, no stranger whatever to be admitted; behind Trautmannsdorf and his entourage he deployed an honour guard of ten young Hungarian ensigns. He himself escorted the Viennese gentlemen, spelled by Trčka and Neumann; no word uttered by the guests was to go unmonitored. Towards the bellicose worthies of the camp the hunchbacked count adopted an insulting demeanour of sovereign coolness. When he paid not the slightest attention to the impressive tableau of cavalry manoeuvres laid on for him, he was taken quickly to the Duke.

During these hard winter days Friedland often strolled in the orchard of his quarters, enjoying his regained mobility. The little count had thought to present himself stiffly as an emissary of the Emperor, but relented when the Duke in a long red cloak, leaning on a Spanish cane, greeted him cordially, asked after the Emperor, and Eggenberg; he regretted that the exigencies of war kept them so much apart. And before Trautmannsdorf could outline his commission, the Duke entangled him in a long conversation strewn with jokes and sorrowful remarks concerning old Harrach, the court physicians, and others. Only then, as they strolled along the wide bare alley of fruit trees, did Friedland cast a sidelong glance at mute fat Questenberg with the curt remark: I hope, sir, you are recovered from your recent visit.

The silence that followed was the signal for Trautmannsdorf to begin. He took up the allusion to the previous visit, with overdone diffidence spoke of the peculiar situation of the imperial House in relation to Spain and hoped the Duke understood rightly the heralded and now actually occurring incursion of the Spanish into the theatre of war as a measure

undertaken with no involvement of the imperial House and anyway it could not have been prevented without serious complications. Then he went on: Admittedly the force from Milan is alarmingly large and well-armed, yet not strong enough to defy every force that might be brought against it. One might therefore render any hostile assault impossible by building Aldringen's little outfit up to a respectable size and granting it such freedom of movement as the moment demands. Would his Serenity the Duke therefore put his heart at ease and find himself ready, as long as he is unable to leave winter quarters, to grant a sufficient number of regiments to reinforce Aldringen and be his to deploy.

"For me, impossible," the Duke replied amiably. He turned to Neumann, following just behind, asked for a list of the current strength, and when it came pointed out the numbers to the small grave count, who hardly glanced at it: "You can see for yourself, my dear count. Also, the Milanese gentleman has been told by me to leave the theatre of war as soon as possible, or else to head for Pilsen. The Bavarian Elector must be patient; they won't lose their way."

This failed to calm the count: One must first set aside other matters, the needs of the imperial House and so on. Trautmannsdorf, head always sunk to his chest, chewed his knuckles and couldn't go on. Calm confident laughter from the Duke, who had been harkening to a bugle-call: Let the count have no worries on that score; I know you again, old friendly Eggenberg and you, how you torment yourselves, maybe a finance person is in league to vex you. With Friedland, he asserted, the Emperor and the ancestral House are as safe as in the lap of Abraham. He won't fritter them away. Peace is nearer than you think. Wallenstein's tone remained friendly even as Trautmannsdorf, deeply troubled, kept silent. He stood in front of them, pulled them closer by the belts: "Now we shall take counsel together, Herr Questenberg, and you, my dear count. I stand before you representatives of the Emperor as a veritable accused, and you may charge me with whatever negligence."

Questenberg pulled himself violently together: "Please, Serenity, spare us this. We are not here as accusers, not at all."

"Now look here," Wallenstein interrupted, still holding them by the belt, "in truth you cannot accuse me of anything. You'd have a hard time trying it with Jesus. So set the Bavarian free. What are people putting in your ears. You gentlemen seem not to know how the Bavarian Elector's brother in Cologne deals with the French; Maximilian is in the line of fire."

The count, embarrassingly aware of Wallenstein's hand at his waist, angrily conceded that they had heard as much. "So," the Duke responded, swinging his cane, "does it mean nothing?"

The count forced a smile, took a few steps to shift the Duke from the spot – he did so, clumsily. It would soon seem – the count wrested himself free – that not Wallenstein but they themselves stood here accused.

"So be sensible, sir. You've seen my figures. Your replies are off the point. Grapple with me. You are almost ready to concede what I say. Or – are you not alone here?"

"What?" Trautmannsdorf's head swept around.

"I mean, sir, you stand here, I can see you and hear you speak. But with you are certain others whom I do not see. Who perhaps did not – dare to come."

"Your Serenity knows me."

“I know there are ghosts in Vienna who would rather devour me in the morning than at midday. Some wear square hats and black gowns. It is possible that they could even bring down a man like Trautmannsdorf.”

The count, cool: “I acquired the rules of my thinking in Aristotle’s good old school.”

“I know, I know. But answer me anyway. You are neither corruptible nor stupid.”

“I would ask Your Serenity only to consider for whom it is we speak, Questenberg and I, at this moment. We are to represent His Majesty, or convey instructions from him. And so we beseech Your Serenity – I especially, for you know, Serenity, how I have taken your part, how I have always smoothed your path at court, and how no one has managed to incite me to evil acts against you – I beseech you, yield to us for one moment. We may not wear a crown, but our instructions are there nonetheless – and what are we all? Before His Imperial Majesty?”

The Duke, hard: “One who has fought his whole life for the Emperor has no need to explain himself.”

“The Emperor knows how much he has to thank you for.”

“Others seem not to know it.”

“Oh, we –”

“No matter to me if you know it. No matter.”

“We are all –”

“Beside the point. I serve my master fairly and seek at all times to act according to his wishes. Others keep their hands off me. Anyone with a brain can understand I have no inclination to deviate from my contract. Let none play fast and loose with me. My most earnest request to negotiate with you is treated with contempt, regarded as a mere nothing.” Their lordships kept silent.

“You must tell me, sir, what you have against my reasoning on the Spanish-Bavarian matter. I cannot allow the imperial army to be weakened.” They had been standing in the same spot. Now the Duke turned aside, gestured to them, went ahead into the house.

On the way the little count exchanged not a glance with Questenberg, though he could feel the man’s eyes boring mercilessly into him. He alone must conclude this weighty decisive business. He clenched his jaw, his boots advanced, stood still, advanced, stood still. Grit. A mat. The threshold. The only thing: not give way, not listen; but speak, lower his horns. He told himself: Stiffen your resolve, little Trautmannsdorf, clear your mind, this must happen, suppress your tendency to tease, it must happen, do not listen, it must happen.

Low overheated refectory, Wallenstein hatless, cloakless, high forehead, white beard, pointed at chairs, he on a bench at the little bright window. As the servant bore his cloak away he shouted:”Shut the door!” Trautmannsdorf gestured to his companion to keep quiet, calmed himself keeping his eyes on the candelabra – upside-down antlers descending from the ceiling.

Softly, not letting the Duke’s fixed glinting glare disconcert him, he laid out the facts: With regard to His Imperial Majesty, if one does not mean to oppose him, at least in one point every difference must dissolve: one is either his subject, or else a private person. He stressed this particularly.

The Duke let him finish, then: He is a Prince of the Empire, that's one point. And then there's the contract, written and sealed. Already in one respect the contract has been breached without sufficient cause, namely Feria has appeared in Germany with no orders to that effect from him, the Duke; and then this same Feria has withdrawn from the command bestowed on him by the Emperor in order to take up an utterly useless position with the Bavarian Serenity. He will not yield, not do what ignorant meddlers decide without asking him. He knows how to parry mischievous lunges at his peacemaking efforts.

Now Trautmannsdorf's gaze shifted from the antlers. Facing him on the bench was a cold person leaning on a Spanish cane, the tone decisive, brooking no argument. It was not hard to draw from the pouch at his belt a sealed folded paper and read from it: That the Duke of Friedland, His Majesty's loyal Field-marshal, is to be most earnestly reproached for having by his actions in the last campaign severely endangered the security of the Imperial House, of the ancestral lands and of the Empire; and that further, following consultations with his most experienced advisers, His Majesty finds it opportune to despatch two trusted counsellors, von Trautmannsdorf and von Questenberg, both known to and held in fond regard by the Field-marshal, who are to admonish him and through discussion bring the Hispano-Bavarian matter to a conclusion satisfactory to the Emperor. Should, however, the humour of his Ducal Serenity disincline him to pursue an amicable settlement, then he must be advised that this order having been given to his Field-marshal by His Imperial Majesty, in view of the gravity of the situation instructions will be given, over the Generalissimus' head, to the colonels.

Trautmannsdorf handed this imperial instruction to the Duke, who weighed it in his hand for a while without looking at it, in silence. Then he read it, stood up, set it down on the table and stepped towards them. As they both stood up, Wallenstein grasped the little count, who was staring at him, by the hand: "You are a better man than him."

Under the impression he wanted to think the matter over, they made to take their leave in hope of his continuing favour, love and consideration; but in a low firm voice he declared he would tell them his mind at once. He will not accept the imperial demand, but neither will he oppose it. He will resign. They should stay a few days at headquarters so they can take his written resignation back with them.

Again he shook the shocked count vigorously by the hand; he would not forget the good service he had rendered.

Trčka and Kinsky, when they sought him out some hours later, were not brought into his confidence. He went with them – Neumann too was summoned – calmly through the lists of generals and officers to form a rounded view of each man. He struck a nerve when he declared that it was now of highest importance to separate the sheep from the goats, and swiftly send the unreliable packing. Their verdict on Aldringen was bad; it was right he should lurk far behind at Passau, or somewhere. The Duke spoke up for Gallas; Prince Piccolomini, loyal former captain of his life guard, was beyond suspicion; they went step by step through the lists. About some men, declared the very pensive alert and receptive Duke, he must seek further information. He would also consult Senno, his astrologer, about such and such a one.

This was said very quietly, at the end. It made a strong impression on those present: the strangely tentative tone and, in the midst of businesslike discussion, the astrologer Senno.

They felt he was carrying something extraordinary within him, he was under some compulsion, he said nothing, maybe distrusted them too.

That same day towards evening, he remarked after dinner to Trčka that he would resign. Opinion at court, seemingly shared by the Emperor, is that he is a traitor to the Emperor and the Empire; doubtless here around him are fools rogues and slanderers diligently conveying such highly coloured news to Vienna. Now they pile impossible orders onto him in order to achieve a decision; he declines. Therefore further consideration of the lists is superfluous.

Trčka was so upset that a quarter of an hour later he fell fainting into the arms of camp commandant von Ilow, in Ilow's lodging, which he had sought without thinking. The announcement had caught him defenceless, even though the tone of the conversation had hinted at Friedland's decision. Mighty von Ilow was not for a moment put out. After calming his guest with a glass of wine he declared bluntly – bloodshot eyes flitting left and right as always when he was coming to a decision: The Duke needs us, he's helpless without us, it's our turn to take the initiative. Later: Friedland talks of resigning just to challenge us, wants to know how he stands with us. This helped Trčka regain his legs. He swore: How shaming to have shown such weakness in front of Schlick. Then Ilow insisted that all active officers, generals and colonels included, must be alerted; Wallenstein had reached the decision to leave after looking through the lists; his confidence in the reliability of the troops was wavering.

The colonels who were ruthlessly rounded up in the dark – five or six of them – and at once confronted with the question were shocked almost to madness, and gave more or less the same complaining response: What about their salary, their claims on the Emperor for which Wallenstein has pledged surety, and the subventions they have received from him.

Von Ilow, Trčka, Neumann and Kinsky busied themselves with letters and visits in the grey dawn to summon all generals and colonels of nearby regiments for a briefing. At the meeting that evening in the town hall of Pilsen, Neumann, climbing onto a table in his elegantly pointed French shoes, reported: The Duke's decision clearly results from an insolent demand by the imperial delegation; it centres on the same point on which the gentlemen here present, at His Serenity's command, have already advised: a march out of winter quarters, the Spanish, and how and under what escort the successor to the Netherlands Infanta should be brought from Milan to Brussels. Already several officers were shouting: "We know all that!" "He should stay in Milan." The actual point – clever Neumann, balancing on the tabletop, continued, once his calming acknowledging gestures had restored order – is the handing over of troops; this question cannot be decided around a green table in Vienna. Or is perhaps Pater Lamormaini now competent to expound on strategy. Gales of laughter halted the proceedings for a while; every colonel bound to the Duke, to Ilow and Trčka, was present. Their verdict was soon ready: It's a wicked piece of court chicanery against the Duke. Those who hoped for a change in the condition of the army – not a small number – were irrelevant; their opposition, which they dared not press, was quickly softened when von Ilow bellowed: Troops will be released only at the moment when the Duke intends a great stroke, not yet to be hinted at. General commotion, questions, huzzas, confusion. Ilow's brazen smile.

The din almost hampered the selection of a deputation under von Ilow, consisting of colonels Bredow, Henderson, Losy, and Mohr vom Wald, which was to betake itself at once to

the Duke in Saxon-lane. They were received in his bedchamber, where he was conferring with Senno, and turned away with his thanks: He has already made his decision.

But early next morning, when Trčka joined the agitated deputation and they stood tearstreaked at his bedside, Friedland, silently reading each face, eyes glowering, slowly extended a hand to each of them – they were to touch only the ends of his fingers, which it cost him effort to raise: He welcomed their insistence that he remain by them; he was mindful of their money and their futures; and so would continue to bear the burden and lead them through even this bad time.

As they clanked their way back through the sleeping streets of Pilsen, the deputation decided to hold a celebratory banquet. It happened that during the event that afternoon, a number of colonels who were not at all trusted were prompted by the general excitement, they being all here together, to propose that His ailing Serenity, their world-famous commander and Field-marshal whom they had won back and who would lead them to further victories and glory, be sent a letter of thanks for his change of heart and his graciousness; a skilful scribe should set down how resolutely they stood by him. The letter* was composed as the riotous banquet proceeded by a delighted Neumann, and a Trčka weeping for joy. They employed the strongest terms, instead of an oath on their own body they swore to contribute whatever was needed to maintain the Duke and the armies and to stand with him to the last drop of blood in their veins; any among them who was disloyal and forgetful of his honour was to be pursued and vengeance wreaked on all his goods and chattels, his body and his life as if they personally were betrayed. The missive was adopted with a tremendous outburst of joy, sabre-rattling and smashing of glasses.

Two tables had been pulled together in an alcove, by them stood mighty von Ilow, brandishing his sword. Anyone wanting to subscribe had to come to him. In the growing tumult, four guards with lowered partizans barred access to the alcove. In the hall, potbellied Piccolomini waded and waddled maneshaking between the rows of tables, cried out in Italian, stumbled arm in arm with Diodati towards the alcove: “O traditore!” No one knew whom he meant. Isolani, who had pulled three foreign fur coats over his head, stormed across to Colonel Losy, who had mocked him as the leader of Savoyard monkeys, and threatened him with a table-top. Trčka had allowed the banquet to degenerate into a drunken melee; he went about sword drawn, ready to strike anyone down. The alcove was quieter; signatories were Julius Heinrich von Sachsen, Morzin, Suys, Gonzaga, Lamboy, Florent de la Fosse, von Wiltberg, Montard de Noyrel, Přichowitz, Rauchhaupt, Kossetsky – the latter after he had twice fallen under the table and two guards with halberds had to hold his back straight – Gordon, Marcus Corpus, Silvio Piccolomini, Johann Ulrich Bissingen, von Teufel, Tobias von Giesenburg, Juan de Salazar – he rode with Felipe Corrasco, a fellow countryman built like an elephant – Lukas Notario, called the Weasel because of his features, finally the gloomy Scot, Walter Butler.* Slender soft Christoph Peukher ran about naked, drenched from every side in wine, in order to prove he was a man: several times he was driven back from the alcove, eventually they let him through; von Ilow himself threw him out the window into a snowdrift: a fitting conclusion to the letter, he said. Officers crowded by the window, pelted him with beakers and stools as he lay in the snow.

55. Dismissed Again

FOLLOWING A COURTEOUS reception and some friendly conversation, Trautmannsdorf and Questenberg were informed by the Duke with a shrug of the shoulders that unforeseen circumstances had cut athwart his stated decision to resign. He saw himself, actually, opposed by his whole camp, the whole army, had no idea how to free himself from this noose. As for detaching a body of troops to support the Spaniard, the officers had urged another tack than that which at the moment might be justified strategically. This, for him, must be the end of it. They will understand, in Vienna. It is no simple matter for him to withdraw from the army; he stands surety for the outlays of his colonels and officers; the gentlemen know His Imperial Majesty's financial situation.

Trautmannsdorf asked: "In that case, the colonels trust Your Serenity more than they trust His Imperial Majesty." The Duke, reluctantly: Just a matter of distance, I'm closer to them.

And the order to provide reinforcements to the Spanish? "Count Trautmannsdorf is playing theatre with me. It's a big word, 'order', and you sir like to employ it, it sits well on you. But do not ignore the facts as I have stated them. My secretary will give you some written remarks; Count Schlick will do well to reflect on them."

Trautmannsdorf obstinate, for the first time filled with anger against Wallenstein: "But the incontrovertible order, in writing, from His Imperial Majesty?"

The Duke, who had stood up slowly from the table to fetch a sealed scroll from the cupboard by the wall, heard this. He returned to his chair, sighed, regarded Trautmannsdorf with impenetrable calm: "This is the seal, the great seal, of my Field-marshal Christian von Ilow. You gentlemen should see the reality, and see how it relates to words. Have you gentlemen already had wind of this?" The two men exchanged glances, said snappishly, No. But then, as the Duke calmly read it out, read out the names, they were outraged, robbed of breath. Clearly the Duke was using this missive from the officers as security against his dismissal. A groan escaped Trautmannsdorf; the Duke broke off: Should he continue? They requested a copy of the missive, to which Wallenstein willingly acceded: He'll make sure not a single name is omitted. The Duke, icily triumphant, escorted them to the porch. Beside themselves with fury, paralysed by shame, they departed next day.

In the days that followed, the Duke attended some of the banquets arranged in his honour by von Ilow and Gallas. The talk around the tables had a truculent boastful tone; Friedland joined in every toast. Spring is around the corner, a man knows what he lives for. To flatter the Duke, young officers cried; We'll play chess with those schemers in Vienna, the Spanish will be chased back to Spain, the Vienna court close behind them. But Wallenstein launched into his idea of a Crusade, he wanted to bring all the troops of Christendom together for once and hurl them at the Turk; Catholic, Lutheran is all the same to him, the world needs conquering, a scoundrel, any who thinks to abandon the flag and hinder Christendom's reunification.

The Duke's entourage toiled with dogged determination amid the excitement that had gripped the camp at Pilsen. Count Kinsky, the Bohemian Francophile, brought de la Broderie, one of Fouquière's attachés, to see Friedland; he considered this an opportune moment to

strike against Habsburg. Jovial as always, vain Kinsky hauled his victim along – a dapper man with a long nose, the point drooping over his mouth. They met a very different reception from Friedland than they had expected. He barked incisive questions of insulting curtness at them as if at a servant, eschewed welcomes and courteous phrases. The conversation, conducted in Italian, started with de la Broderie offering to Friedland the Bohemian crown, which Friedland brushed aside with icy words in order to pose six questions to Fouquière's intermediary, notably: What assurance did France give him in case of a war against Habsburg; what position should one adopt towards Bavaria, France's go-between; what should be the initiating cause for operations against Habsburg.

The shocked well-informed disconcerted negotiator, after first reporting back to Fouquières, who was at work in Dresden, conveyed this reply: Bavaria and Prince-elector Maximilian would be sacrificed to Wallenstein's resentment; an annual stipend of one million livres was promised him, five hundred thousand immediately; France's armed protection. Action against Vienna must proceed. From Dresden de la Broderie brought to the Duke an effusive personal letter from His Most Christian Majesty, prepared long ago. Friedland responded with a contented snarl: he warned the Frenchman not to imagine he was falling away from the Emperor. "The army stands behind me," he said, "I do not oppose the Emperor, I want to bring peace, the war party at court will submit. But it seems now that the Bavarian and Jesuit party rules at court, and Spain carries the sceptre. Bavaria likes to mock me. I shall pay them back once and for all." De la Broderie took his leave with a bow: he understood, he would bring a draft treaty from Fontainebleau.

Kinsky was held back by the Duke's fearsome glare: Had he whispered in the Frenchman's ear about Bohemia – the French want to bestow the kingdom of Bohemia on him. He dragged the distraught cringing count around the room by the ear: "I'll have you dismissed if you compromise me. What have I ever said to you about Bohemia? Tell me! Hey hey, what have I said to you? Do you hanker for your lands, sirrah? Haha, hey, you can conquer them yourself."

When Kinsky tried to argue, the Duke evicted him roaring, shoved him in the back. Trčka caught him just outside the door. They whispered together; a special envoy from the Duke was to go to the Saxon Prince-elector, Sesima Raschin had turned up, was undertaking missions for the Swede Oxenstierna.

As the camp seethed, an ominous metallic clanging came from the Duke's quarters.

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By mistake, Piccolomini's spies took Trautmannsdorf and Questenberg prisoner and held them a few days as suspected secret messengers of Wallenstein. When they reappeared in Vienna, a united front formed. In panicked terror the secret committee dealing with the Friedland case caved in, went flags flying across to the Jesuit party. Fearfully, reluctantly, they drew brutal Count Schlick into their deliberations. They also thought it well to inform the tender young King of Hungary, whose haughty distaste for Wallenstein, the 'presumptuous parvenu', normally kept everyone at a distance. But following such insubordination, the open act of rebellion embodied in the Pilsen missive, the General's removal had become inevitable. Gallas would take over, but he was in Pilsen, unreachable; so Aldringen in Bavaria and Piccolomini should first make preparations with the greatest secrecy, speed and resolution.

They sent to Emperor Ferdinand, to obtain his signature to the decision. Meanwhile, under threat of an attack, the Vienna city guard was hurriedly mobilised. The high dignitaries of the Commission felt a constriction in the chest as they watched the few hundred men approach, people of the poorer class who toiled daily at a trade, now hastily kitted out with ancient weapons – muskets and partizans which they hardly knew how to handle. With bellowed Halloos! and much running about, five light field guns were hauled up: Wallenstein's booty from the Danish campaign, that had been placed as ornaments on bridges. A noisy mob thronged about them, children swung onto the gun carriages, the guardsmen let draymen and porters lend a hand. To the great delight of the dense crowds, the guns were positioned at entrances to the Hofburg, the squads marched in, set up tents, lit fires and sang. Word was that gipsies and discontented vagabonds from Hungary planned to break in and loot the place. This rumour circulated too among their lordships up above. Abbot Anton whispered: "How can these people withstand a Friedland force." Eggenberg broke out in an unconstrained despairing wail, an old man's blubbing; Trautmannsdorf shook his head when he saw him cowering helpless in a corner. He did not yet know that the old prince cried because their liege, the Emperor, whom he had advised over the course of decades, and loved, had parted from them devoid of hope.

Deathly silence at Wolkersdorf. The Emperor out every day on excursions. From Rome, chosen by the general of the Company of Jesuits, an ancient crooked priest arrived, waited for Ferdinand. Lamormaini, who no longer felt able to guide the Emperor, had asked for help. The black-gowned stranger paced tirelessly along the corridors, up and down stairs; every morning he dozed a few hours. To keep him company Lamormaini assigned a genteel young novice. The old man was pleased, chattered away. They glided along corridors, up stairs to the attic, through the attic rooms, down stairs.

"Do you know, child, what Jesus said. Attend now: 'Feed my sheep'; he said this to Peter. Is a sheep an intelligent beast? Ask yourself that. A great man, a member of our blessed company, has thought much about this. Jesus never uttered anything inconsequential. Sheep are dumb beasts, maybe the dumbest. They have instincts and appetites and nothing else. You see how Jesus thought of people, and what task he gave the holy Church. We are to guide them and feed them, we are to know who it is we have before us, hence we are not to be the bellwether. Peter took up his shepherd's crook and did duty as a shepherd. Do you know, my child, who is best regarded as a bellwether?"

"No, Magnificence."

"Well," he whispered, "it's here on our doorstep. It's princes and kings and emperors. They owe obedience to the Church, are really the property of the Church; for what could be better for the herd than to belong to a competent shepherd. But confusion has entered in; violence flourishes, and our Holy Father in his lands is hard put to assert himself against lambs turned wild beasts. Ah, we have much toil before us, my child. Rejoice in your young bones." The old man sighed. The other remarked softly: "The Emperor's a long time away."

"We'll wait," the old man sighed. After a while: "A peculiar cast of human, the prince. They are a special thing. The people sense it. As a priest you'll have your own opinion of them, my child. They are almost the worst of the dumb beasts. It is certain that human beings are free

by nature. For is not every lamb and sheep and every dog free to run where it wants. And the deer, the bedbug, the flea. Why not the human? The deer remains free – as long as there is no hunter. A musket convinces the deer to give up its freedom, a musket has tremendous powers of persuasion. What kings and dukes and counts do in their territories is of this kind. You'll see. If I fence a deer in, I am exercising not a right, but a deal of cleverness."

"Why does God allow this?"

"You're no fool, my friend. God hasn't yet joined the queue. Because princes have power they think they can do without good sense, or thoughts of God. No one is more prone to confusion than a prince. They lose the ground from under their feet and tread thin air. Maybe pull their people along behind. We must make ourselves master of the princes, and if that doesn't work, of the people. We cannot give up, nothing must scare us off. Only the holy Church can save humanity from the abyss." They paused for breath under a tall picture on the wall: in the blue-gowned Virgin's lap the holy Infant toyed with a golden book. They ambled on. The old man pointed a thumb back at the picture: "The Book. The Book. Our little sheep think that's all they need. Now they are the masters. Anyone who can read has access to God."

"But that's heresy."

"Now, have you ever stopped to think who is guilty of heresy? Luther? Hus? Pfui. They are dupes. Silly flat heads, they don't amount even to dupes. The Book. It was a sin, we've known it a long time, to surrender literacy to the laity, to let them learn to write at all. To keep the holy Word holy, that should have been more important than anything. The holy Word should be passed down from Pope to Pope by word of mouth, and no one should hear it save those brought in by the Pope. Simple people should not eat of this Tree of Knowledge. Now the calamity is upon us, and with what consequence? Mass heresy. They base everything on the Bible. Have you ever heard their preachers? – On the Bible! In just that tone! With such pride, as if one had said: Lainez taught this, or Vitelleschi advocated that. They might as well say, my son, that their base is nature, the animal kingdom, the stars, crystals, the fishes in the sea, the knacker's yard. For what do they mean: the Bible? It's a manuscript full of sentences, syllables, letters, marks, Hebrew Greek Latin. My eyes glide over it, I find this word, that, spell out l-o-g-o-s, a decision is required just to say 'logos'. I ascend, almost without moving my eyes, into the spiritual, and – the written Bible disappears. My spirit rules."

"Your Magnificence sets no store by the holy Gospel?"

"By the Gospel? For sure. If you are strong and not easily scared, in a certain respect the Gospel is nothing."

"A certain respect?"

"A bunch of papers. Hah, you need only ask an Indian if I am right or not. Any bird will confirm it. Paint the letters of the Bible on a panful of gingerbread biscuits, sprinkle them with white sugar exactly following the original text; you can fetch a cow as a natural authority: Is this the Bible, or gingerbread biscuits? She'll gobble the whole panful, and you need expect no miracle from the beast's guts: what the cow produces later is a cowpat like any other. Begging your pardon – yes, you laugh, child – I shall only say that this Lutheran cow has behaved well, but has, despite the Lutheran confession, remained our own fine old cow."

"I see."

"And with this first step we take all other steps. This faith in letters, I tell you, is a relapse into Judaism. Woe unto him who believes that because he has two feet he can stand up by himself. Our faith has freedom, the Holy Ghost that dictated the Gospels is with the Pope. Only with the Holy Ghost does freedom arise. A time will come when we take serious steps to regain the Bible for Church and Pope. We must protect the sheep against madness and death."

Corridors, doors, stairs. Gravely they paced the floorboards. They sat by a window on the ground floor, gazed out over the forest. They waited. A servant brought a side table with apples and sugar water. The novice opened a window. Refreshing breeze.

Ferdinand was helped down from his horse. A moustachioed older man at his side, scars a finger's breadth deep in the little determined face that ended in a strongly jutting lower jaw. Passing by the priest with hasty steps. Soon the valet fetched the grey Father; the Emperor thanked him, chatted a while, would receive him that evening.

In the wide timbered hall, roofbeams braced as if by swallowed arms, Ferdinand stood conversing in a vigorous low voice with the moustached bandit, who had two pistols at his belt. The Emperor had induced him after the attack to stay with him. Now Ferdinand, dressed like the other in green and white, loose knee-hose quivering, deep red face, demanded that Böckel come away with him. He resisted. Then Ferdinand will leave without him. He feared a plot, he whispered anxiously, maybe they will lock him up to be sure of him. Such plots had been planned against Emperors Matthias and Rudolf. The other refused to believe it. "It's reached the point," insisted Ferdinand, "that they want to depose the Duke of Friedland, Friedland my friend, he raised me up, they mean to seize me, they know what I think." Sturdy Böckel, whose back was strong and round, stared slyly about him: So Ferdinand must leave nothing behind, they must take with them all they can carry. Best towards evening, he'll leave first to make preparations. Then he whispered: The Emperor must keep his nerve till then.

Ferdinand, who had initially felt a shock at the sight of the unknown priest, went into a room, lurked by the door, made a nervous circuit of the castle on horseback. Late that afternoon he had to stroll the corridors with old Prince Eggenberg; he was to sign the decree dismissing Wallenstein. For the first time Ferdinand felt hatred for the man now pestering and tormenting him. He ignored the old man's gaze of canine trustfulness, just wanted him to go. What about Wallenstein, fie, fie, they meant to grind him down with war.

When it was time to go to evening Mass, Ferdinand was already clinging to his mount, Wolkersdorf half an hour behind him.

He recalled how, a long time ago, Count Paar had tried to carry him forcibly away. Böckel's accomplices lay in a hollow; Ferdinand embraced the iron-hard fellows. Then as if released he screamed meaningless full-throated syllables into the air; the others laughed. He flung himself onto bare earth, arms and legs jerking, ground his teeth, wept, foamed, screamed. Pushing himself up in a daze he let his head droop to the ground. He was dizzy, he thought someone had punched him.

They tried to stop him as he began to unbridle his horse, feed it, spread hay and straw for it, tearfully kissed between the nostrils this creature that had borne him away.

That first night, which he spent in an empty barn between his horse and the ruffians, he dreamed he was again standing at his window at Wolkersdorf; something tapped on the glass, he climbed out, they took him by the hand, ran with him through the forest. But he ran faster, he laughed, left them behind, his dangling feet hardly touched the ground as he flew and swooped, and again he ran with them laughing, rolling, flying, balsamic air wafted over him. He looked up: no Thousand-foot, no disgusting belly hanging over him.

He tittered into the straw. The others heard, whispered his name to each other in the dark.

56. Unruly Regiments

JUBILATION in Dresden at Wallenstein's downfall. In the bourses of Hamburg Bremen Augsburg a dreadful unease and caution, anxious questions as to the attitude of the Prague Jews, who were heavily implicated. All they heard was that neither the primate Bassevi nor Count Michna had fled, as they did not consider Wallenstein's cause lost. Accounts of the Pilsen banquet circulated in every court; Friedland's emissary in Dresden boastfully recited the names of colonels and generals.

The Duke's new peace conditions arrived at the Saxon court: rejection of Spanish sovereignty and interference in German affairs, France to be hurled back across the Rhine, the Palatinate restored, Duke Bernhard of Weimar to be compensated with Alsace or a portion of Bavaria. The path to peace was delineated: alliance of the Duke with Saxony and Brandenburg; at the moment of alliance, peace conditions can be dictated to the Emperor and the Swede. Fat Johann Georg was obdurate, could not be moved to action. True, he wanted peace, and was aghast at the terrible devastation in his lands, but he would have nothing to do with the renegade General, that rascal, nullity, he would forever and always talk peace only with the elected Roman Emperor. Day after day his Field-marshal Arnim conducted a determined tenacious campaign to wear him and Kaspar von Schönberg down. The toppling of the Duke made Arnim's own position more difficult, for the Emperor might be powerless, but the potbellied Prince-elector held Friedland's own army, absent imperial backing, in low esteem. A sentiment stirred in Johann Georg that he should support the shamefully betrayed Emperor against such rascality. Despite the declarations he gave no credit to the reliability of Friedland's army; lacking the Emperor's legal and natural authority, order in the army would evaporate; no army can stand on a rotten base. Johann Georg and von Schönberg intended to use the situation to their advantage; the fox who had made Saxony so insecure would be paid back for his depredations. The situation was as before the battle of Breitenfeld: Sweden and Saxony would join forces, and this time give Friedland a good knock on the head.

Working on the Duke's behalf alongside Arnim in the service of Electoral Saxony was the young Duke of Lauenburg. He worshipped Friedland. In order to hamper Saxon action against the Generalissimus, he went off to Bernhard, first revealing his intentions to Arnim, who groaned and cursed with him in a locked room: We'll thwart the wicked Saxon plans; the Dresden lot think they have the Duke already in their snare. But Bernhard of Weimar, pouting over-proud young general, met him with brutal coldness: he did not believe the dismissal would be carried through; it was a trick by Friedland to lure them into his net. Laughing

scornfully in Lauenburg's face he said: "There'll surely be remarkable dramatics, if the Lord God intends to use this Friedland to save the German Empire." And then he asked, brows knitted: What do he and Arnim mean by pursuing such plans behind their master's back.

Sweating Prince Piccolomini was furious when he found that contacts were continuing between Pilsen and the two enemies. He urged the quill-pusher Aldringen in Passau to make haste; he agreed. Gallas, in the Pilsen camp unable to leave the Duke's side, was unreachable. Aldringen sought leave from the Bavarian Elector to take troops to execute the dismissal.

For a long while Maximilian could not be brought to a decision. He was there in Passau, but instead of joining the deliberations he spent hours in prayer. Here was the decisive move. He was uncertain, delayed the action. When pressed he became angry and hostile. Friedland had deeply humbled his overweening pride; and now a decision was coming that could bring the end of the House of Wittelsbach. The very thought of Wittelsbach's possible extinction, monstrous thought, and that Sweden, Bernhard of Weimar or Friedland might one day hold sway in Bavaria, paralysed his brain. Küttner was with him at the Town Hall. He set about the wavering helpless Elector with all the steel of Slavata's thinking. Over several hours he managed to drive out from Maximilian his fears regarding Wittelsbach, and lured him back to his old feud with the Duke. No wavering there: Wallenstein must fall.

And as Aldringen pulled out with his regiments, Maximilian still sat rigid in his armchair at the window of the Town Hall in Passau listening to the clatter of horses' hooves. Wittelsbach was in peril, who could he depend on? Friedland had a big army. And this man! Küttner heard his sudden groan; a hot flush of shame engulfed Maximilian; he stared wildly around at the man behind him. When Küttner, with a martyred air, had left the room, Maximilian dropped to his knees by the window; with a passion forced his thoughts out there to the regiments, prayed to the tutelary saints to protect the troops, promised gifts, foundations, whatever it might take. He remained on his knees as if expecting a reply. Opened the window. The street was empty, Aldringen gone.

The regiments, straggling over mountain passes, past the sources of Moldau. At Netolitz Piccolomini caught them up during dreadful snow flurries. No time for delay; the colonels were let in on the secret. Piccolomini produced a decree with the imperial seal: No officer or soldier henceforth owes a duty to the former commander in chief the Duke of Friedland; all are to take orders from Count Gallas, and in case Gallas is impeded, from Piccolomini and Aldringen. Since the Roman Emperor was indisposed, the document bore the signatures of the King of Hungary and Prince Eggenberg. The change has been occasioned by a very dangerous and wide-ranging conspiracy and plot by Friedland, by his treacherous disloyalty and barbarous tyranny aimed at depriving the Imperial House of land and people, crown and sceptre. The solution presented by the hot-blooded Italian was: violence. He would, he swore, apply a scorpion to the wound. The sly nervous quill-pusher Aldringen let him take over the regiments, slouched on behind with his staff.

The regiments under Piccolomini lost no time in hurling themselves at Prague. "I'll not wait," the Italian spat, "for the Duke to enter Prague." Total confusion in the town. Colonels of Friedland's forces had no idea what the provost-general had in mind when, as troops in battle formation placed artillery at the bridges and on the Hradschin, he summoned them to the

Town Hall of the old town and read out the dismissal edict –it was proclaimed at the same time with drumrolls in streets and squares – and required them to place themselves under his command as representative of General Gallas. The room was dark; only as he spoke did the assembled officers notice behind him a line of prisoners shackled along the wall, groaning: officers closely allied to Friedland, his feudatories. Two colonels wanted to discuss the situation; Piccolomini acceded, but given the present danger the discussion must lead within a few minutes to a conclusion advantageous to the Emperor. The rest were ready without further ado to obey the imperial decree. They scrambled outside, distraught. Their regiments stood mingled with squads of Aldringen's troops; they were advised that no harm was intended, but conflict must be forestalled, they must keep away from their men for a few days.

Marradas' troops marching up from the south; everywhere the watchwords: "We shan't abandon the Emperor. Kick out Swedes and Frenchies." Then: "Wallenstein a traitor, wants to take Bohemia from the Emperor, means to join with Sweden and France. We'll hold the pass."

All at once the mood among the Friedland troops quartered in Prague was transformed. After the initial astonishment the arrival of the new regiments worked like a release. Someone had meant to put them to bad use. The newcomers mingled, brought incredible news of the treachery plotted against the Bohemians. Wallenstein – Old Nick himself – and his whole diabolical haughty tribe, that wastrel out to fatten himself, trying to steal Bohemia away while they moulder in lousy quarters. They were true soldiers of the Roman Emperor, eager to head into the Empire and claim their booty. Gallas would lead them to the riches of the Rhine; the French, ah the French – on into lovely Alsace.

Piccolomini moved into the opulent Wallenstein palace on the Hradschin. Only now did the town grow fearful. The streets emptied. Everyone hid, hauled away and buried valuables. In every quarter the arcades were closed, barricaded, a large part of the most valuable items near the Moldau were buried by night in chests. The Jews armed themselves. The newly arrived officers noticed nothing. Nobility met behind closed doors in every part of the town and on nearby estates. Everyone was certain: they must stand by Wallenstein. Young peasant lads and sons of burghers who had declared themselves ready to move at a signal were given the alarm; money and weapons were distributed, passwords issued. An enormous price was put on the head of Count William Slavata; an instinctive general fury identified the pretty count as mainly culpable for this dreadful turn of events; he had been away for weeks, had now achieved his goal. Ancient Countess Trčka was said to have come to Prague as soon as she learned of Piccolomini's surprise attack, bringing dozens of gold chains for anyone who would murder the Italian. Everywhere weapons suddenly appeared, smuggled in from abroad.

During these silent days an unlikely bevy of Jews departed from Prague with several wagons. Local nobles cleared their way with passes and salvaguardia, provided they swore to remain true to the cause of Friedland and Bohemia. There they stood, mournful creatures with the yellow mark on their coat in the halls of gentlemen; their heart had been with Wallenstein as long as he had lived. By the third commandment they swore – doffing the little black cap, right hand clutching the Bible so that the knuckles stood out: Let them be cursed for all eternity by their god Adonai, be consumed by the fires that fell on Sodom and Gomorrah, if they should ever engage in disloyalty and falsehood; let the true God who created leaves and

grass and every thing never come to their aid. They headed north at first, as if aiming for the market at Brandeis; then turned southwest. A few Jewish youngsters took horse near Brandeis, sped off to Pilsen.

Couriers from Prague bringing joyful news of the taking of the town found Vienna deathly quiet. Emperor vanished, his servants thrown in irons. No clue to his whereabouts. The Empress knew nothing. She searched for him in heavy gloomy agitation, to no avail. They tried to calm her by explaining that the Emperor feared to remain in Vienna at the moment, he had been advised to slip away unobserved to Marradas' troops. For the high counsellors, the lady from Mantua, turning up here and there passionately irritable, brusque even with the priests, was during those dread-filled days the most dreadful of sights. Lamormaini could not leave her side. She maltreated him, dragged from him what he knew of Ferdinand. The Father tried in vain to bring her to prayer, confession and calm. No end to the whispering screaming weeping sighing from her apartments.

Eggenberg no longer left the house. He dreaded an encounter with the Empress; cowered at home with a dull sense of defeat. No visitors were admitted. It was all collapsing on his head.

The joyful news from Prague was spread only by the Fathers of the Company of Jesus as they flitted about; the court around them pricked up its ears. The enormous spoils would fall to the Emperor, and what to this one, what to that one. Connoisseurs of the ducal estate, the palace at Prague, at Jičin, were sought; and suddenly they went wheezing heatedly about, eyed one another, divided the loot. Who would decide, who should receive what? The Emperor was not here, the King of Hungary lacked experience, Eggenberg had withdrawn from society. Only Count Schlick still had a firm grip. Huge quantities of property were up for grabs, no one wanted to see himself cheated. Claims were lodged. Profits asserted, contested. The Fathers stoked the fires, any source of water for their mill would do. Former loud advocates for the Duke, officers he had brought high, now went disguised about the court muttering invective against Piccolomini and Aldringen; they would soon be brought to heel.

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Pilsen decided to march on Prague. At all events Schaffgotsch was supposed to bring support from Silesia. Wallenstein's orders were carried instantly in every direction to colonels and generals, calling for a general rendezvous of troops outside Prague. He himself would move out at once.

But next morning, when after the conference the Duke wanted to be carried in his chair to the camp, the town was unusually quiet, streets bare of sentries and patrols, gates unguarded.

Tall Ilow, trotting up to the exit from the town on a steaming horse, jangling as he dismounted to approach the sedan chair, was able to report only that Colonel Diodati had in all secrecy gathered all those quartered in the town and set off for Prague. Disappearing along with Diodati went the potbellied Spanish agent Navarro, who had spent some weeks carousing in Pilsen.

On that day's the evening, which brought the order for the immediate breakup of the entire camp, at Saxon-lane there was announced to Friedland – he had shrugged his shoulders at Diodati's departure, had never liked the weakling – a deputation of Jews who had already

been some days in the town and would not be turned away. Since the Jews had begged to speak with Wallenstein alone, only Neumann stayed back in the candlelit room. They threw themselves onto their knees, all mucky from the street, booted and spurred like nobles, six strong men; two elders wept. They were unable to bring their primate, Bassevi; Bassevi was travelling, doing the Duke's business in Augsburg, did not wish to waste an hour at this time. And then an elder drew from his grey cap, which lay before him on the carpet, a long extravagantly crumpled strip of paper, and at a nod from sombre Friedland read out, as their elongated shadows danced on the floor, the dismissal decree that was drummed through the streets of Prague as they rode away. They beat their breasts: wicked Piccolomini had moved into the wonderful Friedland mansion. He had fallen on everyone with cunning and violence; they must tell the Duke all they had witnessed, he must return, swiftly swiftly. Wallenstein listened, kept silent. He was stricken, trembled in his chair, hissed, "Rabble, rabble."

Neumann had to note the information the Jews supplied. What else did the Jews want, growled the Duke. They sank again to their knees: He had been such a friend to them, the Bohemian people awaited him, they supported him, he must take pity on them. Friedland seemed not to hear, his face turned pale and twisted in growing fury, his eyes glazed, distant. At a gesture from Neumann the Jews tiptoed from the room. They would not be able to speak with him next day; Neumann advised them to keep out of the Duke's sight. News of the occupation of his Prague residence by the rascally Italian had struck Wallenstein with deadly force. He recoiled from the Jews as from stinging nettles when he encountered them near the gate to the camp; they stood in a group, pleading. He had no idea what other complaints they were bringing him; such ardent pain.

That evening Trčka kissed the Duke's hands, swore to avenge Piccolomini's perfidy, even if it cost him his life. The Duke wheezed: Never had he treated anyone with greater courtesy than that man; he thought of his wife and sister in law, both now at Jičin. Ilow should immediately despatch a few companies of Croatian cavalry to Jičin, if danger threatened the women should follow them. After they had sat silent together a long while – army wagons and gun carriages already rattling past outside, horses whinnying, banging their heads on shutters – Wallenstein gently outlined to despondent Trčka the letter he had sent Ferdinand. Colonels Mohr vom Wald and Breuner had delivered it; he planned to withdraw out of the ancestral lands to the periphery of the Empire, Hamburg or Danzig; all that was left to him was to die; he wanted to retain his duchies.

"Are you in earnest?" whispered Trčka, not raising his head.

"I am old,Trčka. It's true, I haven't long to live. I shall make my letter public as soon as I catch my breath. It tears the mask from their faces. You'll see: they really don't care, I'll be in their way even in Hamburg. The Jesuits have a bad conscience because they didn't want peace to arise in Germany. So they must depose me. The Emperor wants my money, I'm his creditor."

"Piccolomini's glory in Prague will not last long."

"I know those Viennese. They don't shy from the most grotesque injustices when it suits them. They made quick work of the Palatine. As long as I'm on my feet I'll be a danger to them. From Hungary until now, Trčka, I've had to cringe among them. Now it's out in the open." Trčka shook his fists, unconsciously ground his teeth. "The whole army stands behind you."

“Even if only a half or a quarter, as long as I’m on my feet. They’ll not enjoy a happy hour while I’m still around. Trčka, all’s fair in war. I don’t swear by the army. Diodati’s not alone. To say nothing of human nature. They won’t find it easy to hang on. You find a few Croatians, they slip into Prague, a thousand guilders per man, ten thousand for whoever poisons or stabs Piccolomini. I trust von Ilow, he’s now riding to Jičin to bring the women away to safety.”

So it was unnecessary for distraught commanders on their own initiative to call for outside help. Now Wallenstein took full charge, circumspect and with great incisiveness. Every horse in Pilsen was hitched up. The war chest was taken: ten thousand thalers, six thousand ducats, seventeen gold chains. Ten thousand thalers were taken from leading persons of the area. Before they set off, a further contribution of thirty thousand guilders was levied on Pilsen. Sweden, Saxony, the French had all mobilised; on no side did unflappable Wallenstein leave himself exposed. Count Trčka wrote in despair to the young Duke of Sachsen-Lauenburg, still hanging around the Duke of Weimar: “Hurry hurry hurry!” The Duke himself challenged Arnim to seize the hour for a decisive blow; this, he threatened, was a crisis for Electoral Saxony; he himself was off to retake Prague. The Emperor would be driven out of Austria.

The entire army headed north. The rank and file of every branch of weaponry, their junior officers too, were restless, unsure. A general rendezvous of forces outside Prague was ordered, but Croats with light artillery sped ahead of the army, the baggage train was placed on a war footing. They rolled unopposed over frozen roads. Suddenly orders came from headquarters, just now setting out behind them: rumours were spreading of mutinies in Prague, all were exhorted to strictest discipline, absolute obedience, the provost-general is patrolling the marching army, remember there are courts martial. Soon after that: The march must speed up, if Prague resists, it will be opened for six hours of pillage.

They rolled through silent villages; parsons they asked advised almost in a whisper: Prague had ordered every pulpit to proclaim the dismissal of Friedland, formerly commander in chief; an imperial decree circulating says he’s a traitor, that’s why the command was taken from him. Forward scouts of Aldringen were already being captured here and there; these knew they were to drive disloyal Wallenstein from Prague; Friedland forces had already abandoned him. Ten miles southwest of Prague, Trčka’s cavalry and light artillery were halted by a strong contingent of Aldringen’s dragoons. The dragoons attacked, Trčka’s cavalry were repelled. They fled, carrying mayhem into the marching horde. The entire army surged and swayed as if facing a forest of pikes. Small heavily armed cuirassier patrols turned up alongside every regiment, with provosts and hangmen. Orders came to halt the march, form a battle front.

Bright spring weather. Trickling water, thawing snow on the highway. Bustling about on every side curious women, nervous peasants: Imperial troops from Prague will be along in a few hours. Reports of the losses among Trčka’s cavalry. Shock and exasperation flooding like an avalanche over the dammed-up regiments. Whispers under the eyes of police patrols: “We’re in winter quarters. Imperials! We’re imperials. What do they want with us. Who’s duping us.” Troops in the fields, between villages that had nothing to steal: “Onward! On! To Prague. We shan’t wait.” Turmoil up and down the regiments; all wanted to advance, to Prague, no battle, they would not make war on imperials.

It began with de la Mouilly's regiment: the crews of two shrapnel guns swore out loud that they would pray next day at the grave of blessed Sigismund in the castle moat. They were strung up. Corporals, company quartermasters and a few culverin shots assailed the provost and his people, they were beaten to the ground; an approaching cuirassier patrol fired pistols into the melee. The whole company fell on them, tore them to bits. Yelling and uproar spread to nearby regiments, everywhere patrols were attacked, disarmed or killed; constables, marshals, stewards were tied up. "To Prague!" was the cry in the regiments of Altmannshausen, Rodell, Balbiano, Haimerl, Notario. The defeated cavalry squad was riding ahead already with white ribbons on their lances. Colonels and officers followed helplessly, shoved on by the horde. Unruly units raced past, broke away to the flanks. Heavy artillery was left lying in fields.

Tumult, triumphant cries ahead: cavalry from Marradas, Aldringen, almost unarmed, galloping among the disorganised mob! They had orders for the commanding colonels, a decree from the new generalissimus, Gallas. He threatened under authority of the imperial powers assigned to him and in order to avert imperial disfavour: no officer is to accept orders from Friedland, Ilow or Trčka, but heed only orders issued by him or Aldringen or Piccolomini.

In the fields among groves of poplar and swollen streams there took place a brief confused engagement: five companies of Trčka's cuirassiers, select German troops, forced their way through to the south, scattered mud and water in their wake.

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From Bohemian swamps in the south, from the salty fields of Hungary, seven devils had broken out; tall as houses, arms long as trees hung from their shoulders. They ran crouched through woodland in the spring weather. The pelt was like a wolf's, their hooves dug knee-deep by night into the damp soil. The sound of their pattering feet, trumpeting of their noses struck many people dead. At the enormous horizon-covering sight of them many people were overcome by a desire to run with them, chase after them. Jumped up, clung to thick tufts of fur, crawled high in the steam that rose from them, grunted and blew like them, often they were squashed against rocks, or drowned at river crossings.

A mysterious panic overtook the regiments in Bohemia and Moravia. No one knew where the terror came from. Always one devil ran behind the others, often they ran in random circles. Word was they intended to head through the Empire to the Russian Sea. Among the Saxons, the banners on their immobile poles began to sway. Swedish regiments began noisily to stir.

In the woods behind Swedish lines, in the Oberpfalz, in scorched Saxony masses of people drifted; they emerged from holes in the earth, from stables ruins graves where they had hidden away. Snarled filled with hate: "There's nothing but Catholic and Lutheran, Imperials, Sweden, Bavaria, nothing else in the world. Strike us dead." – "No matter to us if we live. A little boy, a meadow, water. We have no right to live. Must turn to dung and earth."

They drifted pillaging through villages. "A rogue, anyone who talks of Emperor and Christ. They've thrown it all away." Uproar. "I abjure the Emperor." – "I swear it on a gold coin, or strike me dead." They tore down wherever they found them coats of arms, imperial colours, scapulars, rosaries, consecrated chains and crosses. "Sump water's better, a charmed chit." – "That's my kid's little tooth." – "Not a little tooth, maiden, you've had it consecrated." She

wept: “I can’t hand it over, don’t take it from me.” – “You’ll betray us.” – “No, it’s not Jesus’ fault. But leave my dear lord alone.” They hit out at her. “I’m not a traitor. I pray for you, God will help you. Believe me, dear friends. Oh, I wish I was dead.”

57. No Longer Wallenstein

PALE, BENT, BROKEN alongside the sturdy driver of a baggage-wagon laden with hay sat a burgher from Pilsen, a rather fat man under a broad black leather hat; the driver had agreed to take him to Prague. The reins tautened slackened as Aldringen’s cavalry galloped through the column; the Pilsener shoved a full purse into the driver’s hands, unhitched one of the horses, leapt back and away. Slavata, dizzily awhirl, had only one thought: where is the Duke, we’re losing him, he’s vanished. He had tracked him down to Pilsen, now where is he.

Half a day through chaos and skirmishes. Catch him, he mustn’t get away. And then joy: Trčka’s cuirassiers, whole companies heading west, north towards Pilsen past woodland, in the direction of Mies. Slavata rode along the column: musketeers slow-marching two by two along the highway, mounted dragoons in the middle, closed litter behind, drawn by two horses. The shabbily dressed man rode in a daze over fields some distance behind, never let the closed litter out of his view, the sight of it gladdened him in the gusting wind. “I’ve prepared a nice grave for you,” he whispered, sent across caressing looks. “A shame to let you die somewhere abed, and no one has any good from it. I’m happy for you.” The horse shied: “Strange, he senses me. Come, quiet now. You shall pull him when he’s ours. When he lies there so nicely, full length and unmoving.” The horse gave a great whinny, trotted quietly on.

He was overtaken, plodding in pursuit alone through the mud, by the joy that spread from behind across the fields, grew over his back. How suddenly all had changed, as if Providence played into his hands. The army scattered, no bridge to Piccolomini, there they sit in Prague, cannot reach him, they pen edicts, bills of proscription, bans, declarations of outlawry: they can’t lay a finger on Friedland! I, I, I have him, I riding here, alone, in the name of eternal Destiny. Over there, lovely, how lovely, they’re carrying him in a litter. Two fine horses, may they keep a good watch over him; the cuirassiers, may they guard him well. He belongs to me. He was a Bohemian, my cousin. It gives him no claim over me.

He feasted on these thoughts in the swiftly gathering dusk. A magical certainty led him on.

The Duke turned off into Mies. And as Slavata gazed enraptured after him from the bare field and unthinking doffed his leather hat, companies of troops came marching up from the south, clanking heavily-armed dragoons. Slavata, shocked, mingled with them, they turned towards the little town guided by a patrol of Trčka’s men. Deep into the night the Bohemian lurked behind the house where the colonel of the newcomers was billeted. On his way back from seeing the Duke, Slavata accosted him almost violently; contended with him for two difficult hours. This colonel, who had been heading as ordered for the rendezvous near Prague, was unsettled now by the Duke’s offer of two hundred thousand thalers if he would stay until reinforcements arrived; supposedly only a small number of troops had mutinied. The colonel, a signatory to the Pilsen missive, was no adherent of the Duke; he wanted to see the bill of proscription Privy Counsellor Slavata spoke of in the dark room. Slavata managed to arouse

the cagey man, cause him to clench his fists by alluding to Friedland's evil mood, which was clearly diverting him away from his Catholic piety and towards Saxony and Sweden. He was unable to wring from the very stolid Irishman a decision on whether to take the Duke prisoner. He merely grunted, dour and laconic, that he would stay by the Duke since Fate had so ordained it, and would seek to hinder wicked plans. As he left Slavata whispered, pleading with the colonel, kissing his hand almost with a passion: We are on our own; the cause of the holy Church and the House of Habsburg rests on us two.

Marching out of Mies in chill foggy air towards Eger. The colonel kept his dragoons tightly together; five Old Saxon mounted companies that had joined him were gone; two hundred infantry remained. Moorland meadows swaying, pools of water, wretched crippled trees. There's Green Mountain, topped by St Anne's Chapel. The citadel of Eger. That afternoon the Upper-gate and Lower-gate closed behind them.

The solitary pretty Bohemian strolled out that evening to the chapel, looked down on the peaceful town, laughed shuddering as he trekked back in the dark: he was a slave to his passions; he gurgled, could not break free, wanted them to bind him hand and foot. The magical hour he had so long awaited would soon be here.

The dragoons camped in the fields, the colonel with his ensigns in town. They made no attempt to hinder the Duke's couriers as they sped in and out. The Duke of Friedland lodged in the mayor's official residence by the market. A timbered gallery ran around the courtyard, Trčka Kinsky Ilow lodged to the rear.

Broken, useless, pale vain Count Kinsky; he trembled, how to flee, slunk through the town, about the house, made friendly approaches to this or that one. Stubborn and bad-tempered the tall panther von Ilow; he fought a running battle with Trčka in the house, and out riding: Trčka should have repelled Aldringen's forces, should have held out; how, he couldn't say. Trčka did not argue back; they were both in a state of bitter disquiet. The mutiny had swept them up in a sudden swooning flood, they had stormed away confused and disheartened from the howling thundering din, no thought of linking up with the Duke –

– who had first become aware of the turmoil and general panic when bloodied groups of fleeing military police rode past. He stepped from the litter, the stirrups of the lead horse were swathed in silk; in his familiar red cloak he drew troops around him. Quickly he had a low wall built across the road behind, to conceal a handful of light artillery pieces. But they had no need to dig into the sticky oozing earth, no one thought they would be pursued, all were heading for Prague. Not until later, after four hours riding, did he lie back in the litter, a death mask floating before his eyes. In Eger, in the house of former mayor Pachelbel,* they trod gingerly around him, his trusted entourage, in shame and torment. No outbursts of rage, but they saw how brutally he held himself in, made no reproach, how he was gripped by a most terrible judgemental mood, consumed by vengeance against those who had done this to him.

They took the measure of one another. They'd wait it out, could not abandon the Duke. Young Albert of Sachsen-Lauenburg, Saxon marshal under Arnim, rode into Eger, already at the gate scolded Ilow and Trčka, whose negligence had brought this terrible calamity from which there was no escape. Before the Duke of Friedland he almost went down on his knees.

Wallenstein, wrapped in a black fur coat, sitting in a chair arms folded, little eyes rimmed blue-black, jutting cheekbones, withered throat bare, slack lips twitching, rasped: Tell Bernhard of Weimar in Regensburg that I am defending myself here in Eger with the troops remaining to me; he is to gather again the regiments scattered by panic. Let Bernhard advance to the Bohemian frontier with cavalry, as many as he can spare, and he must send infantry along behind to cover the artillery. “Tell Duke Bernhard,” Wallenstein raised his fists, his gaze hard and sly, “that he will be cutting his own flesh if he delays. I shall make a stand here; they won’t bring me to surrender; he’ll believe me when I say I shall defeat Gallas and Piccolomini. In two or three weeks the army of the Emperor will have a different aspect, mine also.”

In a fever, accompanied by just one page boy, Lauenburg raced away to Regensburg, as he left argued again with Trčka, tore the coat from his back.

From Eger a decree went out from Friedland to all his regiments, carried by a number of Bohemian fanatics. The Duke demanded, by virtue of his generalcy and in full accord with the respect for that position imposed on the colonels by his Imperial Majesty, that the colonels at once make their way to Eger, their forces to encamp at Laun, halfway between Eger and Prague. This demand being founded on the turn of events; it was in His Imperial Majesty’s service and would enable the enemy to be confronted as he deserved, his attempted coup thwarted. For just as Jews had found their way to him in Pilsen, so along the road from Mies to Eger he had been met by throng after throng of armed Bohemian nobility, roused from Prague and the Eger hinterland to link up with the Duke. He had no need of a mounted escort for the journey, for Bohemians kept watch on every path and woodland ahead, behind and to the sides. They remained outside the town, which the troops had secured as soon as they entered. At Sesima Raschin’s request, Wallenstein let a dozen of them in.

They offered themselves as his personal bodyguard. He was distant, ill-disposed, considered that the gentlemen would have been better occupied fomenting an uprising in Prague. Then he fell silent, seemed disinclined to hear them out. They overheard a venomous hissed conversation with Trčka, who tried to calm him: These gentry mean to misuse me for their own purposes, probably looking for a king of Bohemia, I want no truck with such a childish pack. After a long interval he confronted them again, his look dangerous: They must not think he will make any significant concession, but he has tasks for them all. Smil von Hodějovský, now a bearded soft-spoken man, untameable little Berka, anger-ravaged Daniel Lukšan crowded about him, one after the other kissed the reluctantly proffered hand. Even as they left the trio said not a word.

Smil drew the others into a barn beside the house. They gazed at one another, hugged. At the sight of Daniel’s brows lifted in pain, Smil suppressed the sob that rose in his overflowing breast; they let Daniel cry, consoled him. They would bring Wallenstein round, even now, especially now. He had received them. He too had found out the truth of Habsburg. They would never abandon him. A select few Bohemians were admitted to the town to help defend it, the rest were to speed across the countryside to foment rebellion, watch for and hamper any forces heading for Eger. Ilow and Trčka were ordered to organise the defence of Eger. Chancellor Elz was despatched to solicit support from nearby Protestant gentry and noblemen, also from the Margrave of Brandenburg-Kulmbach, just over the frontier.

That desiccated little old man came in person with a small retinue to find out what lay behind it all. Wallenstein pressed the cunning dogged fellow to join him at once with his hundred local militia, and alert anyone who seemed reliable. “I have come,” the Duke said in the pale dawn light, “here to Eger to pursue the fight against the Emperor out in the open. You, sir, know how matters stand in the Empire. You, sir, are a Prince of the Empire and a Protestant. We all of us owe allegiance to the Emperor, but not to this. I’ve forced them these last few weeks to remove the mask. They mean to suppress religious freedom, beyond all measure. The Emperor is their instrument. I have received intelligence that no one knows where the Emperor is. I do know that they have shoved that worthy noble gentleman aside to pursue their goal.” Then: “Sir, the princes of the Empire must wake up. It is high time. You will reproach me that I have little reason to reproach you thus, that I myself have done harm to the princes of the Empire as commander of an imperial army. But I believed I was serving an Emperor. I proceeded with the violence of a soldier, believing that I must serve my Emperor. And when they relieved me of my position, I departed unresisting. Now I am no longer mad enough to serve the Emperor. I must show my teeth to the selfish clique, the rotten false Catholics, for such are the Jesuits who deny you Protestants the truth and regard you not even as human, still less as princes and noblemen.” At this the little man snarled: He knew those scurrilous clerics, preaching cruelties and intransigence, may they all be struck dead.

“Yes, dead, Margrave. Let’s see who strikes whom dead. They’ve hounded me here like a bandit. If only the regiments had followed me, that false wicked clique could have been overcome, and peace brought to the Empire.”

Later, “You’re all powerless,” croaked the Duke, aroused by the dried-up margrave’s mention of a great new Protestant Union. “Stop dabbling in novelties. You lot are stuck in your quarrels. We saw the Union in action at Bärwalde, at Heilbronn. Send me soldiers, so I can oppose the onslaught of Imperials. Field-marshal Arnim has my confidence; Bernhard will grasp the situation. No more meddling on your own account, my dear sir. The fate of the Empire will be decided in eight days.”

The little man insisted: “They’ll never be rid of me.” The Duke, shouting: “Trust me, sir, I’ve had the reins in my hands for long enough; you know my name is not without distinction. And so I shall not be called Friedland and von Wallenstein when after this war nothing is left of you princes of the Empire but a heap of titled men prey to any passing looter. The Holy Empire will blow you away –”

“What are you saying?”

“Give me troops. Now, this minute. You know those Judases who bring the Empire to ruin.”

The old margrave scuttled off, irritatably scolded his companions: “I’ll not join his rebellion. He doesn’t like handing over to Gallas, and so tries to wheedle me. He’ll eat out of the hand of the imperial princes, the whippersnapper, wicked man of violence. Big name: hah.”

Two days later the Duke, riding out in person, had the companies so well under control that during a snowstorm the digging of trenches outside the town and the formation of a tolerable militia group from the town and nearby villages proceeded apace. He addressed officers in coarse terms about the absconded regiments, in particular the treachery of Count

Gallas and his usurped command: if necessary he would march on Vienna and teach them manners. Tall Ilow and Trčka toiled once more in a passionate frenzy. Only now did Wallenstein, ignoring his dreadful martyring ailments, terrorise those around him with the old outbreaks of mad rage. He braced himself against this jailhouse of a town: the Emperor must be thrown over, the Empire torn to pieces. He would avenge himself for it all, everything from Hungary to Regensburg and Pilsen.

He wore no shoes, his feet were wrapped in thick white bandages, his horse had to be led. In a cape-collar, the wide red cape draped over it, the haggard man sat under a plumed hat grown too big for him, on the jolting back of his mount. He was strapped on, so weak he often fell face down on the mane and had to be hoisted upright.

Back in the house he pressed his perspiring face to the window pane, growled: "They've succeeded. I wanted to make peace. There he is, over there. Here I am." Softly to Trčka: "I tell you, the Roman Empire is beyond saving. I couldn't do it. No one else will either. As God is my witness, I did try." His lips swelled and quivered.

Now Slavata, in concert with the colonel he had netted and seeing men arriving daily from the country around, thought the time for waiting was over. At any moment he might be discovered by one of the numerous Bohemian volunteers – five whole companies already outside the gates. The mercenary Colonel Butler was already fed up with waiting. When the extent of the Duke's influence over his own regiment became obvious, and Trčka kept crowing about Bernhard coming up from the south, Arnim from the north, Friedland's former army still in utter disorder, they'd have an easy contest – Butler agreed with Slavata to carry out the execution that very night, to speed the Duke and his entourage from life into a richly deserved death. The commandant of Eger had to be brought in on it, because they meant to admit a few dozen trusted dragoons from their camp into the town before nightfall. They were unable to win over the outraged man, one of Trčka's senior lieutenants; the most he would do was hand his command to Butler for that one night. They came to no agreement, but the commandant had to make his residence in the citadel available for a banquet, and he must preside at it.

This was delicate Count Slavata's final move in the affair. They let him go just before the climax. He felt drained, went uneasily through the lanes, hollowed out by irresolution and mistrust. He stopped beside a moribund nag by the knackers' cart, a bad taste in his mouth. He walked on, shivering; must head out of town. He passed by the Pachelbel house; should he speak to Kinsky; about what? He took no part in preparations for the banquet.

After the heavy exertions of the day, Friedland's trusted confederates welcomed a banquet in this gloomy town that gave them the shivers. They thawed out – mighty Ilow, blond Count Trčka, Kinsky with the unhappy face, slim but deceptively strong Neumann the Master of Horse – amid the merrily chattering company. They drank and drank, the wonderful banquet spread before their eyes. Already tipsy, they slipped out to a side room to look over despatches just received, took plates of food with them. A signal sent Irish and Italian captains and provosts after them, at their head a certain Devereux, subject of an arrest warrant by the Duke for extortion and common rape; they burst into the side room with pikes, drawn daggers, pistols, egged each other on with roars of "Long live Ferdinand! – Who's a good Catholic? – Viva la casa d'Austria!"

Only one candle burned in the room, the four men were reading by its light. The commandant took the candle up from the table. As Kinsky, pierced through between throat and collar, sank howling to his knees and lay stretched out, the candle fell from the trembling commandant's hand. In a corner Ilow and Trčka, fighting barehanded unable to reach their swords in the melee, were struck down in the gloom by pikethrusts, numerous dagger-blows; so mangled they could hardly be lifted by arm and leg to be thrown through the window into the courtyard. Neumann slipped out of the room in the dark; in the corridor to the banqueting hall he ran into the points of partizans held ready by sentries.

Devereux, studded cloak clanking, with a few dragoons went leaping roaring whooping through the moonbright lane from the citadel into the town, the marketplace. He struck drunken sparks from the cobbles with his sword outside Wallenstein's house, cursed the Duke out loud, laughed until the deeply shocked Butler pulled him back. The guards on the torchlit stair to Friedland's room tried to bar the way; the unruly visitors hurled them over the banisters, bawled out, pushed on blindly from step to step.

Someone behind screamed, crashed down the stairs, the landing shook. They looked around. A slim furious man rushed up brandishing a dagger, hissing. Startled, they shrank back. Devereux, who was leaning forward arms akimbo staring down the gloomy passageway, was struck in the face with fist and dagger-hilt. As he turned his head aside moaning, the man raced ahead down the passage to the Duke's room.

A servant stood there with a candle; the Duke had sent him out with a golden platter to fetch a curative in beer. Outside the door the corpse-pale man with the dagger– his dirty cap fell off behind, long blond locks strayed wildly over his eyes – shouted for the colonel. He screamed in despair: "Away! Away here! Where's Butler!" His words tumbled over themselves, he swung his dagger defensively left and right in face of the advancing mob.

Howling, babbling through chattering teeth, Slavata knelt in the narrow passageway, stretched pleading arms towards them. Their doublets hung open, bootlegs flopped loose, hose were sullied with wine and spilled sauces and fish. Their blood-smeared faces craned forward. His mouth opened wide, ejected sudden vomit. He groaned: "Fetch the colonel. Go away." As they stepped over the puddle, he clambered to his feet. He whimpered, raged loathing and horror. Behind him the door opened. He stumbled backwards into the room, head smashed by a tremendous blow from a partizan blade.

The Duke in a white nightshirt, stood arms spread by Slavata's twitching body; the partizan ripped open half his chest.

In the desolate chamber "Die, villain, die!" rang out from the furious invaders long after he had bled to death. Butler strode among them with whip and pistols and drove them out.

Menials were summoned from the citadel to occupy Wallenstein's chancellery. They dealt with a few courtiers in their beds. The astrologer Senno was led from a side room, he was almost ready to determine the moment for a new action. They took four thousand crowns from his purse, advance payment from Friedland for the casting.

As the night advanced they burst open the doors to a burgher's coachhouse. The coach was hauled into the lane. Soldiers harnessed a team. Dead Friedland was rolled up in a blood-

red carpet from his room. Three men dragged him bumping down the stairs, out through the front door. Took him rattling over cobbles through moonlight, the thin covering of snow, ice on the puddles. He lay sprawled across the floor, the carpet dangled on both sides of the coach.

They could do with him as they liked. It was no longer Wallenstein

A stream of blood had gurgled from the gaping chest wound. It steamed. Took him along.

Swallowed once more by the powers of darkness. Was already set back on his feet, cleaned up, dried, warmed. They held him, and murmured, his blind eyes twitching, close to them.

58. Maximilian the Suitor

TOWARDS MORNING a hunt for Bohemians in the town was launched. The companies at the defence line outside the town fought a veritable battle; finally they fled and scattered. Then the victors huddled in the town, afraid that the Swedes or Arnim would soon arrive. But they had the pleasure of capturing the Duke of Lauenburg, returning gleefully from Regensburg to report to Wallenstein the imminent departure of Bernhard's forces. Lauenburg's page escaped to Regensburg. They almost captured Arnim, marching slowly and full of doubt past Zwickau; rumours of the murder reached him. Paralysed with disgust and horror, he stayed put. Fleeing Bohemians carried the news far into the countryside. Rumour travelled just as fast as news: Frenchies, Italians and Irishmen had committed the murder out of their ancient dislike of Germans. In the still seething camps of Piccolomini's regiments at Prague it came to revolts, Germans attacking Gauls. It started with fatal duels among officers, squadrons of troops glared at each other from the sidelines. Aldringen's regiments marched with Bavarians against the rebels, beat them down without mercy.

Frenzied victory scenes in Vienna. Among the Capuchins and in St Stephan's cathedral a service of thanksgiving: the House of Habsburg saved, the Holy Church preserved. Deeply shaken Pope Urban in Rome sent congratulations on the despatch of the dreadful monster. "What power lurks in these Germans," he marvelled, horrified.

Count Schlick, gloomy bullheaded mass of flesh, now with the King of Hungary all-powerful at court, sorted out Wallenstein's legacy together with Baron Breuner and Abbot Anton. Each of the twelve dragoons who had burst in on Wallenstein was awarded a hundred imperial thalers. The officers who led and took part, a thousand and two thousand. Devereux, complaining of his wounds, an extra forty thousand guilders together with some confiscated estates. In all, Wallenstein had squirreled away property worth some fifty million. Friedland and Reichenberg were awarded to Gallas, Aldringen received Teplitz, Piccolomini Nachod; they also bestowed on him the title of a Count of Aragon. His coat of arms included a turtle with the inscription 'Step by Step'.

Silence reigned in Prince Eggenberg's room. The hunchbacked count sat often with him; both were limp and weary. Eggenberg whispered from his bed: "What do you blame me for, Trautmannsdorf?" The count: "I don't blame you, it's just that it's through him that I rose high." Then, shuddering: "It was not my doing. He had to be deposed, if necessary by violence. We gave no one authority for such bestiality."

“Were he alive to hear you, my friend, he’d shake his head. Violence cannot be contained.”

“It was not my doing. I deny it, it was not my doing. When the partizan ripped open his chest, it was not my doing. I’ll never concede it as long as I live. Eggenberg, you are old and honest, you won’t lay this at my door.”

The old man, with a weary smile: “Yet he is dead.” The little count’s face contorted, he ground his teeth. “What are you saying. He still lives before my eyes. It was you who let the disaster in Regensburg unfold, the Emperor listened to you. I haven’t forgotten.”

“I know, I know, you’re right. Let it go. I defer. What am I now to that lot.”

They fell silent, the room stayed silent a long while, then the big heavy Luxemburger limped in. Then all three stayed silent.

The secret of the murder was discovered: the corpse of Count Slavata, of which Colonel Butler had made no mention, was recognised. The curious intrafamilial hatred had played a leading role in the disaster; all felt relief. Lamormaini told what his friend Abbot Anton, who amid the gloom avoided him to conceal his satisfaction, had said: now they can emerge from the debt economy. “It’s a stroke of luck, the Duke was a tool of Heaven sent to drag the House of Habsburg out of its misery. Look on the bright side. The House of Habsburg, defender of the Holy Church, deserves the self-sacrifice of its own famous field-marshal to the cause of its prosperity.” Trautmannsdorf waved this aside. “Leave it, Father. You still go often, too often, to your brethren in the Society.” Then very softly: “What news of the Emperor?” Eggenberg raised himself on an elbow, gazed wide-eyed at the priest.

“Nothing.”

“And – you have nothing to clutch at, no clue?”

“I think it will be a long while before we hear of our good pious master.”

“Why do you think so?”

“He’ll have taken himself off to some monastery, some out of the way hermitage. He was well on the way. For a long time already. I often thought it would happen.”

Eggenberg turned away, pulled the blanket over his face sobbing quietly. After a while he emerged, looked sadly about the room for something; abruptly to Trautmannsdorf: “And – why do you not mourn, Trautmannsdorf? Here, now?”

“For the Emperor?”

“He has no part in this. I don’t even blame your Friedland overmuch. Maybe he has brought us peace. Maybe he did want what is right. But – what was our Emperor compared to him. A goodly man. A pious Christian. Our prince.”

Trautmannsdorf bowed his head. “So he was. I hope we may yet find him, Eggenberg.”

“I do not. No, let it be. Let him be, too. You must look for him, Father. And then, what do you want from him. What burdens must they have heaped on him. For me, even as I lie here dying, it is a consolation to think of my gracious master in a monastery.”

On one of these days the Empress Eleonore, the lady from Mantua, threw herself from a window of her bedchamber at the Hofburg to lie shattered on the courtyard cobbles.* After

she had learned by chance of Ferdinand's absconding, her unhinged behaviour caused her to be confined and closely watched. Her dear Countess Kollonitsch had allowed herself to be diverted for an hour as they both looked out of the window down over the courtyard. They chatted as before; the crafty lady from Mantua tied a blue veil around her happy friend's black hair, over her eyes, knotted it with some force under her giggling friend's chin. As Kollonitsch squealed and tried to undo the knot, she calmly pulled a stool across, clasped her hands in prayer, let herself fall forward calling on Mary, down onto her lamenting face.

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As young King Ferdinand toiled with Count Gallas to reorganise the army, bring everything back to life using the riches now at their disposal; as troops and officers pledged obedience to Gallas, and Sweden and Saxony drew back waiting, very discreet feelers from the Bavarian court went out to Vienna. Maximilian's power and influence in Vienna were extraordinary; the leading parties at court held him to be the backbone of the Catholic cause in the Empire. The Bavarian had no children, was a widower. So he considered marrying again; the Emperor Ferdinand had a daughter just entering womanhood; the man of very advanced years would not be dissuaded from seeking young Maria Anna's hand.*

He was with his troops in Passau when news came of Wallenstein's end. The Emperor had vanished, the sybarite, the foolish jovial man, led astray who knew by whom. It was too much for Max. He succumbed to the enslaving fury of his emotions, knew not if he should weep or laugh; unable to sleep in the martyrdom of joy that engulfed his heart and hands with fire, flamed across his face, darkened his thoughts. On the advice of Contzen, at whom he threw himself helpless utterly changed and desperate for help, he fasted for several days, scourged himself savagely. His compulsive urge to unburden himself, give himself away, was sublimated into gifts to foundations of the Holy Church. At times he became totally eclipsed, lamed.

Now he emerged icy, cautious, slowly, step by step, concealing suppressing his inmost thoughts. He forced himself to act, calmed himself. Küttner, lovely tender man, could not see what the Prince-elector wanted when he ordered him to quit the court for several weeks. But he went. Richel tried to lighten the sad bitterly laughing cavalier's heart by devising a new mission to Paris. But for all his self-discipline Maximilian, back in Munich at his lathe among the most delicate ivories, could not prevent his thoughts from turning to Maria Anna, lovely pious young daughter of the fugitive Emperor's first marriage, and his desire to have her for a wife. The thought spilled out as if through his lips: this was an experience that would not be denied. He set to work, employed all his old methods. And then suddenly it was all too much. No peace, no joy, no Küttner; he gave in; it penetrated him to the marrow. Maximilian had a sense of transgression; he felt a tremulous desire to climb through a dark opened window in the roof, stretch out his hand, and abduct her. He had never imagined desire could be so strong: fetch fugitive Ferdinand's young daughter Maria Anna away from Vienna. It trickled through him endlessly refreshing as he tossed and turned and slept again, no need now for the scourge. Since Contzen did not forbid it he decided to give in to the emotion. With a bliss he had never known he made himself the instrument of his emotion.

It was the last act of dying Eggenberg, whom Trautmannsdorf visited at the behest of King Ferdinand, to formulate the reply to the question: whether Maria Anna should be promised to

the Bavarian Prince-elector, or not. The haughty demeanour of the Bavarian delegates Richel and Wolkenstein had aroused gloomy memories at court. Eggenberg insisted: “Do it, do it. Let them strut. We are both sacrifices. Give her to him, he’s deceiving himself about her.”

The princess resisted. Maximilian was old, by repute hard; they consoled her with his piety.

They were coupled at the Augustine church in Munich. That evening tar barrels and bonfires blazed in the squares. In the Market-square by the great column of Mary oiled geese were staked, lads raced by on horseback, tried to wrench off their necks. In the Residence the nobility danced jolly dances: galliard, saraband, gavotte. Banquet in the great hall, ballet, wrestling, quintain contests. In procession to the contests the gold-smothered Prince-elector and his bride were conveyed through the streets in a triumphal coach behind trumpets and war-drums conducted by maestro di Campo, surrounded in the dazzling spring sunshine by flower-strewing nymphs. The coach was drawn by two white horses. Maximilian’s smile was fixed. Her first laugh came when at the crossbow contest on the dark Plachfeld the bad shots were flogged, their hose paraded on poles as prizes awarded by the town. And after the armourers’ sword-dance she kissed the stern man on the throne-chair at her side in full view of the crowd. He wore a triple string of pearls on his hat; a heron’s beak in gold set with diamonds, an aigrette bobbed and swayed. His fat face was framed by a full thick grey-brown beard. His head was encased in a miasma of hot joy. Sneakily lifting his gaze from the ground, he exchanged a confused almost shamefaced look with young Küttner, standing not far off.

On the Market-square, where the gallows used to stand, Maximilian had erected a column to Mary. Heavily-armed angels with mighty wings surrounded her feet, contending with monsters. Contzen delivered a sermon on the text from the Psalms: Thou shalt tread upon the lion and adder: the young lion and the dragon shalt thou trample under feet.

59. Ferdinand Happy

THE MASSES OF humanity could not be staunched. They sloshed and trickled from Bohemia to the west, from the north into Thuringia, down from the Rhine, an endless gurgling. They swelled out of Bavaria, streams fed from all directions. Plundering mercenaries located the springs, their billeting collapsed the well-shaft; extortion and harassment, famine and despair made waters rise. Around Chiemsee males fled en masse to forest and mountain, formed bands to lessen the privations. Church bells, flogged by the metal clapper, twitched and trembled between Alz and Inn, Inn and Isar. “Rise up!” the roar across villages that had slid down onto the plain, lay dreaming amid mountains, stood mirrored in Chiemsee’s waters. They would throw the armies of Maximilian the Arrogant, the Milanese governor’s Spaniards and Italians, Imperials of smooth cruel quillpusher lickspittle Aldringen, back across the Isar.

In winter they ran freezing over damp ground; in the mountains men saw and ran after them, at their heels women and children, old men, invalids. They invaded and looted the homes of tenant farmers, tore the doors off barns, hanged millers from their own mills, hauled away floursacks, floursacks all along the hungry roads. At Rosenheim they came together, composed a scandalous letter to Prince-elector Maximilian calling him skinflint, monster, pious hypocrite. They threw priests out of their houses as lackeys of his; Jesuits were whipped,

here and there murdered. When the landlords turned to Munich, Capuchins were despatched to soothe the peasants; the monks dared not approach too close to the fire. Cronberg's regiment was stationed at Endorf and Prien on Chiemsee, then farther out at Riedering and Söchtenau. Companies of troops were attacked one by one, scattered, the horses stolen, weapons gathered; strongholds and depots everywhere broken into in the hunt for weapons. A gallant band of monks set out to confront the rebels; in their camps saw such misery that they departed before even proclaiming Maximilian's decree. The monks gulped before these men almost too feeble to stand, their hollow cheeks, the graves they were shown, the angry warnings; let themselves be escorted horror-struck back through deserted villages.

Provost-general Lindelo in Wasserburg on the Inn received orders to stand firm. Colonel Billehe commanded Spanish infantry from Feria's army, artillery came from Munich, Fürstenberg brought up his cavalry. Near Ebersberg they sent two hundred peasants to their rest. When church bells persisted in their endless ringing, villages were pounded to rubble by artillery. Mercenaries who knew the region sketched the terrain; concentrations of peasants were quietly encircled and dealt with by field pieces and a few culverins. Riders from Cronberg's cavalry sought revenge; they caught the ringleader Michael Mauerberger; he was dragged from them by Colonel Billehe, and since he confessed to involvement in the scandalous letter was summarily beheaded and quartered. The butchered pieces were exhibited as far as the Upper Austrian frontier, where the insurrection was just taking hold.

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Into the migrating hordes of refugees, into this devastated countryside came Ferdinand. He had escaped the bandit leader who kept him tied up for ten days, hoping to trade him for a ransom from the court at Vienna. He wandered with the begging starving looting mass. Ferdinand, as dirty as they, ate meat with them from dead horses, ran from snarling yard dogs. With him was an exiled miller, Kaspar Weinbuch. They never stayed two days in the same place; the ground was alive, he hauled himself up, shoved them away. Ferdinand grown gaunt now, face bone-thin, covered in slack wrinkled dirt-encrusted skin; he walked more bent, faster than before, his bright blue eyes focused and very lively. Talked and gesticulated left and right: "No mercy! No mercy! Don't give up. Devils are loose in the world; if you don't master them the Deluge will come, and whatever has the breath of life in its nostrils will be snuffed out. It cannot be otherwise. Not otherwise can the Lord save himself."

His words were those of Kaspar Weinbuch – a one-armed man, still young, who had burned down his mill rather than grind for the Italians. "Don't give up! Use force! No mercy! Use your arms, teeth. Don't die, don't give up the ghost. Where can mankind find salvation, if you die. The mill that should grind for our nearest and dearest, our children and grandchildren and grandchildren's children, still stands, our blood our bones dangle from the millwheel. It must burn. Don't give in. Don't die! Don't die!"

They looted in order to live, defended themselves, bore arms. Couldn't keep horses: no oats to be had. Though often lodging in empty houses they suffered horribly from the cold.

They bestowed on Ferdinand the nickname The Fury. Hard chivvying words flooded from his mouth; he refused to notice the desperate, slipping into towns to eat their fill, warm themselves not caring if someone beat them to death, offering themselves as recruits to the

accursed mercenaries. The Fury, hobbling along leaning on his stick, consoled and stirred them: “Fear God! Fear Him! Know that a dreadful power lurks behind the world, and we must answer to it. Show leniency to none. Murder, murder! Do not forget Him!”

Several among these hordes carried with them something that appalled the surrounding populace above all else: a cross made of big branches roped together, on it an actual rotting corpse, sometimes male, sometimes female, a child dangling from each cross-piece.

The cross-bearers seemed not to notice the pestilential stink.

Everywhere they were dispersed. The Fury wandered past Furth with Kaspar Weinbuch. Spring had arrived by the time they trod Bohemian soil. Rain pouring endlessly down. People shrank from these agitators, drove them on. An old fisherwoman, who took them in for some hours and gave them food, warned them, showed them the three children of her daughter, little things she was looking after, father and mother both killed in a Bohemian revolt. “Oh how can these dear children be a joy to them now. In the earth so young, so young.” Bohemia has learned its lesson, has grown quiet. The bearded miller laughed, but The Fury stroked the old woman’s hands: “What do you want? It’s all true, what you say. I’d be so happy to believe it. But it’s no use.” She gazed sadly at him. “How long will you keep wandering, old man; you’ll quieten down, like me.”

“Ah, it’s of no use, little woman, what you say. You want to lie down and die. Everyone wants to lie down and die. But stay alive, hold yourself straight.”

“The Bible says: my strength is made perfect in weakness.”

“You want to die. You can do nothing else but die.”

The miller dragged him from his reverie out of the hut, yelled at him: “The people, men and women, are as one: sluggards, lame. You think you know them better than we do?”

The rumour rang in their ears: Friedland, the Emperor’s commander in chief, has been struck down in Eger on the Emperor’s orders, his friends, all high officers, with him. He was said to lie buried at Mies, on the estate of his former field-marshal von Ilow. The Fury sought and sought, tried to locate the guarded grave in the Franciscan monastery. They stayed a long while in this place. And as Weinbuch, unwilling to hang around, tried to pull him on, a travelling coach clattered one noontime into the little village from the east; a noblewoman, still young, climbed out in a grey mourning gown, crepe veil about her face, white mourning-strips pinned to her sleeves, four women behind. It was Isabella, wife of dead Friedland. Now Weinbuch could not drag him from the spot.

A little troupe of fencing-masters, brethren of Saints Mark and Luke, strolled that same day into the village to exhibit the art of fencing using every kind of weapons; a jovial well-nourished tooth-puller and stonemason were with them. He noticed the two lurking dirty fellows, they were intrigued by his showman’s tricks; he fed them.

The body that had once accompanied Duke Albrecht of Friedland, the Bohemian von Wallenstein, was shovelled out of the earth to lie clamped between thin pine boards. The widow had drummed up some villagers to escort the corpse out of their jurisdiction. Old peasants lifted the coffin on two poles; it was hung with a grey cloth so no one would see that the over-tall man’s shins had been broken and bent back.

In misery behind four monks, among women paid to pray and mourn, the fully-veiled duchess. Left, right.

Ferdinand followed at a distance on two sticks, cap in hand, weeping, the quivering grey face heedless of the warm tears washing it.

Weinbuch swore at his blubbering, with a scornful grin left him there to join the others in the tavern, drinking toasts to the dead man in beer and rosemary-wine at the duchess' expense. At the crossroads the Duke was transferred to a haywain; the widow drove on behind, on to Jičin, to the charterhouse at Walditz.

The Fury, now with a stubbly beard on cheeks and chin, was from that day on strangely taciturn, his face expressionless. When a wretched little clutch of refugees trailed past them and the miller held out his arms and began to orate, he stood silently waiting to one side. The miller whooped the old enticing call: "Don't give up! Take an axe! Strike out left and right! Hammer down the walls!" The refugees too stretched out their arms.

"Why did you just stand there?" the miller accosted him as they went along, menace in his tone. Quietly, not arguing, the other said: "I can't do it. I can't bring it out."

"What can't you bring out?"

"I cannot curse."

"You're a fine one. You're half-eaten already. Ready to lie down and die." Nothing to be done with The Fury.

Ferdinand had allowed himself to be overwhelmed by the flooding masses of humanity. Had succumbed to the misery that confronted him. In horror and remorse he had screamed: "Take up axes! Axes! Don't give up!" It was all put to painful rest before Wallenstein's mean plank coffin.

And now darkness came upon him. He knew not what was coming, but waited for it. He had a great need for sleep. Quite possibly he might die unresisting. And then something moved in him. He sighed, and a memory stirred: "Make way, make way." Gentle silence in which he could nestle. A beam he could feel his way along. Often something in him gazed on Wallenstein's coffin. He felt moved to follow the coffin, squeeze the hands, set the broken shins in splints.

The fencing-master and the tooth-puller took a liking to him, carried him and the miller along in their cart, he would help drum up customers. They quarrelled with the miller when he began to turn their teasing back on them. When Weinbuch one day in anger broke two rapiers with a stone, they beat him up. The miller disappeared; The Fury, who wanted to go after him, they held back. The troupe came into a zone of armies, hoping for better business. As the first companies in the region of Joachimstal near Carlsbad passed by them, The Fury begged them to let the mercenaries have a glimpse of him, he wanted to be away from here. On one occasion the fat mountebank came back gleeful: he'd spotted the other fellow, the bearded one, the miller Kaspar. Wouldn't say where: he was swinging high in the air on a soldiers' gallows, must have bitten off more than he could chew. The Fury blazed up: "Take me there. Take me. I'll tell them everything. He died a good death." And he wailed for Weinbuch and wept: "Let me go! Help me." They laughed: "Hup, hup! Run along on your crutches. We'll

send a dog after you, he'll run rings around you." He lifted up his hands and trembled: "You can't help your wildness."

In a birch wood just coming into leaf, at the spot where they meant to pitch camp there lay a lady's brown shoe, and from not far off a low whimpering could be heard among the trees. They crept towards it. A curled-up female body lay there, naked and hacked about, and behind it in a box on the ground an infant waved its little white legs, beat its fists and whimpered. With a marrow-curdling scream as if his senses had flown, The Fury flung himself to the ground, crawled on his knees towards the woman, stroked her icy face. They pulled him away from the mutilated creature; he left his sticks lying, felt for the child, held it tight in his cloak. They could not pull it from him, as soon as they tried he dropped face-down to the ground to protect it. They managed to stand him back on his feet, the little mite in his cloak screamed, he stood like a billy-goat, they had to let him be; he roared horribly, would not hand it over.

The troupe stole women and used them to squeeze money, sold illicit talismans against wounding. They kept The Fury and his infant close, because he knew too much. He calmed down, followed along, was friendly. But the tension in him frightened them. He gave the infant up to a nun. He nagged, nagged: they must let him go. By what right did they detain him. He threatened; they laughed. In despair he sat for hours in a corner of the cart wringing his hands. They let him mutter away in the straw. He quarrelled angrily with them; seemed so vengeful they no longer dared take him to markets, into villages; they hoped to tame him. During these days his task was to watch over the carts along with the fettler-lads. When these reported how, instead of watching the carts, The Fury engaged in long secret conversations with passing Walloons, and Walloons had several times been spotted in the vicinity of their camp, they decided to be rid of him, he must be thinking either to flee or to betray them.

They came past Kaaden, on the Eger River, where the child of a councillor fell into their hands. But the town had some riders available, who came in pursuit. In fear they left the child lying in the road. When the riders were not satisfied with this but continued the hunt, they unhitched the horses and rode off with as much as they could carry, leaving The Fury by the carts. He was seized by the riders, brought back to Kaaden and locked up in the town wall. The beadles, bribed by the child's family, vented their anger on him.

But Ferdinand, ever since his mistreatment by the fencing troupe, seemed to have completely lost his wits. He was prey to sudden jolting overwhelming excitement. When the robbers left him in the road and he was taken prisoner, it seemed he was relieved of every care. He had not, as the fettler-lads said, urged the Walloons to rescue him, but only told them his story: he had occupied high office, had given it up. Because ruling had little purpose. Everything runs by itself. And everything is for the best, as he had learned. You only have to know how. Let them do whatever they want with him, no one can hurt him. He even challenged the Walloons to aim blows at him, it would do him good. Then when one of them punched him hard on the shoulder, he dropped into the grass, writhed in pain, but gave a crooked smile: It's nothing, does me good.* They left him sitting there pale, half fainting. In the town gaol he was so mishandled that he lost what remained of his senses. But as soon as he was released he told everyone again that he was Emperor Ferdinand, the Roman Emperor,

now he's doing better. They dealt with him like a lump of wood. To extract confessions they branded him on forehead and arms and rubbed salt in the wounds. He revealed all he knew of the troupe, admitted no guilt himself. In the dungeon he stood each time before the judge and the executioner, the bent grey man, bewailed judge and executioner, implored them to think of themselves and not of laws or emperor, he'd been emperor, he released them from their obligations; Increaser of the Empire so he said, and so they might cease tormenting him, it was of no help to them.

He cried out: "You must rejoice. It is May or June. A lovely time. Do not frown so. Your actions besmirch you, constrict your chest. No beast would want to live in such gloom and sadness. Laugh. When a man laughs he greets other beings." Even after a painful procedure on the rack he begged them: "Do not set such fierce faces. The world is all so lovely. You must not take offence. I am no rogue, you've no need to become riled on my account. And you could be done with others in a happier manner. Happy happy. I am happy, and so I'd like to go on living." He glided along his wooden beam.

But they did not laugh. And they became truly grim when one morning the executioner found The Fury's cell empty.

The fencing troupe had learned of his incarceration; they did not exactly regret handing him over, but wanted to play a joke on the authorities now the proceeds of their swindles were all gone. Being strong men, having climbed unobserved over the wall, they overpowered the sentries posted at the gaol by the town guard. The Fury, alarmed by the torchlight, blinked at them from the straw, his face mournful, he failed to recognise them. Then, as they lifted him and wrapped him in a cloak, he whispered greetings, stroked them. They bundled him with difficulty over the wall, Ferdinand biting back his pain. While they giggled in excitement they had to damp down his joy. The stout stonemason who led his mount asked as they rode through the soughing forest: Would he like a priest. Ferdinand laughed: "Not yet. I believe in my Saviour. But if I had to confess my sins, I wouldn't know what sins to confess."

"You're a bad man," the other warned.

"No, I beg your pardon, everything has been washed from me. Do you know where vice and virtue are to be found?"

After four hours' riding they came to a hut where the rest of the troupe were waiting, stayed there several days. Ferdinand praised the good deed they had done him. They mostly left him alone. When they sent a monk of the Discalced to jaundiced feverish Ferdinand, pus oozing from his many wounds, he wept copiously, confessed: "Sin, yes, that's it."

"Now you see."

"I know it, I know what sin is."

"You see."

"It's just, I can't feel it. It's all been washed away. Who did that?"

"You're sick, you're freezing, shivering with cold." But Ferdinand looked calmly at him from bright eyes: "I'm under a spell. I can only rejoice."

The Discalced spoke prayers, blessed him, left.

Ferdinand survived the fever. He crawled yearning, once the troupe had clattered off, on all fours out of the door into the greenwood. It was sunny. He wanted to heal himself.

The forest, floor of a wide sea, buffeted and churned day and night. Trees young and old held fast to the earth by their roots, branches and foliage thrust hungrily up, were grabbed by the topknot, twisted down, thrust aside, led round in circles. Flowers of many colours grew in hidden patches of grass. Ferdinand crawled upright against young trunks, felt his knees, air blew into his open mouth, breath came more gently from his slack chest; he advanced across the mossy ground like a boneless worm. He stumbled and swayed like a drunkard. Sometimes, like magic spells, there sounded from him the words: Empire, War, Throne. For minutes on end he held his arms outstretched, groaned: "I won't pray, Mary must help me, she'll pardon me." All of a sudden as he lay there, the furry moss had him.

Head bent, impatient, he paced and stood until the troupe hurried off, so he could find himself once more among the silent trees.

A strange creature awaited him in a tree. It sat amid strong branches, stretched a brown-black head out through the leaves, a filthy young man with hair all over his body. He let the branches close over him, looked down once more. He had a pelt-like rag tied over shoulders and belly, he scrabbled and hung there with skinny monkey-legs. The goblin, after a while bending down its black bony chest, croaked something like a word, scampered cautiously along the branches above Ferdinand as he lay and crawled below, then came down to the ground. Ferdinand beckoned. He fled.

Day by day he came closer. Once he lunged at the sick man, snatched his bread, chewed as he ran away. He regarded Ferdinand from flitting grey eyes that moved restlessly in hollow orbits, but with no movement of the eyelids. At last he touched and sniffed at the sitting man, who often held a hand out to him. He would flinch from it, but at last took hold of the fingers, looked closely at them, turned and lifted them, sniffed, let them drop. Sat there, only to leap suddenly up into a tree, alarmed by a noise, and vanish.

Once, when Ferdinand left the hut door open, the creature slipped in, ran out with a big lump of meat that he devoured sitting on a branch. He watched in curiosity as Ferdinand pulled himself up on his sticks and shuffled along, came to his side, supported him deftly from behind with an arm under his shoulder; cawed laughter in the same harsh tone as his words.

Ferdinand quickly learned his childish signs. One morning – Ferdinand had forbidden him to enter the hut because of his repellent smell – the creature was already lying in wait for him. He beckoned, laughed, indicated that he knew something nice. He supported Ferdinand by an arm, and then the cawing creature gave him a piggyback across rocky ground. They looked down between bushes from a little rise. There was a stream, and a big bright tinkling bathing lodge. Floating tables; ladies with split skirts walked along the balcony. They threw blossoms down, those below caught them in sheets. Merry young ladies stretched hands out to the balcony for presents, they danced in the water, dresses floating high. Flutes and lutes played. Balls hung with bells drifted rapidly over the water. The forest sprite squealed softly, ground his teeth, eyes sparkling, avidly sucked in the drool welling from his mouth. He hopped cautiously back with Ferdinand.

Ferdinand felt extraordinary love for this wild creature. He marvelled at himself. There was nothing stronger than this inclination, this strange desire for the animal being. He was beset by painful tensions as he recovered; his face and hands peeled in the summer air. The troupe often disappeared for days, he had to ration bread and meat. And then the forest sprite was gone, for two days failed to appear. Ferdinand, easily exhausted though he was, very nearly went in search of him. Until one noontime alone in the hut he was surprised by a thin cry, then a crackling and a nearby scraping.

The brown-black thing there by a thicket. It was hunched over something white. Cawing laughing growling it signed to Ferdinand with hands and eyes. The white thing lifted; it was a young red-haired girl with little on; she must have been abducted from the bathing lodge. The pockmarked maiden, not pretty, now and then swooning in her deathly pale terror, held arms out to Ferdinand. He gave her hardly a glance. The forest goblin bared its teeth, dragged her back into the thicket snarling hissing, uttering passionate cries, looked around as Ferdinand came out of the hut, pulled up her dress, with fists and gurgles began to violate her.

Ferdinand stood there, wide bright eyes glazed. The goblin emerged, its body steaming, beckoned him to the girl, hugged him grunting drooling, breathed hot on him. The girl turned over in the grass, tried to run away. Ferdinand's knees trembled. He could not free himself of this intoxicating breath. Half unthinking he pressed the goblin to him. Horrible, almost unbearable, the sensation of that shaggy pelt and the strong odour of sweat. He felt no pity for the girl as his insides whipped him on. He managed as it raced through him to hold the goblin tight in his arms, eaten up with fear and resignation. The girl had gone. The hot creature laughed at him, shook itself loose, growled, snarled when it saw no girl, lumbered away.

Ferdinand sat in the dark hut, eyes flickering, blinked. Looked around, where am I. "I must go," the thought in him. After sleeping two hours he was bathed in sweat. His head swam. The numbing horror had pranced through his dreams, mighty and unleashed.

The troupe returned next morning. The evening before he had thrown sticks at the goblin when it came near grinning, had barred the door.

But as they went on past hills and fields, he again fell victim to numbness. Clover dog-roses lupins came by. And so it continued all day long in the ruined cellars where they hid and Ferdinand, who could hardly walk, was left to watch over the stolen horses weapons sacks while they practised their trade outside. Here Ferdinand slipped away, completely reshaped by his experiences. Something mysterious lay on him. He had bread cheese and smoked meat in his knapsack. He was grey and sinewy, his face still yellow. He made an unsettling impression on those who fed him and let him sleep. Slipped away.

He was impelled, turning and resisting, back towards the forest and the goblin's realm. He blamed and praised himself in the same breath for having escaped it. As he touched a tree's bark he felt he belonged here; could not lift his hand away, it seemed frozen on.

After some days he drew near to the place, his excitement mounting. Shaking with terror he found the hut. The low wooden structure, the crude brown slats. It robbed him of breath. For a moment his heart stopped. He lay down. Was deeply happy. He waited the whole day, fell asleep in the open air. Another day. He moved as if fast asleep. When he awoke in the grey

twittering dawn the hairy brown goblin was there gazing sidelong at him, laughing. Ferdinand remained grave, stroked it pleading. It pointed to its back, seemed to want to carry him. Ferdinand laid his hands on the creature, enjoyed the touch, it rippled through him. The goblin squealed, scratched itself, as it crawled away pointed to the hut, snarled, gurgled. The door was open. The man ducked low, went in. It must have been occupied recently; bread and bacon lay under the table, on the benches; they had left in a hurry.

Ferdinand, breathing heavily, took a seat, watched the goblin as it rturned everything over and finally ran out with a hunk of bread.

Sounds of summer in the forest, sunlight playing.

Towards evening with its ruddy glow the forest goblin opened the door. Ferdinand lay stretched on a bench. The creature tapped the soles of the man's bare feet. He sat up.

A wide flat knife lay under the table beside the bench. The creature made contact with its toes. At once it bent down, grabbed the knife with a long hairy arm. Its eyes gleamed.

It swung astride the man on the bench, pressed down on the shuddering joyful body and lightning-quick stabbed the knife from behind into his back. Several times. Their eyes locked. A slight surprise came into Ferdinand's face. He shuddered down to his toes, fell on his side.

The creature scrambled off the bench, looked at the knife, rushed out with it, stabbed the grassy ground, hurled the knife towards the hut.

Two days later it crept in, ate. Grabbed the body where it lay under the table by both legs, hitched itself like a horse to drag it out and across the grass. The goblin was strong enough to swing the emaciated body round in a circle. It snorted giggled, had fun. Ran with it through undergrowth, branches. It was raining. Raindrops splashed. Ferdinand lay on two high branches. Thin cool water dripped over his bright eyes. The goblin pulled little twigs down around him, he sat covered in leaves. Rocked the body on the branches, purred, frowning.

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The loosened desperate components of the population encountered on all sides the marching armies of Imperials Saxony Sweden Bavaria. Many went over to the troops, enticed by pay and rations. Whatever impeded the progress of the armies was smashed aside.

The mercenary masses themselves began to swing at each other, struck each other down, sped in pursuit, more butchering, Imperials Saxons Swedes Bavarians. In the west Gauls had gathered. They waited strong and fresh for the signal to hurl themselves into the fray.

THE END

NOTES TO BOOK 4

Chapter 22: Christians

Commission: cf. Book 2: the forcible conversions of Protestants to Catholics.

Louis the Heretic: Louis IV of Bavaria, emperor 1328-47, resisted Pope John XXII's efforts to impose his authority on the Empire. Maximilian built a sumptuous memorial to him in 1622.

imperial robes: Maximilian had decided not to compete with Ferdinand for the imperial crown.

Chapter 23: Demons

Aussig (Cz. Usti nad Labem): Bohemian border town 30 miles from Dresden; plundered 7 times during the War.

Bodenstadt: in eastern Bohemia.

Chapter 24: 'Naught to do with Religion'

Monstrous hand: cf.Belshazzar's feast.

Premonstratensians: order of 'white canons' founded by St Norbert of Xanten, archbishop of Magdeburg.

Chapter 25: Restitution

Restitution Edict: promulgated on 6 March 1629.

Francesco Barberini 1597-1679: effectively the Vatican foreign minister; also Pope Urban's nephew.

Scania Traders: Scania, in south of Sweden, was a main herring market, and important precursor of the Hansa.

Chapter 26: Peace with the Danes

Adam Contzen 1571-1635: influential Catholic theorist of the State, as well as Max's confessor.

Danish territories in Germany: the Danish king also held feudal title to lands in imperial Schleswig- Holstein..

Black Heads of Riga: Baltic guild of unmarried traders, founded in the 14th C.

Peace of Lübeck: signed on 16 May 1629 by Wallenstein and Christian.

Welf: one of Europe's oldest noble lineages, dating back to the 9th C.

East Friesia: on frontier with rebel Dutch provinces; repeatedly occupied by Mansfeld and Tilly.

Dangerous Gustavus Adolphus: the Catholic Polish King Sigismund – cousin of Protestant Gustavus and brother in law of Ferdinand – renounced the Swedish crown in 1604. Power politics and religion led Gustavus to invade Poland in 1629, where he was defeated by joint Polish and Imperial forces.

Breisgau, Rottweil: districts near the Black Forest, belonging to the Austrian Habsburgs.

Chapter 27: Intercepts

Attila: 5th C. Hun leader; *Theodoric:* 5th/6th C. Ostrogoth king; *Berengar:* 10th C. king of Italy and Holy Roman Emperor; *Desiderius:* 8th C. Lombard king, Charlemagne's father in law. Relevance to Wallenstein unclear.

Schleissheim: country residence north of Munich, begun by Max's father Duke William, later much enlarged.

St Urban: 4th C. bishop of Langres; his day is 3 April.

La Rochelle: Huguenot surrender in Oct 1628, after a 14 month siege, led to further Protestant suppressions.

Chapter 28: In Blooming Lombardy

King of the Romans: title signifying heir apparent to the imperial crown.

Barberini: Urban VIII was Maffeo Barberini, of a powerful Roman clan.

Henry IV 1050-1106: s Emperor, he quarrelled with successive popes, and was thrice excommunicated. His penitential journey to Canossa became a byword for Imperial subjection to Rome.

Horoscope: c.1607 Wallenstein engaged Johannes Kepler, Prague court mathematician, to cast his horoscope.

Ghibellines: supporters of the Emperor in north Italian territories, opposed to the pope-supporting Guelphs.

Empress was a relation: Duke Vincenzo II of Mantua, whose death without an heir in 1627 triggered the war, was Eleonore's brother. The Duke of Nevers was from a distant collateral line.

Chapter 29: Battle in the Heavens

Peller-Haus: iconic Renaissance residence built 1602-05 by one of the up-and-coming merchant class.

Nassauer-Haus: 14th C. tower-residence.

Torquato Tasso 1544-95: poet, author of the epic novel in verse *Jerusalem Delivered*.

Chapter 30: To Regensburg

Pierre De Brulart 1583-1640: Viscount Puisieux, Louis XIII's foreign minister.

François Leclerc du Tremblay 1577-1638: Richelieu's 'eminence grise', Louis XIII's first minister.

Charles III 839-888: Carolingian HRE. Deposed 887.

Wenceslas: Wenceslas II 1137-92, Duke of Bohemia, deposed 1179. (Not the 'Good King ~'.)

Chapter 31: A Burning

In March 1920 *Die Neue Merkur* published two advance excerpts: Sermon and Jew Burning. On 3 March Th. Mann noted in his diary: "horrific short story of Döblin's which makes the torture scenes in *Till Eulenspiegel* seem completely harmless."

Chapter 32: The Necessity of Obedience

Leonhardus Lessius 1554-1623: Flemish theologian and moral philosopher. (An anachronism: the action here takes place during the 1630 Convention.)

Chapter 33: He Delighted in his Blindness

Gregor of Valencia 1549-1603: Spanish Jesuit long active in Bavaria; professor of Dogmatics at Ingolstadt.

Jakob Gretser 1562-1625: philologist, historian, dramatist, and polemicist for the Counter-reformation.

Martin Becanus 1563-1624: influential Jesuit of the Counter-reformation.

St Callixtus: pope 218-221. The catacombs are the burial place of many subsequent popes.

Guide …: Claudius Aquaviva, Jesuit General, published the tract in 1602.

… peasants for the reaping: cf. Matthew 9, 37.

capitulatio caesarea: electoral manifesto of a candidate for Holy Roman Emperor.

NOTES TO BOOK 5

Chapter 36: 'I Com e to Defend You'

Swedish fleet landed on 6 July 1630 with 13,000 men. This vision launched Döblin on the *Wallenstein* epic.

Greifenhagen: some miles upstream of Stettin, on the Oder.

Axel Gustafson Oxenstierna 1583-1654: Swedish statesman, diplomat and administrative reformer.

… lifted up his heart: cf. Daniel, 5.20.

Federico Duke of Savelli, ł1649: mediocre field-marshal; more successful as a diplomat in Rome.

Chapter 37: Magdeburg Wedding

The utter devastation of Magdeburg on 10 (20) May 1631 caused horror throughbout Europe.

Hoë von Hoënegg 1580-1645: Lutheran theologian; influenced Saxony to back the Emperor against Frederick.

Psalmist Asaph: see Psalm 83:13.

…denied …a dance: Wallenstein had conducted an unsuccessful siege of the town for six months in 1629.

Breitenfeld: momentous battle fought on 17 September 1631. (A second battle here in 1642.)

cartouwe: heavy siege-gun.

Chapter 38: Mantuan Aftermath

Judenburg: town in Upper tyria, near where Ferdinand'sfather and several deceasedsisters were entombed.

Bamberg: Franconian town; the prince-bishop Fuchs von Dornheim in 1626-31 conducted many witch-trials.

Chapter 39: In the Grotto

Christof Angermaier c.1580-1633: important artist at Max's court.

Moses: see Jude 1:9 "Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee."

no wife: an anachronism; Max's wife died in 1635; this scene take splace in 1631.

leather cannon: to improve mobility, cannon were cast with thinner walls, reinforced by leather straps.

almost ruined: Max's father Duke William was forced to abdicate in1597 accused of financial mismanagement.

Petersberg: The 12th C. monastery on this elevation in the centre of Erfurt in fact belonged to the Benedictines.

Julius Echter von Mespelbrunn 1545-1617: bishop of Würzburg; his library was notable for bookbinding.

Chapter 40: Sweden Victorious

Duke of Franconia: the Prince-bishop having fled, Gustavus can claim the title.

Roman Month: unit of tax, set at 12,000 Imperial thalers, based on the cost of escorting an emperor to be crowned in Rome.

Free Imperial Knighthood: lower ranks of nobility owing allegiance directly to the Emperor, but not entitled to a seat in regional or imperial assemblies.

Duke Friedrich zu Löwenstein 1598-1657: Gustavus, having sacked Bronnbach monastery, gave it him in 1631.

Mouse Tower: erected in the 14th C. on an island on the Rhine near Bingen, as a lookout and toll point.

Peter Pázmány 1570-1637: philosopher-theologian; leading figure in the Hungarian counter-Reformation.

Chapter 41: On the Move Again

Altbunzlau: where the 10th C. King (later Saint) Wenceslas was murdered by his brother. The bronze ring at the door of the Wencelas Chapelin Prague was supposed to have been removed from the church at Altbunzlau.

Berka: cf. p.107.

Chapter 43: Tilly

Lech: The battle was fought in April 1632.

Chapter 44: Nuremberg

Schrannenplatz: old informal name for the Marienplatz, from a dialect term for corn market.

Saul, Saul: Acts 9.4

…signal to break out: this engagement between Gustavus and Wallenstein took place on 3 September 1632.

Chapter 45: The King is Dead

Lützen: the battle was fought on 6 (16) November 1632.

NOTES TO BOOK SIX

46. Carthage must be Destroyed

Azorius = Juan Azor 1535-1603: Spanish Jesuit moral philosopher; *Cornelius* =Cornelis van den Steen 1567-1637: Flemish Jesuit; wrote Bible commentaries; *Santarelli* 1569-1649: Italian Jesuit. Argued (supported by Jesuit General Vitelleschi) that the pope can depose and punish a king, causing a sharp anti-Jesuit backlash in France.

Juan de Mariana 1536-1624: Spanish Jesuit; like Santarelli, argued for the overthrow of tyrants.

false confession: Wallenstein had converted to Catholicism in 1606.

Licetus = Fortunato Liceti 1577-1656: Italian professor of philosophy, medicine and physics.

47. The Final Act Begins

own bribed people: suspicion fell on the Duke of Sachsen-Lauenburg, who after ten years in the Emperor's service defected to the Swedes shortly before Lützen. Cf. C F Meyer's novella *Gustav Adolf's Page.*

armistice: Heidersdorf is 40km S of Breslau. The armistice (renewed several times) lasted June to October 1633.

major-general: Johann von Bubna; in 1618 he had been Marshal of the Bohemian standing army. The conversation actually took place in May, before Wallenstein headed out to Silesia.

Nimptsch (Pol. Niemca): formerly the Silesian capital; burned by Wallenstein in 1633, then emptied by plague.

48. Grist to Slavata's Mill

six hundred: only the leaders of the 600-strong mutiny were executed – a case of hasty reading or faulty recall.

Sixty-four: the Committee (rarely consulted) comprised 32 knights, 16 prelates, and 16 from towns/markets.

Feria = Gómez Suárez de Figueroa y Córdoba, 3rd Duke of Feria 1587–1634: called 'Grand Duke' for his military prowess; one of the last capable Spanish generals. He was twice governor of Milan, 1618-15 and 1631-33.

…my religion: contrast the Dominican's jolly version with the sermon in Mantua in Ch. 38.

50. Thundering in the Wrong Direction

Wilhelm of Weimar 1598-1662: duke of Saxe-Weimar, brother of Bernhard.

Alexander Leslie, 1st Earl of Leven (1582 – 1661): in Swedish service since 1608, he became a favourite general of Gustavus Adolphus. He later led the Covenanter army, and the Parliamentary forces in the English Civil War.

Lohausen = Wilhelm von Calcum-Lohausen 1584-1640: military career in North German territories; half a year as PoW after the battle of Barenberg; then joined with the Swedes as soon as they landed.

Feuquières = Manassès de Pas, Marquis de Feuquières 1590-1640:special envoy of Richelieu.

Louis Philipp of Simmern 1602-55: younger brother of Frederick. Although recognised as innocent by Ferdinand, his lands were occupied by Spain until the arrival of the Swedes.

Kinsky = Wilhelm Kinsky von Wchinitz und Tettau 1574-1634: Bohemian diplomat; spent years in Saxony.

Burgsdorff = Konrad von Burgsdorff 1595-1662: commanded the Elector of Brandenburg's lifeguard.

51. An Unprecedented Insult

Ilow: Christian von Ilow 1585-1634: general, supporterof Wallenstein.

secco: white wine provided to new recruits.

52. Slavata's Gamble

Bellarmin = Roberto Bellarmino 1542-1621: Jesuit cardinal, advocate of papal supremacy.

Ottavio Piccolomini 1599-1656: well-connected warrior and diplomatic go-between. (He became Duke of Amalfi in 1638, four years after the events depucted here.).

53. The Hermit, Again

St Ursula: legendary 4th C figure. The song is a 1625 hymn from Cologne titled 'Die Königstochter aus Engelland (The king's daughter from England/Angle-land/Angel-land)', included in *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. The first verse sung by Kollonitsch goes: 'Vionitus was a mighty king in Angle/Angel-land. His daughter Ursula was a paragon of maidenhood. Because she was bought with Christ's blood and baptised according to the will of the Highest, she was His bride alone, to serve Him in perpetual chastity' – relevant to Eleonore's situation.

Passau Charm: talisman supposed to protect soldiers against wounding, current from 1611 or so when troops of Matthias emerged almost unscathed from the siege of Passau.

54. Peace is Nearer than you Think

The letter: this Declaration of 12 Jan 1634, undertook (in Wallenstein's absence) to keep him as General, while the 74 signatories would remain always at his side.

Walter Butler 1600-1634: entered service with Ferdinand after his family's Irish estate was confiscated in 1616.

55. Dismissed Again

'*Feed my sheep'*: John 21:17.

57. No Longer Wallenstein

Pachelbel: the former mayor was driven out by the Recatholicising Commission (cf.Book 2). Wallenstein had been a frequent guest at the house.

Slavata's death: as with Ferdinand's death, Döblin here diverges from history. Slavata lived to 1652.

58. Ferdinand is Happy

courtyard cobbles: female suicide by defenestration occurs in at least three Döblin epics, perhaps traceable to a family drama in the early 1890s when during a quarrel his elder sister threatened to throw herself out.

Maria Anna 1610-65 married Maximilian in 1635. Her mother was Max's sister, her father was Max's cousin.

does me good: cf. the boxing match in chapter 27.

ALFRED DÖBLIN'S *WALLENSTEIN*

Volume 2 (Books 4 – 6)

In *Wallenstein*, his fictional recreation of the Thirty Years War, Alfred Döblin (1878-1957) builds with words a whole teeming world, unfamiliar yet believable, replete on the one hand with mundane motives and activities (greed, power, tribal identity, mortality; decrees, propaganda, war, sermons) and on the other hand grotesqueries that highlight the gulf between the surface world of custom and social order and the demons that lurk beneath. Modes of thought apparently alien to our secular age are laid out for inspection; unsettled, we wonder how exactly our own 'modern' world views really are superior.

Volume II takes us from the momentous Convention where the Electors force the dismissal of Field-marshal Wallenstein, just as the Swedish king decides to intervene in the chaos of the Thirty Years War. It ends with the assassination of Wallenstein, and the (fictional) end of Emperor Ferdinand.

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