

Leo Perutz

THE THIRD BULLET

Translated by C. D. Godwin



<https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com>

Die dritte Kugel published 1915 by Albert Langen, München.

Reprinted by Szolnay (1978); Knaur (1993).

Not previously translated into English.

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Cover illustration from the Archiv für Kunst und Geschichte, Berlin.

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INTRODUCTION¹

In the years between the great wars of the 20th century, Leo Perutz (1882-1957) was the most-read writer in German, admired among others by J. L. Borges, Graham Greene, Walter Benjamin, Alfred Hitchcock (who used a Perutzian trope in his silent-film success *The Lodger*), and Ian Fleming (who wrote Perutz a nice letter – see below).

While some of his novels were published in English during his lifetime, the Anglophone world showed little interest. Not until the 1980s did new German editions of his books start to appear. The 1,000 page *Oxford Companion to German Literature* (2nd ed. 1986) was unable to find space even for a mention of Perutz.

When interest in Perutz revived, his Anglophone publishers somehow failed to include this, his first novel, possibly because the modern German reissue did not appear until 1993-94, when the translation wave was receding. So this translation is the first into English.

Perutz' strengths were recognised from the first:

... [*The Third Bullet*] is, of its kind, the most fabulous I've ever seen ... If you were an English or American writer, your work would be read in 100,000 copies from London to the Sudan.²

... If he were English, he would already be a Baronet, and swim in guineas. In the German lands he is still not much, just the best storyteller. Other novelists inhabit more exalted spheres, others again are more nimble with the typewriter, but none comes to mind as frequently as Leo Perutz, and no one else writing in German has such a full-blooded passion for storytelling.³

... In the Viennese writer Perutz there lurks an endless and uninterrupted delight in story-telling. He feels a naïve pleasure in thinking up a fable, in the artifice involved in tangling and untangling the threads, in the impactful intermezzo, in the carefully prepared Grand Scene. He masters the mechanics of tension to the highest degree. He knows the reader's secret wish: to be led through the labyrinth by an effortlessly reliable hand. He knows the itching for the next chapter, when at last, late in the night, the book has to be put aside. He fetches his themes from the realm of improbability, from that frontier region where the most powerful feats of imagination dwell so closely alongside the cheapest tricks of effect-making. ... The more romantically the plot develops, the more its colours glow. The more complicated the situation becomes, the more the characters come alive. The construction disappears behind the characters, the manipulating hand becomes invisible, the human being stands out. ...⁴

In January 1931, the not-yet-famous Ian Fleming wrote to Perutz:

In the last five years I have read the best and the worst of modern English, German, French and Russian literature, mostly untranslated, and have never once felt a need to write to the author.

Last Saturday I took [your novel *Little Apple*] with me on a journey from Munich to London. From the yellow cover I mistakenly thought it one of those things one reads on a journey, where by page 37, after the police detective has been rendered thoroughly ridiculous, we know who murdered the rich American in his hotel room ...

I finished your book in the early hours of this morning, and I have to say I found it utterly gripping. I could write at length: about the psychology, the continuity, and the Poe-like humanity of the whole thing – but my German is not up to it. ... I shall only say that I admire your style, your language, and your art, down to the finest details. The word "genius" has

¹ Materials for this introduction were found in the very useful volume *Leo Perutz 1882-1957* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay, 1989), compiled to accompany an exhibition at the Deutsche Bibliothek.

² Ernst Weiss, letter to Perutz, 9 September 1918.

³ Richard A Bermann, in *Der Tag* (Vienna), 28 Feb 1923.

⁴ Carl von Ossietzky, in *Das Tage-Buch* (Berlin), October 1925.

through misuse long since lost value and meaning, otherwise I would simply define your book as a work of genius.⁵

Who was Leo Perutz?

Leo Perutz was born in Prague in 1882, and died in Austria in 1957. From 1938 to 1950 he was a reluctant exile in Palestine/Israel. By profession an “insurance-mathematical statistician” (in which role he published several papers), in October 1907 he joined the major insurance firm Assicurazioni Generale in (then-Austrian) Trieste: by sheer coincidence the same month when Franz Kafka joined the same firm in Prague. But Perutz apparently had little contact with the circle around Kafka and Max Brod; Vienna itself offered plenty of literary excitements in figures such as Karl Kraus and Arthur Schnitzler.

Between 1915 and 1936, Perutz, a sociable habitué of coffee houses but a staunch avoider of publicity, published ten novels (two written in collaboration with his friend Paul Frank), as well as several short stories. In 1953 he published one more novel; and his last, found in his posthumous papers, appeared in 1959. (The titles are listed at the end of this Introduction.)

The Third Bullet

Written between 1911 and 1915 in several dozen notebooks, which the very diffident author passed around to friends in batches for comments (a practice chided by one as “highly crackpot!”⁶), *The Third Bullet* is a historical thriller, with elements of diabolism and magical realism. Alongside Hernando Cortez and King Montezuma, a colourful cast of German and Spanish desperados mingle and quarrel, in scene after scene of vivid action and dialogue.

Critics admired how Perutz had unobtrusively recreated the colloquial zest of *Simplicius Simplicissimus*, Grimmelshausen’s 17th century picaresque novel of the Thirty Years War, while avoiding the antiquarianist flummery so prevalent in German historical fiction. Contemporary reviewers welcomed this with enthusiasm, as these three excerpts show:

[1] [...] Now the War has not yet ended, but the [post-War] book is already here. It’s called *The Third Bullet*, and the writer is a newcomer, an unknown man called Leo Perutz. A book that surprises, engrosses, [...] a book that thrills, grips, and won’t let go, even after you have long since reached the end. [...] The pages are filled with battles, the roar of cannon and arquebus fire, battle-cries in many languages. [...] It’s as if a Turkish war-drum has sat for centuries in an obscure corner and suddenly booms again. To its throbbing beat, marching hordes go by: colourful figures, many clanking in iron, helmet-plumes nodding, others in leather jackets full of holes, armed with spears, others again dark-haired, thin, naked, their skin reddish-brown; lansquenets, knights, whores, heroes, dukes, generals, kings, necromancers, mercenaries Spanish, Flemish, German, Mexican. [...]

A book from an age when the face of this Earth still wore a very different look. [...] Here’s the great Charles V, and the executor of his imperial will, Hernando Cortez, the man with the stony visage and stony heart, the whole great Spanish army waltzing off across the ocean to Great Lord Montezuma and his golden city Tenochtitlan. A cornucopia of characters, each one embroiled in a myriad events that sweep past in a wild tumultuous chase, like a mountain torrent in spate. [...]

[2] [...] Recently the first book by the Viennese Leo Perutz appeared: *Die dritte Kugel*, a book filled with war alarums and powder-smoke, but not, thank God, a hastily scribbled novel from the current World War. [...] He tells of fantastical events from a fantastic age. The blood-soaked Conquistador Cortez goes through the book, endless German figures from the Peasant Wars

⁵ Quoted in the Afterword to the 1987 edition of *Wohin rollst du, Apfelchen*, p.267-8.

⁶ Richard A Bermann: Letter to Perutz, 3 May 1912.

⁷ Paul Frank, *Wiener Allgemeine Zeitung*, 30 Nov 1915.

mingle with Montezuma's Aztecs, the doltish and bamboozled Devil of mercenary ideology struts about, Martin Luther's thoughts contest with the ruinous gold of the New World. Not a scene, not an image in this remarkable book that could not have been experienced or thought up by someone in the 16th century. The colours are genuine; at long last a historical novel in the spirit of the times it depicts.⁸

[3] [...] This is a lovely book. When it's raining cats and dogs outside, you can cut yourself off from the world with a dish of sugared almonds, one hand turning the pages, the other slowly lifting almonds to your mouth. It revolves around the adventures of a wily German nobleman in the New World, and all the savagery that happens and has happened has such a tinge of melancholy because it happens not before our eyes, but is recalled in the old man's memory. [...] It's a wild tale, with many wonderful details, and its literary pretensions are so fastidious and modest that the writer lies hidden behind what he has written. [...]

Anyone wanting to know how Cortez conquered and massacred the Mexicans, and how the great golden treasure was lost, and how they conjured up the Devil, and "what happened next": immerse yourself in this fabulous little book, that sends its greeting like a beautiful ancient woodcut from the days when everything was so simple and easy: from the days of boyhood.⁹

C. D. Godwin
Stroud, U.K.
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⁸ Richard A Bermann, *Die Zeit* (Vienna) 28 Nov. 1915.

⁹ Peter Panter (i.e. Kurt Tucholsky), *Die Weltbühne*, May/June 1919.

WORKS BY LEO PERUTZ

(The translated titles can usually be found, reasonably priced, on www.abebooks.co.uk)

1915: **Die Dritte Kugel [The Third Bullet]**. Untranslated until now. Set in early 16th C. in Germany and Mexico, featuring Cortez, Montezuma and magical realism.

1916: **Das Mangobaumwunder [The Mango Tree Mystery]** (with Paul Frank). Untranslated. A macabre mystery involving exotic poisons and an enigmatic baron.

1918: **Zwischen Neun und Neun [Between 9 and 9]**. Trans. Thomas Ahrens & Edward Larkin, Ariadne Press 2010. A handcuffed prisoner jumps from a Vienna roof and spends a lively day evading capture – or does he?

1920: **Der Marques de Bolibar [The Marquis of Bolibar]**. Trans. John Brownjohn, Arcade 1989. Intrigue and the unrolling of unintended but inevitable consequences during the Peninsular War in Spain.

1923: **Der Meister des jüngsten Tages [The Master of the Day of Judgment]**. Trans Eric Mosbacher, Harvill 1994. Murder mystery set in early 20th C. Vienna.

1924: **Turlupin [Turlupin]**. Trans. John Brownjohn, Harvill 1996. Set in Cardinal Richelieu's Paris, where curious events surround a momentous shuttlecocks tournament.

1924: **Der Kosak und die Nachtigall [The Cossack and the Nightingale]** (with Paul Frank). Untranslated. A burlesque love story involving an opera singer and the Russian husband she has left, but who plots to ruin her romantic affairs.

1928: **Wohin rollst du, Äpfelchen? [Little Apple]**. Trans. John Brownjohn, Arcade 1992. Set in Austria and Russia at the end of the First World War, this exciting adventure of thwarted vengeance ranks with *All Quiet on the Western Front*, published in the same year.

1933: **SanktPetri-Schnee [Saint Peter's Snow]**. Translated by Eric Mosbacher, Arcade, 1990. A coma, puzzling memories, mind-altering mildew: a feverish tale of a man caught between two realities.

1936: **Der schwedische Reiter [The Swedish Cavalier]**. Trans. John Brownjohn, Arcade 1993. Set in the 17th C. Swedish-Polish wars, a nameless tramp assumes the identity of a Swedish officer, with fatal consequences.

1953: **Nachts unter der steinernen Brücke [By Night under the Stone Bridge]**. Trans. Eric Mosbacher, Arcade 1990. An elegy for the lost world of Prague, set in the 16th C. of mad Emperor Rudolf, the Jewish financier Mordechai Meisel, and the mystical Great Rabbi.

†1959: **Das Judas der Leonardo [Leonardo's Judas]**. Trans. Eric Mosbacher 1989. Set in Milan in 1498: Leonardo is unable to finish his great painting of The Last Supper until he finds a suitable model for Judas.

In 1993 a volume of short stories written between 1907 and 1929 was published under the title **Herr, erbarme Dich meiner [Lord have mercy on me]**. Untranslated.

A search of Abebooks.co.uk shows the following titles translated in the 1920s/30s:

Master of the Day of Judgment Elkin Mathews & Marrot, UK 1929/Charles Boni US 1930 Tr.Hedwig Singer.

The Virgin's Brand E P Dutton 1935 [Not clear which Perutz title this refers to.]

From Nine to Nine. Viking, US. 1926 / Bodley Head, UK 1927. Tr Lily Lore

The Marquis de Bolibar Viking 1927 Tr. Graham Rawson

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PRELUDE

THE WINE OF DOCTOR CREMONIUS

I'm shivering, and the fire's about to go out. Autumn gusts tug at my cloak, the patched holes leer devilish grimaces. Rain is drumming all around, it roars and rattles as if calfskin has been stretched across the world. A night made for warming oneself at the campfire, and reminiscing in a circle of fellow grey-haired warriors about adventures undergone. Alas, I have no spirit for it today, after fifteen hours on the back of my lame nag, never dismounting. The Saxon Elector, great enemy of the Pope, Lutheran who succeeded in uniting the Protestant princes against the Emperor, and who instigated an uprising in Bohemia to boot, has been captured by us and brought here to the Emperor's camp, so that tomorrow he may prostrate himself before Charles the Fifth, and in all humility acknowledge him his most gracious Emperor.

Now they're leading his Chancellor and privy counsellors by in chains. There's the old man whose crown I slashed with my sabre at Mühlberg. His head is wrapped in a bloody bandage, and he lets it droop with a near sad and despondent air, as if he knows he won't for long wear it between his shoulders. So, brother, you're near despondent now, but who told you to pen from Ingolstadt that defiant call for abdication? "We give notice to Charles, who styles himself Fifth Roman Emperor, that he has acted against God and Nation, unmindful of his duties and in breach of his oath." Ha, the Emperor's about to give you lot his proper answer. Who advised you miserable rogues to stick your fingers in such matters? Look at me, brother! I too am Lutheran. Yet I ride with the Emperor's pack, I slash, stab and shoot whomever he tells me to stab and shoot, it's all the same to me. I make no song and dance of my religion, hold my peace with black robes of every cut, I say "good day" first to those foppish Spanish bravos who strut so haughtily about the camp and puff themselves up in their Fool's motley at the Emperor's side. But I, dear brother, have all the while kept proudly on my tongue, as my war-cry, that faith for which you now carry your necks to the executioner!

All away now. They drove the wretches on with kicks and blows. Around me all is quiet. I'm tired, how I wish sleep would come at last. Alas, sleep for me has become, it seems, just such a haughty Spanish *alamode* popinjay. It is high-handed, will not come when summoned.

And so I close my eyes and think of bygone years. I send out the days and hours of my life. Like falcons they shall fly through time and fetch me people I have known, delights I once enjoyed, agonies I suffered, sins and pious deeds I have done. I shall line them all up and from them piece together a year of my life. I shall hold it in both hands and gaze into it as into a mirror, so that I find there my former face and the faces of others whom I loved, or who angered me. For I have encountered many of the world's great figures. Frundsberg and clever Rohan, the brute Christian of Denmark, Hernando Cortez, and Niklas Salm.¹ One of these I shall invite into my memories, so that this endless night may pass more swiftly!

Alas, those bygone days and hours fly back empty-handed, and bring me neither faces nor figures. None of those I summon will come, all have vanished from my memory, leaving nothing but an empty echo of their name. And my life itself has grown pale, and I no longer find my own image therein. Years there are of such vacancy all of a sudden, it's as if I never

lived them, and yet they were filled to the brim with a hundredfold incidents. And other years are there, in which all is so jumbled that yesterday follows today and Whitsun comes before Easter, as if the golden thread that joins the hours of my life, one after the other, has parted. And when my thoughts wander through my bygone life, it's like going through a deserted house, many rooms are empty, many on the other hand are filled with useless refuse, worm-eaten furniture, and dusty items lie all jumbled atop one another.

Now and then a forgotten vanished day comes to mind. Then suddenly I see myself engaged in some foolish or barbaric deed, bereft of meaning or purpose, so I must puzzle over myself, must laugh, or even grow angry. Jesus, how did it happen that once upon a time, in a distant land, I murdered a king? Was it really I who committed this deed? I see him standing high atop a city wall, surrounded by numerous men in armour, and he waves a greeting to me. But I ignore it, and instead tell Melchior Jäcklein, my page, to aim at the king's breast, I myself apply the slow match, the gun cracks ... the king falls down ...

It must have been a fit of anger. And yet I have no idea what the king did to annoy me, so that I proceeded so cruelly against him. Alas, our mortal flesh is always with Satan.

Then again I see myself hack a wooden door to smithereens with my sword, in a city with many rose gardens, where rowing boats glide down avenues. But why I did this, and what so confused my mind as to make me splinter a wooden door with such fury, I have no idea. Yet I must laugh at myself whenever I think of it, at my landing up in such a foolish exploit. And today I still see those idiotic gestures, so like a drunkard's futile antics of which no one can make sense: his bizarre laughter and weeping, cursing and flailing at imaginary foes. And I grow ashamed of my mad deeds, and often it seems good that so few of my days remain in memory, while most are nothing but a discordant ringing in my ears and a heavy lassitude in my limbs, as if I had ridden my whole life long on the back of a lame nag.

But has a memory nevertheless come calling? Suddenly the image of dead Matiscona pops up, that proud man who knew the true salt of the philosophers, and who once intended to teach me the secret Hebrew spell for banishing all ailments from body and soul. It emerges from the darkness, moves its lips, as if at last he will reveal to me the comforting elixir! But alack! It is not his voice I hear, only the hoarse croak of that blear-eyed Capuchin who ten days ago at the inn at Erfurt stole my purse. Damnation! Now suddenly I hear lisping and snuffling that rascally Jew who yesterday tried to part me from my silver trappings for three new groschen, but today he wears the face of a noble gentleman, Richard Norfolk, late father of my wife, who was called the White Rose.

Yes, once upon a time they all knew me, the great of the Earth! Yes, I was once one of them, and the clever valued my counsel, and the strong my support. I've seen them at their work, generals, clerics, thinkers, as they shaped the face of the world. But today all is murk within me, and mixed up, like a baggage-train lad's daydream of a nobleman's life.

On one occasion in the New World I rode past sky-high cliffs on which some long-forgotten race had displayed in curious painted designs its unchristian symbols and notions. I saw women mating with egrets, two trumpets lewdly assailing a virgin, and a king revelling in his bed with a St George's dragon. And no one alive could interpret the occult symbols and

meanings, for endless rain had washed away all words and signs, leaving only half-ruined pictures to speak lost wisdom to deaf ears. And when I try to call to mind my bygone life, I seem to stand again before that distant cliff; for every thought and feeling has been washed from my memory, and all that's left me is half-ruined imagery, whose meaning none can tell.

And yet – one man is alive who could interpret my life. He's Melchior Jäcklein, my mute equerry, he's now bending over me, covering me with his woollen cloak. But today he's in a rage, he grinds his teeth and balls his fists. No doubt he's quarrelled yet again with the Spaniards, he has no love for them, and there are too many in the camp for his liking. My mute equerry harbours many hatreds, for all the world's malice has taken fire within him. He remembers many who have done ill to him or to me, he resents them to this day, and thinks of nothing, day or night, but how to wreak vengeance on them. But I no longer know them, I ride on by, and cannot for the life of me remember who they are, or what they ever did to me.

But the mute man forgets nothing, my entire life is depicted in his head in the same lurid colours that peasants use to paint holy martyrs. And it often seems he tries to summon up in my memory a long forgotten incident, as if to warn me of something I forgot to do, and then I see him rant and rage, and in helpless anger he twists his face into foolish desperate grimaces because I cannot understand what he wants of me, and I grow sad because I no longer know or feel what even now fills his mind with great anger and deep sorrow.

What, all of a sudden, is all this din and stir, why this mad laughter? Is it carnival night? It's the musketeers, who just now lay sprawled on their cloaks throwing dice; they have flung aside their bone dice to throng around Doctor Cremonius, the Emperor's alchemist.

"Yer Honour! Magister! Sir Crystal-gazer!" they all call out at once. The Emperor's aurifex and astrologer comes to a halt, lifts his head like one awoken from deep contemplation, and asks: "What do you want with me?" The words echo very strangely in my heart, I know not why. The two Imperial bodyguards who came marching behind the aurifex now take up position to his left and right, and keep their eyes fixed on him.

The musketeers roar and shout: "Yer Honour! Have you no goldwater for the falling sickness?"

"Hey, you! Sir Long-cloak! You got a remedy for pockmarks, at all?"

"You should use St Benedict's thistle for the scars the pox has left on your face," is Doctor Cremonius' response. "For the falling sickness, take imperial violet-water. And now farewell, and let me on my way."

One lies in his path and cries: "Oh Master Pimp and Ruffian! Was it not you who in Würzburg so confused a young maiden that she spurned every honourable fellow, and became whore to a diabolical Jew?"

And another, a young fellow with a beard like a haughty Hindoo sage, plants himself in front of the old man and cries: "Od's blood, Master Quacksalver! Have you no remedy against those soup-slurpers and obdurate black crows who cavort in the Emperor's ear with their foolish antics, and pretend they know how to make gold, when all they can do is wag their tails and beg for a little white penny, like a puppy for a crust of bread?"

The old man shakes his head, and says in a quiet voice: "Take the juice of an onion, my boy, and put a little in your ear! It is good for restoring wits to those who have lost them."

Then he goes on, the others laugh, but the young fellow's face is red and he bellows: "Hoi there! Stop! Halt!"

The old man comes to a halt, and asks in a voice both weary and proud: "What do you want with me?"

Again the words sadden me. I seem to have heard them said in a frightened mournful voice that cut me to the heart whenever they were uttered. I no longer know when or where.

The young lansquenet has calmed down, he sits and grumbles: "Your advice is good only for bedwetting infants. Begone! The Emperor will soon enough honour you with a hempen necklace! I'll see you next at the sign of the Four Winds, tripping the poor-sinner's dance."

The old man proceeds on his way without a word, he's coming past me, the two bodyguards still close behind. But he must not go on before I learn who his voice and words remind me of. "Master savant! Sir! Pray tarry a while!"

The old man gives a start, and for the third time I hear the words that cause me so much grief, and for a moment I seem to know who it was that once spoke them to me in such a sorrowful tone. But the memory that tugs abruptly at my heart flies away again like a shy bird, and I cannot snatch it back, but stare after it into the night.

Doctor Cremonius' voice arouses me from my thoughts: "Who are you, sir?"

"I am a captain of the Hungarian cavalry. They call me Captain Glasspeeper, because one of my eyes is of glass."

"And what do you desire of me?"

"No draught, and no salve, Master savant! What I ask of you is something else, since you are so well versed in the *Scientiis*, in particular the *Necromantia*. I once knew someone who taught me that bygone years all drift about in the same place, *stagnum oblivionis*, the pool of forgetting, like clouds in empty space, and can return or vanish at the call and command of particular human beings. Master, do you have power over bygone times? Can you make words ring out again that have long since died, and people long mouldering in their graves flicker before my eyes?"

"Brother, you ask almost too much. Such acts belong only to God, and the tiresome Devil."

"Yet, Master, I knew one who with magic spells and henbane smoke conjured murderous Nero's shade from its tomb, and made it come to our table, and sing and play the lute."

The alchemist leans down, fixes me with a long look, and whispers: "Brother, the one who achieved that feat can only be the Count of Matiscona. I know him well, only seven weeks ago I sent a messenger to that great astrologer and aurifex. I desired to know from him an arcane word pregnant with secrets, which I myself have been unable to locate, yet I need it to bring to conclusion a matter of great importance. Just one little word, yet a human life depends on it. God willing, his answer shall arrive in good time, or I must expect enormous distress."

“You see, Master, how amazed I am. An infant crawling in the dirt would find the Garden of Paradise or the Holy Land sooner than your messenger will find the Count of Matiscona. Learn from me that Matiscona is dead. At the Hungarian castle of Gran, the Friday before Palm Sunday, I myself stood at his deathbed. He who could use Hebrew magic spells to banish every ailment and fever fell victim to a new disease never before seen, that no one before him ever contracted, and none after him. Truly, it is not good to spy into God’s secrets.”

The old man stands before me, face pressed into his hands. Wind plays in his white hair.

Now he stands straight. His face is very pale. “Brother, thank you! Now my mood is gladdened and relieved. But for you I would have stumbled about for many more days in impatient dread, and grief would for many more nights have torn me from sleep, for fear that Matiscona’s answer might reach me just one little hour too late. For a human life depended on this matter. But now within me all is once again blithe and calm. Thank God for you, brother. Tell me again what it is you want.”

“What I want is a year of my bygone life, one year when a voice called to me three times at this hour. Master! I shall say a Paternoster for your blessing, if you grant me this boon.”

The alchemist fills his cup from a flask he carries at his belt. “May God grant you your wish. Drink this – and do not forget the Paternoster.”

It tastes of flaming sulphur, and takes away my breath. “Master, your wine is no Hungarian or Brabanter. Aah, your wine burns me to the heart.”

The old man smiles and gives a nod. “*Et quid volo, nisi ut ardeat?* What else do I want, except it burn?”

I cannot take another sip, it burns my throat like the fires of Hell. I throw down the cup.

“Brother! Why did you not drink it all? You’ve wasted a fair amount!”

“What lay in the bottom of the cup?”

“I do not know. Perhaps a great sorrow, perhaps the tail-end of a blessing. Fare you well, brother, and do not forget that Paternoster!”

Blood races wildly at my temples, my heart beats like the bells at Ave prayers. Never since youthful days has my heart been so sore and afraid. “Master! People say you mean to reveal to the Emperor the secret of how tin and bad copper can be transmuted into purest gold. Master, I beg you, do not do this, gold must not come into the Emperor’s hands! Whole peoples I saw die, and empires turn to rubble, all for gold. If you do not hold your tongue, you will bring dreadful calamity into the world. For the love of God, never reveal your secret to the Emperor, or else the world will go down in flames!”

The old man smiles, gazes into the distance as if in a reverie, and says softly into the wind: “*Et quid volo, nisi ut ardeat?*” And now the two bodyguards close in, and he goes with them on his way, vanishing into the dark of night. But the musketeer has leapt to his feet and shouts after him: “There he goes, the snuffler, the blowhard! Damn me! When a man runs to see the hangman, you shouldn’t stand in his way. Didn’t the Emperor swear on his golden crown that the fellow will be hanged on his own personal gallows if he doesn’t turn a heap of rusty

horseshoe nails into thirty thousand gold doubloons and Hungarian ducats by Saint Nicholas Day? Od's bods, there'll be enough snuffling and beard-stroking when it's his own best neck!"

"Stop, quiet now!" shouts another nearby. "You've sung enough of your mockery!"

"May hailstones beat down on him! All he knows is swindles and monkey business, he has no real skills. He's never made a soldier's hide impervious to stabs and blows, and doesn't know how to bless a bullet."

"Zounds! What need have I of such a blackguard? I'm never without a breviary of the Holy Virgin, as well as the 'Seven Daily Hours of Our Dear Lady' at my side. They're plenty good enough against stabs and blows. I won't ride in the Devil's coach."

An ice-grey Spaniard stands and shakes his head. "Brothers! Making stab-fast and casting consecrated bullets, that's no Devil's art, but ancient usage of war handed down from forefathers. Myself I knew a man, Garcia Novarro, he was so pious a Christian we called him Secretary of Heaven, yet he could consecrate bullets as if he spied the Devil in the crucible."

"I knew the fellow! Didn't go well for him," someone interjected.

"True!" said the old man. "He was despatched to eternal bliss in a hempen sling. Because he lost his arquebus at dice to a German bravo, and no amount of begging and haggling got it back. So Cortez had him restrained in mid-air. But before they hanged him he cursed the one-eyed German's three bullets, twisting the compass in such a way that the first hit the heathen king on the city wall, the second the innocent maiden, and the third the German himself!"

"No!" another cried. "Not the German! The German's still alive! But accursed and damned, because he wouldn't doff his hat to an image of Christ, and he can't die, but races madly through the woods with his equerry, and if any Spaniard encounters him by night, or any monk, he turns their face back to front!"

"Nah, I'll win the Devil's lottery if the German and his mute aren't interred at Veracruz."

"Rubbish! He's alive! I know better!"

Their noisy bickering fades in my ears, I no longer hear what they say about the German and his three bullets. I seem to have heard this fable before, once upon a time. It lurks obscurely in my head, I know not from where, maybe I read it in some stupid book, in *Amadis* or *Ritter Löw*. How did it go? Three bullets – the first hit a noble king, the second an innocent child – how did it go on? – who was hit by the third?

Oh, why fret over it! My head has grown heavy from the alchemist's sulphur that lies like an iron band around my brow. Leaden weights hang from my eyelids, and sleep stands there, he's a most haughty Spanish gentleman, goes arrogantly on his way, pretends not to know me. Has a white ruff around his neck, at every step a plume nods over his helmet, black and white, and the world is mirrored in his cuirass.

What's he holding in his hand ... a naked sword ... in letters of flame I read: *Rubet ensis sanguine hostium*!² Now he stands before me ... a chill courses through my limbs ... he looms tall, gigantic, his body reaches for the stars, dark clouds in the sky brush past his brow ... blood drips like rain from his fist ... a mountain lies on my breast ... I must cry for help ... it's

Hernando Cortez, God have mercy on me! He speaks to me ... thunder rumbles from his mouth: "Give back the arquebus, Wildgrave of the Rhine!"

Who – who uttered that name? Someone called out: *Wildgrave of the Rhine!* He's long since dead, what have I to do with him! The Emperor caused his banishment to be cried in every marketplace and alley in every town; I don't know him ... I am Captain Glasspeeper ... have no other name ... now ... someone's calling again: "Wildgrave of the Rhine!"

It's one of the musketeers, he uttered that name long since vanished and forgotten. It's a Spanish caballero, an old man of lanky frame, with grey hair and grey beard. They lie in a circle all around him, one taps lightly on the drum, the others listen in silence.

"To think you've forgotten the Wildgrave of the Rhine, you Germans! Fie shame! You praise and admire any rascal who achieves dignities, but if one fights starless against the whole pack, you forget all about him. In truth, when a man falls, the world rolls right over him. We Spaniards were enemies of this Grumbach, we slew his retainers, and did him all manner of harm and detriment. And yet, if I am to tell the story of Grumbach and his three bullets, so allow me, gentlemen, first to all to do him honour in Castilian fashion:

"Greetings, Wildgrave of the Rhine! Across oceans and years I greet you, solitary man. You did not shrink from the rage of Cortez, with your three bullets you defied the entire Spanish army undaunted. And now when you rest in foreign soil, and no one in the German lands has any memory of you, let it be me who brings you home from your foreign grave, and into a German ballad."

Three bullets ... arquebus ... Spanish armada – yes, suddenly I recall it all ... figures emerge ... tawny men with boats hoisted on their backs ... a stone idol glares at me with evil eyes ... fiery beacons on every hilltop ... again I see myself smashing to bits the wooden door, but this time I must not laugh at myself, for too much grief lies on my heart ... there's a mist about me of human shapes, they raise their hands and seek the light, and yet must melt away before I know their faces ... a name echoes in my ear – yes, Delilah was her name ... and her childlike voice calls from a great distance: "What do you want with me?"

Enough! Why has he paused? Why does he stand there gazing at the clouds? Time presses, stars are winking in the sky ... it's a long ride to those three bullets ... it will soon be night! Yes, I am he, I am Grumbach, I am the Wildgrave of the Rhine! Begin, fellow, begin!

Quiet now! He's speaking again. It reaches my ears like a soft drum-tap, as if not far from me a calfskin and a drumstick converse of my extinguished life.

**THE TALE OF GRUMBACH
AND HIS THREE BULLETS**

THE BROTHERS

As I recall, I first saw Franz Grumbach, he who for reasons of state was executed and his lands confiscated, known by his full title “Wildgrave at Grumbach and on the Rhine” – I saw him for the first time in a field south of Ghent, following a duel in which the young Duke of Mendoza inflicted a deadly wound on his opponent, a Castilian of the nobility. In this field I saw Grumbach crouched over his friend, whose pale and blood-spattered head was supported on the surgeon’s arm. All was utterly quiet for a while; the Duke stood leaning against the stonework of the bastion, and seemed sad and filled with remorse that the Castilian, from boyhood his friend and good companion, had been pierced through the throat by his sword. He stood wordless, stared into the distance, and only his horse, which I held by the halter, reared and would not keep still.

Then all of a sudden Grumbach, whose name at the time was on all lips (on account of that business with the Bishop of Speyer, whom he had denounced to the Emperor, reviling him as a loose and dissolute priestling) – Grumbach broke the silence. Very quickly and in great haste, as if he feared he would not complete the task, he addressed the dying man: “Be assured,” he said, with a brief glance at the Duke, “that I shall keep a close eye on your bride as if she were my own sister, and shall suffer no other to approach her too close.”

The dying man understood him full well, and spoke, though blood gushed from his mouth, in a low voice: “My Franz! It’s too late. In my family we have a saying: Any girl who kisses a Mendoza becomes a whore. Women are like herons in autumn: fly off and know their way. Don’t trouble yourself, you’ll never hold her back. Fare you well, with a blessing from the Mother of God, the sweet Virgin.”

The Duke stared motionless out over the fields, as if he had heard not a word of this, but the rest of us knew that it was gospel truth what a carver for the King’s table had reported the day before about the cause of the duel, namely that the Duke of Mendoza, in a nook of the big banqueting hall, had hugged and kissed Señorita Catalina Juarez, the Castilian’s bride.

The Castilian’s equerry, a blond German lad named Melchior Jäcklein, his cheeks wet with bright tears, crouched low over his master, and begged: “Squire, truly you’d do well to say a little pious verse or prayer. Not because you’re in any peril, don’t think that. For a Paternoster isn’t like one of milord Medici’s concoctions, that take a man’s life if used at the wrong hour.”

The Castilian opened his eyes and said: “Melchior, how did it go, that song about roses you played for us on the lute?” And he began to sing in a low quavering voice:

*April showers,
maiden’s love and lark’s sweet song,
and rose’s bloom,
all sweet, and gone so soon.*

It cut us all to the quick to hear this dying man sing in such a loving poignant tone.

“Your equerry, Melchior Jäcklein, I shall take and employ in my service,” said Grumbach after a while, and the fellow stood up and said: “My master behaved with courage, and it’s not

his fault he lies so lamentably here. He knew nothing of these false new practices: to let the blade drop like you've been run through, and then commit dastardly murder!"

"Peace, Melchior," the dying man said. "Your head is filled with crickets and doves. A thousand fancies lie hidden there."

But the Duke of Mendoza suddenly shook off his cold calm, whacked his dun on the head with his crop, and cried: "Someone lay a whip on that rogue's mouth! Rip out his tongue!"

Grumbach stepped towards him and took his measure menacingly from head to toe, but the Duke turned his back, and stroked his dun tenderly on neck and mane.

Behind me were two Flemish noblemen of the Duke's entourage. One said softly in his own language: "They go at each other like wolf and hound, yet both are dough from the same trough."

"Dough from the same trough?" the other asked.

"Don't you know? But every spit-boy and every stable lad in the palace knows that those two, the Wildgrave and the Duke, for all their mutual enmity, are both King Philipp's bastards, but from different mothers."

"Pon my soul! They could hardly be less alike."

"You find it strange?" the first one countered. "I don't. If the Duke has the late king's Spanish pride, then the Wildgrave is his German soul."

Meanwhile the surgeon had withdrawn his numbed arm from under the Castilian's head, and climbed in silence to his feet. Blond Melchior began to pray out loud, but Grumbach doffed his hat to take leave of his dead friend.

That's where I saw that face for the first time, and back then it had none of the marks and scars that later so disfigured it. And did I not see Grumbach many times in the New World: once on the island of Ferdinandina, badly wounded, twisting and turning in a fever; once in Cortez' tent, disputing heatedly with Spanish captains on behalf of the Protestant religion; once in deep remorse, grinding his teeth before an image of Our Saviour; and when I think of him today, he comes before my eyes as he appeared to me back then in that field by Ghent: I see him sombre and filled with grief at his dead friend's side, and on his lips a bitter smile at the thought of maiden's love and rose's bloom.

THE NEW WORLD

After that day by Ghent, two years passed before I next saw Grumbach. And during those two years it happened that he forfeited his lands and his titles, and the Emperor's favour likewise, and fled his homeland and the Old World. In the New World, in the camp of Cortez' army, I encountered him again. Yet even before that, it seems our paths crossed by some strange chance. I caught a glimpse for one fleeting moment, but failed to recognise him, for his face then was marred by dirt and blood. Only later did I find out it was he, who had just carried Delilah down from the cliff top to the shore.

And all I saw back then, but failed properly to understand – the mangled conversations of carousing Germans in the Portugee's hut; the dreadful battle of ships in the rainy night; and the sinking of the Spanish caravel – today I can explain it all: it was from the Emperor's rage that Grumbach had fled to the New World; Imperial galleys were on his tail, and I saw a shadow of his flight, as when sometimes on a hot summer's day you see the shadow of a flock of wild birds skim silently across a meadow.

Back then we sat, six Spaniards and a Portugee, on Ferdinandina, one of those big islands that lie not far from the new continent. We traded with the Indians, buying from them bird pelts and gold nuggets, mastic, red peppercorns, cinnamon and ginger. Once a month the Governor's lieutenant came from Baracoa, capital of the island, to take away in his barque all we had bartered, sometimes paying us twenty gold pesos or even more for our wares. And he brought us smoked meats, bread, chickens and brandy, and other necessities of life.

We had built our huts close to the shore, and the sound of breaking surf rang day and night in our ears. Not a thousand yards from our huts, cliffs reared into the sky, which from our side could be ascended only at risk to life and limb. From the summit of this rocky height a broad river came rushing down. There were several Indian villages up there, and sometimes the waterfall carried down wooden implements, bones and skins, and often the bodies of mutilated Indians, bearing witness to the warfare they conducted among themselves and with the Governor's people. And the din from the waterfall was so great, that out in the open we had to raise our voices and shout to make ourselves understood.

It was around the time when big rains come over the country, and every evening when it began to grow dark the sky grew overcast with heavy clouds, and relentless rain fell until next morning. Gusts whirled wet leaves up from the ground, and flung them in our faces.

The threefold song of water – the crash of surf, the deafening roar of the waterfall, and endless pouring rain – sickened our minds, and awoke melancholy and bleakness in our hearts.

We had a wooden cathedral, a capacious store shed, and a hut of wide beams and stout doors in which we kept all our trade goods. Every evening when it began to rain, we came together in the Portugee's hut that served as our tavern, to play dice and gossip.

One evening a caravel approached the island, and cast anchor in our little harbour. We all ran to the beach, and watched as a dinghy was lowered and rowed towards the beach. Six or seven men at once jumped from the boat. One greeted us in broken Spanish, asked how long we had lived here and to what purpose, and whether any surgeon dwelt among us. Meanwhile three of them, equipped with axes and ropes, had already started to fell one of the tall slender sycamores, which they needed for a mast, as the caravel's foremast had broken in the storm.

The others began to dig a deep pit not far from our cathedral, and when their work was done they made their way back to the beach, and lifted the body of an old man from the dinghy. His brow had been pierced by a bullet. They lowered him into the grave, with much curious ceremonial that seemed highly un-Christian. Then one pulled a flag of black cloth from under his coat. When it was unfurled we saw with astonishment that on this flag was painted no coat of arms, no image of a saint, but rather only a crude boot of the kind peasants

wear.³ This they spread over the corpse, shovelled soil on top, and all the while no one said a word, yet all seemed grieving and in gloomy spirits.

Meanwhile it had begun to rain, and we betook ourselves in haste to the Portugee's hut, leaving the strangers to continue their curious antics in the wet.

We sat around the plank table, drinking brandy and speculating about our taciturn new guests. Someone suggested they were filibusters, or pirates, of whom at that time there were many in those seas, and that they must have engaged in serious fighting not long since, for they had asked about a surgeon. As our discussion proceeded, the door was opened, and three of the filibusters stepped in, shook rain from their coats, and plumped themselves solidly down at our table.

For a while they sat without a word, stretched their legs under the table, and rested their heads heavily in their hands. But the Portugee was all agog to know whence these strange guests had come, and whither they might be headed. So he placed a jug of brandy, a loaf and a whole ham on the table before them. The strangers drew knives from pockets, and set to.

"It's a good eleven weeks since we last had a crust of fresh bread between our teeth," one of them said suddenly, in the Spanish tongue.

"You had such a long voyage?" the host asked. "You must be Englishers, or Flemish."

The stranger shook his head. "We all of us and our captain and the others back there on the *Hölzerner Igel*, we're all Germans from the Rhine."

"What is that, 'Holzerner Igel'?" asked the host.

"*Hölzerner Igel* is what our ship is called," the German said. "Means 'wooden hedgehog'."

"Not many Germans come to our New World," said the host. "What do you seek here?"

"In these lands, we heard, a priestling is even now scarcer than bacon in a Jew's kitchen."

"Did you have problems with the Church back there? So, you might not be well received among us, for a pious and Christian land is our New World!"

"Brother," said the German, "whatever a peasant back there in Germany gains from his field finds its way to a priestling's belly. And there's not a priestling too humble to relieve the peasant of his very boots."

The host, a zealous Christian, was appalled to hear the German speak so. "Insulting a priest," he cried, "is not far from abjuring the Pope in Rome."

The peasant drained his glass and said: "I am no papist. And I'm not ashamed to say it out loud. The priests have drawn the blood from our bodies, and the marrow from our bones."

"What you say is a heap of stinking lies," the host cried, very red in the face. "Have also been in Germany. Everywhere met clergy wailing and weeping, because sturdy peasant dungstompers never ever think anything except best way to keep stuffing their gullets." And the host stroked his beard, laughed, and then said: "But not with the word of God."

"So beware wailing priests, and laughing hosts!" was the peasant's terse response.

"You should have stayed in Germany!" the host grumbled. "In our lands you will gain nothing but a scratch behind the ear."

"An honest man's inheritance lies in every land," the peasant said coolly.

The Portugee made no more reply, but went out, and could be heard grumbling by the sheds and storehouse.

"Where are you headed from here?" one of us asked. "If you're going to Baracoa, you'll have no long voyage."

"We travel west. There a continent is said to lie, not yet trodden by the Spanish."

"You'll look for gold there?"

"No!" said the German. "We shall plant barley and wheat, and some oats, and beets too."

But among us was a lad by name of Guevara, a prankster and thoroughgoing rascal, who thought to tease the peasant, saying: "Zounds, so don't you know that in those lands it rains not water but melted candlewax, so the only crop to thrive in that soil is consecrated candles?"

"So corn and barley don't thrive? Where do cattle find their clover, and horses their oats?"

"In those lands there are neither horses nor cattle."

"Where then do the baker's obtain their milk and flour, for bread and lard-cakes?"

"Know," Guevara lied, "that in those lands people obtain their milk from a peculiar kind of toad, or croaker, they're more than four boot-heels high and squat everywhere on the roads. And the bakers know clever ways to use bird-shit instead of flour. But other kinds of beast are not found in those lands."

The peasants' jaws dropped, and dribble trickled down their chins. "In German forests," one said, "there are all kinds of game: stags, roe deer, sows, hares enough. And fieldfares too, quail, and partridge. But what use are they to the peasant, who is permitted to hunt only the fleas in his shirt."

"Let the good man tell us now," another turned to Guevara, "since he has travelled so widely in this New World: what are the women like in those lands? Do they have lovely fair hair? Do they have the eyes of doves, lips like roses, hands soft as spun flax? Is their nature cheerful? Can they dance and sing at carnival, and laugh so that it's a joy to look on them?"

"Know," said Guevara, his face grave, "that the women in these lands crawl on all fours, and their whole body is covered in red and black hair, like monkeys. And they lay eggs, and sit on them until hatched, and this they do three times a year."

Now one of the Germans banged his fist on the table and roared: "Damnation! Our captain may be fool enough to hide himself away in such a horrid filthy place, but I shall never do so! I go no farther!"

"Oh, poor devil," a comrade said. "Did you think to find another such country as Germany away across the sea? You'll never find another Germany in the New World." And he added, in a deeply melancholy tone: "When the wine's all gone, we must make do with small beer." He

meant that since life in Germany was now barred to them, for good or ill they had to betake themselves to the New World.

Hearing his words, we were seized with sympathy, and realised how much distress and hardship there must have been to drive these peasants from their homes to the unexplored New World. Even Guevara now thought to console them, saying: "But they're a peaceable and benevolent folk, the Indios of the New World. It's good to go to market with them, for they set little store by riches and golden things. I myself once obtained from them a whole handful of gold nuggets, in exchange for a shard of blue glass and two ells of red cloth."

Hardly had the words left his mouth when the German sitting next to him delivered him a stinging blow behind the ears. "Pestilence take you!" roared the furious German. "That's your deserts for such blatant lies! A man must be stupid to believe such a foolish bargain."

"Hoy, thresherman!" cried Guevara as he fled to the door; "Why do you thresh me just when what I told you was no lie, for once. By all God's saints, it's the truth."

At that moment the door was flung open, and the Portugee rushed breathless into the room, shoved past Guevara and cried: "Come outside, quick. The Governor's bloodhounds are once again all over the villages of those Indios! I just heard the last rites."

We jumped to our feet and tumbled out through the doorway, for we knew well what the Portugee meant by 'last rites'. As soon as we were outside we ran swiftly to that place along the beach where the river dropped from the cliff into the valley. As we ran we could hear from the heights the death-cry our host called 'last rites'. And the cry was so dreadful and horrid that our knees began to tremble as we ran.

"His last confession!" the Portugee gasped beside me. "He won't cry much more in his life."

We came to the foot of the cliff, and stared in horror at the furious roaring spate.

"You see him? There he dances," said the Portugee suddenly, pointing to the jagged cleft through which water thundered and foamed. We saw a dark body shoot lightning-swift amid foaming water down into the valley. The river at once spat out at our feet the corpse of a man with shattered limbs.

It was an old thin grey-haired Indian. His arms were tied behind his back, and his bare chest gaped with a wide wound. Head and legs were shattered from the fall.

"It's the Governor's men do that sort of thing," said Guevara. "Seignior Diego Velasquez needs many bondmen and women as hands to work the estates granted to him on this island by the King's grace. So he sends out his people to fall on Indio villages by night, and take away men, boys and young females. But old people are killed without mercy, unless they manage to escape into the jungle."

"Not true," said the Portugee. "Only obstinate heathen are killed, but if an old man agrees to be baptised, they do him no harm, even give him bread and meat. Always one or two priests go with the slave-catchers, so that the Indios can be baptised."

The Germans exchanged glances, and one said: "In truth, whenever they come to a village to harry the peasants from pillar to post, they always have one or two priestlings in tow."

One of the Germans held up the murdered man's head, and said: "A fine peasant head. Lined face, and horny hands. He tilled and threshed his whole life long; truly, misery is the lot of peasants in every land, and meseems I am still in Germany!"

Another cried: "Brother! They're sat up there, priestlings and lordlings together, they've stuffed their bellies full to bursting, stolen all the sausages and bacon from the Indios' chimney-nooks, slaughtered the fat sows in the pens, and shot bolts at the chickens for their sport. Brothers! What say we go up there, and raise a farewell toast to those merry gentlemen?"

"Brothers! I think our master should see this murdered peasant. Lift him!" All three lifted the dead Indian from the ground, carried him to the boat, and pushed off.

During the night I was awakened by the barking of dogs. I peeped through the hut window and saw seven of the Germans hasting with long strides through the rain towards the forest. In one hand they held a storm lantern, in the other an arquebus, and the man at their head had a pack of hounds on leashes. They disappeared with their lanterns between the trees of the forest, and even the hounds' barking faded. Then sleep overcame me, as I wondered what game the Germans meant to hunt in our island's pathless forests.

It was already broad daylight when I was summoned from sleep by the shouts and knocks of my companions. As I stepped to the door, I became aware of arquebus fire echoing a thousandfold. On the cliff top I could see flames shooting high, and wild screams and shouts filled the air. No German could be seen, but suddenly I recalled the nocturnal hunting party, and realised that while we slept they had ascended the lofty cliff, and were now ejecting Diego Velasquez' bloodhounds from the village with their firearms.

As we stood and listened, the Portugee suddenly uttered a cry, and hurried towards the cliff where the river dropped into the valley. We ran behind him, and found him bent over the body of one of the Germans, which showed terrible stab wounds. The rushing water had tumbled the body from one rocky bank of the narrow river to the other, as it had the previous day's Indian corpse. And while we busied ourselves with the body, the water cast up a dead hound; its throat had been slashed. The shooting and tumult from the cliff top gradually abated, and we watched in fear and horror as the river delivered up three German corpses one after the other to land at our feet.

Three hours passed while we washed the bodies clean of dirt and blood, and dug a wide grave not far from the place where they had buried their comrade the previous day. We could only surmise that the Germans had all been overcome by the Governor's people, and had paid for their reckless endeavour with their lives, for there had long been no more sounds of shooting. And so we searched carefully all about the watercourse for more bodies, using poles and nets, but all we fished out was a hat and a tattered shirt.

Around four in the afternoon we heard dogs baying in the forest, and before long we saw three Germans trudge slowly and wearily out from the treeline. The one in the lead stepped laboriously and bent, on his back a heavy load. Behind him came a man who seemed wounded, supported and helped along by the third.

The clothes hung from them in rags. Our host called out mockingly: Had they been skirmishing with a bramble hedge? But as they approached closer, the host fell silent, for it seemed from their appearance that three dead men came grinning towards us. The feet dragged, the hollow eyes stared into emptiness, the one in the middle staggered this way and that, and the mouths of all three twitched with mad laughter.

Suddenly the one in the lead let his burden slide to the ground, as if he could no longer bear it. We saw it was a naked Indian maiden, a child of no more than twelve or thirteen years, but of such beauty and shapeliness of limb as I have never again seen the like. She lay faint and hardly breathing, and her eyes stayed closed even as we washed her with cold water.

This was Delilah, whom I would later encounter again in Cortez' camp together with Grumbach and his men; Delilah, for whose sake Grumbach was bent on killing his own brother the Duke of Mendoza. And she stands even today clearly before my eyes, how she danced, how she laughed, how her eyes bored into the earth when she was sad and downcast, although many years have passed since a bullet fired by Melchior Jäcklein laid her low in the Duke's tent. And never since then have I seen a maiden of such charm and daintiness of limb, so it often seems to me that God or the Devil, whichever of the two created her, was never able to produce another such miracle.

"Where did you find the girl?" the host asked.

"There were too many of them!" the German groaned, and it sounded like a madman's laugh. "Four of us are dead, the captain is sore wounded." And in a low voice, his whole body shivering from chills and fever, he added: "We fetched her away from Hell itself."

"Torn from the jaws of bloodhounds," said the second.

I glanced over at the captain, and saw that his head, temples and brow were bound in strips of rag. Blood seeped through to coat his cheeks and nose, so that the face no longer resembled any human face. He had a fever, swayed back and forth, and jabbered with an unruly tongue: "From the jaws of Hell I fetched her."

Meanwhile a rowing boat had been hauled onto the beach. Four or five more Germans leapt ashore and ran up to us. "Captain!" the foremost shouted while still some distance away. "You're back not before time! Two caravels in view." We stared out to sea, and there indeed were two ships a long way off, heading for our harbour.

"It's true!" cried the Portugee, who had the eyes of a vulture or kestrel. "They're the Governor's caravels *El Sol* and *Dei Gratia*! What can Diego Velasquez be seeking on our beach?"

At the Portugee's words the Germans were seized with great fear and agitation, and bumped into one another like skittles after a good pitch. Only the captain paid no attention. He knelt at the maiden's side and trilled in a low voice: "From the jaws of Hell I fetched her!" The child had meanwhile wakened from her faint, but kept quite still, only her clever eyes roved from one man to the next.

"Captain!" a newly arrived German cried, a pockmarked older man, his voice desperate: "Captain! Wake up! This is no time for fantasizing!"

“Captain! Imperial caravels! Mordio! Helpio! What are we to do?” the despairing Germans cried, all at once.

Now the captain climbed to his feet, took two steps, stared wildly about, and uttered an evil cruel laugh. “Ha!” he screamed, shaking a fist under the noses of the Germans. “Now you come to me for help, my dear stern neighbours of the nobility! Did you not leave me there all alone to oppose the bishop, and all the while you sat with him at table, set to with a will and guzzled whatever your tongues found tasty? Yes, steamed carp for the priestling, roast goose for the priestling; who would not want to be a knight, and enjoy such things!”

“God help us! Our captain doesn’t know who we are,” said one of the Germans.

“He’s back in Germany again!” whispered the second.

“Thinks we’re the counts and lords of the Rhenish Circle, who in his German lawsuit sided with the Bishop of Speyer,” said the third. He pulled the captain by the arm and cried: “Squire! Don’t you know me? I’m Jakob Thonges, your equerry!”

But the captain tore free, glared at him and shouted: “Have you licked the priestling’s pans clean yet? Ha, it’ll be the hangman who wipes your mouth, Squire Kosterlatz!”

“Enough of this nonsense!” cried Jakob Thonges in sudden anger, his voice resolute, and he took the captain again by the arm and bellowed in his ear: “Fight with the Spaniards, captain!”

At once the captain regained his senses, felt his head over, glanced at Jakob Thonges, and then stared sharp-eyed out to sea.

“How many are they, Jakob?” he asked after a while.

“Two caravels I see. Yesterday three were on our tail,” came Thonges’ response.

“Then you shall bring the big quarter-cannon ashore and place it in between the cliffs, so that we can engage the villains from two sides!”

The German ran a few paces towards the sea, then turned and shouted: “Which cannon? The Hornet? The Bass Drone? Mad Meg?”

“Mad Meg!” the captain cried, in a voice so fearsome we all gave a start. “And now to the ship! To the ship!” But at once he lost his wits again, stumbled, sank to his knees, gave a groan and trilled: “From the jaws of Hell I fetched her!”

Two Germans lifted the captain up, and carried him to the shore. The bloody rags wrapped around his head had come loose and now trailed in the sand after him, and we saw that the captain’s left eye dangled. One of the Germans, a stout fellow with a pot belly and a broad face, hoisted the Indian maid onto his back, and hurried after the others, panting heavily.

“If you will sell the girl to me, I give two gold pesos for her!” the Portugee called to him.

It began to rain. The Germans made no reply, but loaded their captain and the girl into the boat. Our host ran down the beach shouting like one possessed: “Three gold pesos! Three gold pesos!” And when they ignored him: “Ha, so take yourselves where the hangman will stretch your necks, you heretic German boobies!”

The Germans paid him no attention, but pushed off, and soon darkness fell and with it the rain at full pelt. And the last we saw was the dark outline of the *Hölzerner Igel* as it headed defiantly, sails spread, to engage the Spaniards.

That night around the eleventh hour, we heard the first cannon fire. It came from our beach: Mad Meg giving audible confirmation of her nickname. We ran outside and climbed onto the cathedral roof. At once cannon began to roar from all three vessels, so that in our alarm and terror beads of sweat bathed our foreheads. At the same time waves began to break with a tremendous crash of stormy foam. It was not long before one of the Spanish ships, *El Sol*, caught fire, and at the Devil's command the rain stopped at that very moment, so that the vessel was soon fiercely ablaze, a most lamentable sight.

The thunder of cannons had meanwhile fallen silent, and now we could hear the crack of arquebus and musket fire, and timbers shattering beneath blows of cudgel and axe. The blazing ship lit up the night, and by the ruddy glow we saw Spaniards dash about screaming, while Germans with their hounds leapt onto the deck of the other vessel, *Dei Gratia*, and the Governor's lieutenant, Hernando Cortez, who defended himself with great vigour and would not yield, was thrown headlong into the sea. While the battle raged on the deck of this ship, on *El Sol* the fire now reached the powder magazine, and with an enormous roar the ship burst into a thousand pieces, filling the air with beams, planks and splinters of mast. Terrified and in great haste, we scrambled down from the roof and fled to our huts, as a hail of splintered wood rained down all around.

All of a sudden the storm of battle abated, and a deep dreadful calm lasted until dawn.

Soon after sunrise the Governor's sailors arrived at the beach and ordered us to vacate our huts. *Dei Gratia* lay stranded like a slaughtered calf on the sand. We had to move five or six wounded into our huts, but there was no time to trouble ourselves with the killed and drowned, of whom we saw more than forty, because we had to hasten at once with our tools to render the vessel shipshape again from the severe damage caused by reefs and cannon-fire. Mad Meg lay high on the hillside, overturned, her barrel burst. Far out to sea, no bigger than a silver thaler, we saw the German ship, sailing away to the golden lands of the west.

As we knelt in the sand busy with saw, hammer and nails, Seignior Diego Velasquez, the Governor, came by accompanied by the Duke of Mendoza, whom the King not long before had despatched to the New World with fresh troops, and appointed, despite his youth, as Governor of the island of Jamaica. At their side was Seignior Hernando Cortez, at that time lieutenant and secretary to the Governor. He still wore his soaked clothes, and with every step seawater squirted from his boots.

The Governor was in a great fury of vexation; he kept thrashing the ground with his whip and crying in an overloud voice: "The Devil himself helped them away with his tail!"

"Now," Cortez said, glowering, "now you foam at the mouth, and bare your teeth like a chained cur. But when I advised you yesterday to blow the German caravel up with gunpowder in the night, you would not listen."

“Seignior Cortez,” said the Governor sternly, “it may be you have a certain knowledge of military affairs. But in matters of court, in the ways of the world and of politics, you have not yet acquired enough experience. Otherwise you would have learned, as I did, the secret will and intent of His Royal Majesty in the letter I received from his august hand: namely that we should proceed gently against the Count, and take him into custody without causing him serious injury to life or limb. He must once have been held in high regard at court, this German. Do you know,” he turned to Mendoza, “how did he lose our gracious King’s favour? I have heard talk of breach of the peace, alliance with rebellious peasants, and open sedition against the Imperial person.”

“Oh,” said the Duke airily, “just some fashionable quarrel, hardly worth a mention. He had little time for the black-gown fraternity. And you know how at court –” He began to warble:

*The man of the cloth you must flatter
If you want his assent to the matter.*

“And now he’s sailing away!” said Cortez, aggrieved, pointing to the Germans’ ship, visible to the eye only as a tiny dark spot. He clenched his fist and shook it, and water drained from the sleeve. “He’ll teach the Indios of the mainland to make good use of an arquebus. When we land on their coast next year, they’ll know how to give us a friendly welcome – with lead shot.”

“Seignior Cortez!” the Duke mocked. “It may be you have some knowledge of courtly matters, the ways of the world and politics; but in matters of war you still lack experience. Let me tell you: that ship will never reach the mainland. It has more holes than a Jew’s fur has lice.”

The trio wandered farther along the beach. But these words about Grumbach’s fate slipped past me like the shadow of a bird in flight. Yet I did not know that it was he of whom they spoke, and only much later did it enter my mind, when I saw him with his men and his Indian maid, whom the Germans had christened Delilah, for it was on her account that Grumbach, a second Samson, lost an eye.

But at that time, on the island of Ferdinandina which is now called Cuba, I did not know Grumbach, and everything I witnessed – the burial of the dead German, the captain’s delirious ranting, the night battle of the caravels – it all vanished within a few days almost completely from my memory. For so many singular things swarmed about us in the New World that one might as well forego astonishment. In the forests of the New World I have seen spiders big as wolves, and swallows equipped with a sting. There are brooks in those lands that flow warm in winter but cool in summer, so that people sleep in them as in a bed. I have encountered Indian tribes who all had purple hair, and others who at their feasts sucked on pearls big as a fist, as if they were soft-boiled eggs. And on certain trees in the New World, a fruit grows that they call Golgotha-figs. When you cut one open, blood spills out, and instead of a stone it has within it hundreds of Christ’s crosses, together with all the implements of the Passion. In sum: the singular curiosities of forest and land are so numerous that one forgets about the human soul’s outlandishness, and pays little heed to anger, vengeance and heresy. And so, on our island, we soon forgot all about the German captain and his people.

For over there, any given day provides enough of its own wonders.

GOD'S QUARTER-CANNON

That year and the next, I accumulated through trading on the island of Ferdinandina more than thirty ounces of gold dust. This wealth I kept in a leathern pouch concealed behind the codpiece of my hose, marvelling at how blessed I was on Earth to have such treasure. But in Baracoa I squandered all my gold on fripperies. For the buildings of this town are filled with strumpets wearing gloves, fine veils and clothing all cut away bar the skirt. And I was zealous in pursuit, and lacked the wits even of a fish, for I let them land me with their line and hook, so that after several days not a penny's worth remained behind my codpiece.

I lodged at that time in a tavern, whose sign depicted the giant Christophor lying on his stomach, and with puffed-out cheeks sucking dry the waters of Jordan. This picture angered me every time I saw it, for during those days I fared not much better than the holy man. Once all my gold dust was gone from its pouch, the only credit my host would grant me was water, and if ever he gave me a mug of wine, it was for sure sour wine from a poor vintage. So I sat day after day sulking in the tavern's parlour, cursing the host and the women. I had whittled a sharp splinter of wood, and with it I stabbed to death any fly I found on the wall.

In such condition I was discovered one evening by two Spanish cavaliers, who stepped in from somewhere in the hostelry. They were smartly dressed, with heron plumes in their hats, were served by the host himself, and both downed a skinful.

One – his arm was in a sling – I knew by name; he was a coarse, haughty, arrogant donkey. But I happened to know that, not long before, he had visited the Indian mainland with Cortez' army, so I asked him about it: "Brother, what wind blew you here? Is the war over, and do you have in your sack the crown of the Great Lord of the Indios?"

"We're on leave from Cortez' army, we're to take back bread, bacon and oats," the cavalier replied. "And falconets and horses, and a bunch of good riders too. A plague on all Germans! But for them, we'd have laid hands on the Indio king's little treasure chest long ago."

Puzzled, I asked: "What Germans are those?"

"Od's death and terror! So you don't know that a bunch of Germans arrived before us in the realm of the heathen king? They're putting up stiff resistance to Cortez. I myself received a nasty knock from them, so that my blood ran down my shoulder hot as beer-cakes at Easter."

Hearing him gripe so, I just had to laugh. But he began to curse: "Od's pox on all German dolts, including that raving madman their leader." At once the thought entered my mind that the mad leader could be none other than the German captain from Ferdinandina. And so I asked them both if they would kindly tell me more of the battles they had gone through.

They began to prate mightily of fights, plunder and slaughter, with no end to the spilling of blood. "Won't you join us?" one suddenly turned to me. "You'd make a fine cavalryman in Cortez' army. We've already recruited seventeen, they're on board already." He dipped a hand into his hose-pouch, and slapped a little heap of gold dust down on the table, along with two golden crayfish, such that the Indians of those lands wear in their hair, or at the throat.

I could not but think of the riches I'd allowed so woefully to be tricked from me. My fingers twitched towards the gold, and it seemed the most sensible thing in the world to attach myself to Cortez' army. The other man knocked back my hand, and told his companion with a laugh to put the gold away: "His ears are pricked like my stallion's, when he sees the bag of oats coming!"

But just as I was about to shake on it, a fit of scaffold-regret came over me. I said to myself: why take up such a trade, better leave it alone. So I said to the men: "Friends, comrades, that's something to be pondered, and slept on."

"Ha!" the cavalier insisted. "What need for long reflection? You should thank us and be done. Go at it, go at it, in our business there's no time for shilly-shally."

"Let me think it over for a day or two. You must be patient. Today's Wednesday, not a good day, our Lord Christ was sold by Judas on a Wednesday."

"No!" cried the cavalier. "You must come aboard this very night! By morning you'll not find us in harbour. Don't want to? Then you wear a hareskin for a bib, God rot you for a whoreson!"

The business did not please me. But I couldn't stop moping over my lost wealth, and I thought: when the Devil has the saddle, he has the steed too. I let them persuade me, and went with them to the ship.

At the gangway a little slobbery fellow came up to me, he had a face like a cockerel, even had a cock's feather in his hat. He crowed in my ear: "Welcome to my ship! Be most welcome!"

"Who are you?" I asked.

"I am Pedro Carbonaro, provost of Cortez."

"By all the saints!" I cried. "Back home, people call the Devil by that name!"

"Ha!" said the little man venomously. "You can keep all your saints, and in the Devil's name I'll keep my Devil's name to myself."

With that he stalked off, and I climbed down to the lower deck to seek my lodgement. But there wasn't a single spot where I'd be able to stretch my legs from my chest. For cattle and horses were chained up there, with falconets and other small cannon, quarter-cannon and powder kegs in between, so that I had trouble enough to find a way through.

So I and several other cavaliers found quarters with the whores, of whom there were many on board. They too were heading for Veracruz, and from there to the camp of Cortez' army. Not one was deterred by the long perilous journey, for each hoped to scoop a bucketful from the great river of gold that flowed from the Indians' empire into the pockets of the Spaniards.

Wooden hutches had been erected on deck for these women, and these they had to share with us. And believe you me, more hallelujahs were uttered on that voyage than a priestling hears from Easter to Whitsun.

After midnight, shortly before we set sail, an elegant lady came on board with pages and maids, and a Fool too, and a lute-player. She brought many trunks and chests with her, and found three silken tents made ready, that had been set up for her splendidly enough on deck.

"She's Catalina Juarez, also off to Cortez' camp. Forty gold Castilians Pedro Carbonaro got from her to take her along. Man! And you he takes for nothing," said my comrade. In truth, now I recognised her: the Duke of Mendoza's sweetheart. She wore an embroidered cowl, a red veil, and a camisole of the same colour. A little white dog leapt yapping about her.

"She's chasing after young Mendoza," my comrade explained. "Can't let him be, any more than a crow can cease hopping. And yet in Baracoa he drove her from the house with his horsewhip. He'll not see her any more, he's more occupied with military affairs than pretty ladies, is the young Duke."

Just then loud cries and shrieks erupted. Catalina's pages were shooing a pair of whores from one of the silken tents, where they had thought to find a sleeping place. They wouldn't leave, but fought for their couches with as much scolding and screaming as those two women who came before Solomon about their baby.

Catalina Juarez stood outside the tent, her face proud and angry, tapping her foot impatiently. The pages managed to drag the whores out, scolding all the time: "Oh you sowers of discord! Oh you shameless wayward hussies!"

Then it grew calm again, Catalina disappeared into her tent, and our vessel slowly slipped out of the harbour of Baracoa.

Our passage across the Indian main passed with pleasant weather, and we arrived at the town of Veracruz, known also as Vila Rica, or Rich Town. From here the journey covered more than eighty leagues of newly conquered country, in which Cortez' army had behaved wickedly with rapine, burning, and laying waste. For three days we advanced through the district of Cempoal, where all the natives received and fed us in a very friendly manner, for these Indians were enemies of the Tenochtitlan Empire, against which Cortez directed his campaign.

Then we came to steep mountainous country, and a pass which was called "In God's Name". From there we tramped across a desolate waste, uninhabited on account of its barrenness and heat, and arrived at a province called Tlascalca, in the capital of which one of Cortez' lieutenants awaited us with a thousand Indians, peaceable men sent by Cortez to escort us to the Spanish camp.

On the twenty-second day of our journey, we reached the high valley of Tenochtitlan, having shortly before been obliged to defend ourselves against assaults from hostile Indians, who fell on us and caused some damage. But the closer we came to Cortez' camp, the harder it was to endure the heat, and we were so tormented by dust we could hardly breathe. The farther we rode, the more vigorously we had to scare off swarms of vultures and crows that scuffled about the carcasses of creatures dead of thirst, and which would not be shooed off until we threw stones. The road we travelled on was well marked; we could not mistake the way, for to right and left lay mules, donkeys and horses, necks stretched and tongues lolling, filling the air with their stench. With every step, dust swirled up towards our mounts and stuck in our eyes and throat, so that we all had to feel our way like blind men.

When we were not more than two leagues from the camp, the first Spanish sentries hailed us, and one joined our train, riding beside Catalina's palanquin to lead us into camp.

Just then we saw a tented town on a hillside before us, not far from numerous steep forested cliffs, in whose shade we really wanted to ride, since they promised cool shelter from the sun's heat. But our guide advised us to keep to open ground, saying that on every cliff rebellious Germans had dug themselves in, and we must stay alert for attack or ambush. So we rode on, weary and despondent, as the sun's glare drew sweat cruelly from our brows.

Now, we carried with us more than thirty skins of wine, of which twelve belonged to Catalina. When the heat was at its worst, we stopped for a short rest and drank our bellies full. Our guide showed himself the craziest, you should have seen him drink and drink and never stop. "Know this!" he said when we mounted up again. "For two weeks now, no more wine has passed down my gullet than a little fly could carry on its tail. We've had to make do with foul limey water dug out of the ground. And such privations are all the harder to bear, when not far off there's water a-plenty. For on the mountains there are many ponds full of cool clear water, that they bring right into the city of Tenochtitlan through pipes of wood and mortar. And all the Indios of the city can avail themselves of the water, and drink it. If we could climb up there, we'd soon break and stop the wooden pipes, and cut the city off from its water. But the Germans are dug in, they sit tight and won't be driven off, and so all Cortez' strength is in vain. Boils and pestilence on the lot of them!"

By now we had at last arrived at the camp, and at once sought rest. All stretched out to sleep just where they stood, for none could any longer fend off the heat and weariness.

It was evening when I was awakened by noise and commotion. Several Spaniards had found Catalina's wineskins, and fallen on them in their thirst and fever. Some lay on the ground quaffing, mouths pressed to holes they had stabbed in the skins. Others, having no other vessel to hand, filled their hats with wine. Yet another was burdened with a full skin, hoping to steal it away from under the others' noses. But they fell on him with their fists, and knocked him to the ground, while Catalina's pages added a dreadful din of scolding and curses.

All at once a troop of horse came racing through the camp with fife and drum, the Duke of Mendoza at its head. Numerous Indians ran alongside, of those allied with Cortez. The Duke leapt from his horse with an angry cry: "Ha, do my eyes deceive me? Who does this wine belong to?"

The Spaniards who had been tussling over the wine jumped up and stared goggle-eyed at the Duke. Wine dribbled from their lips, their eyes burned with thirst and fever. Even the riders who had come with the Duke devoured the wine greedily with their eyes.

"The wine belongs to our mistress," at last said one of the pages.

"The wine belongs to us, who the Devil will take it from us!" roared one of the lansquenets.

"The wine's ours! The wine's ours!" twenty outraged voices cried at once.

The Duke drew his sword and stepped towards the lansquenet. "The wine belongs to Cortez, to the whole camp, and to brave soldiers, not to you only, Od's hailstones on your heads! And if anyone gainsays me by one word, I shall mark his throat so he forgets how to stand up again."

The Spaniards stood dumb, not moving. And yet there was not one among them who would not have pawned his last pair of hose for a jug of wine.

Meanwhile Catalina in her tent had recognised the Duke's voice, and emerged with arms spread wide, calling as she approached: "Juan! It's you!"

The Duke took a step back, and said hesitantly: "Madam, who are you? I do not know you."

Catalina took no notice, but kept running towards him. In her hand was a little silver cup full of wine. She said: "Take this, with a blessing from the Mother of God, the sweet Virgin."

The Duke took the cup from her hand, gave her a glare of contempt, and said: "Thank you, madam, but I have no need of wine." He turned his back on her, opened his horse's mouth, and poured the wine down its throat.

Catalina emitted an angry cry, and raised a hand as if to strike her page. But a maid grabbed her arm and led her back to the tent. Her lute-player began to bawl a song, the little dog yapped, the Fool capered madly about, squealing all the while, but through all the commotion we heard Catalina weeping.

The Duke, however, turned calmly to his cavaliers and cried: "Which of you was chosen by lot to throw those Germans headlong off their cliff tomorrow morning?"

Eight leapt from their horses and formed up in line.

"You shall each receive two jugs of wine tonight, plus a half-Castilianer," the Duke said. And turning to his lieutenant he continued: "What can you do, wars cost money. No one serves the Devil for free."

That night, as Mendoza's cavaliers lay outside their tents quaffing the good wine the Duke had given them, there was much gossip about his behaviour, snatching the cup from the lady's hand, tipping it into his horse. And there was not one who did not add his penn'orth.

"He goes soft in the head, from just one sip of wine. He's afraid of wine, because once he gets a mouthful, he has such foolish notions he must caper about and play childish games."

"He's a Moorish heathen on his mother's side. Not allowed to drink wine."

"Comrades, even if he's not allowed wine, he can drink water. Did any of you ever see him drink? Us lot here are dying of thirst and sunstroke. But not a drop ever passes his lips, and he just laughs at the sun's power."

"Quiet! Not so loud! Come closer, I'll tell you great marvels and secrets. You know, he has no blood in his veins. Every kid back home in Granada knows it. His mother really was a Moorish heathen, a princess of the Abuhmeidos family in Granada. And in none of them does blood flow in their veins, but only the hot sand of the Moorish desert. Now you know why he never feels thirst."

"True! True!" someone cried. "I too saw it, in the great bloodbath at Cholula. When an arrow grazed his arm, it was not blood that came out, but fine sand."

"That's why he has such a snow-white face. He doesn't have red blood like us."

“Rubbish!” laughed a third. “I go with the doctor’s opinion. The man has an unruly posterior, whenever he scents a whiff of wine, he makes a disgusting mess in his hose.” At these words everyone burst into raucous laughter, raised mugs to Mendoza’s better health, and proceeded to prattle of other things.

Next morning Mendoza led us off to storm the Germans’ camp. They were dug in at the top of a cliff, which fell away to one side not so steeply that it couldn’t be climbed. Some of us lay concealed behind the boulders strewn everywhere below the cliff, each with his arquebus loaded and at the ready. The eight riders who had won their half Castilian the day before stacked their arquebuses, each placed a naked dagger-blade between his teeth, and they all clambered up the slope.

But we could hear nothing of the Germans. They kept quiet, made no move. Our men climbed ever higher, ever smaller in our sight, but not a shot came from the Germans, and it seemed that not a single living thing would be found up there.

“Comrade!” I said. “It’s a joke. Will they use their daggers on dead rocks?”

“Yes!” whispered the man beside me. “They’ll attack dead rocks.”

“Why don’t the Germans up there shoot?”

“Stupid question. If you have no arquebus, do you shoot with your pantaloons?”

“So the Germans have no guns?”

“They lost them in the dreadful shipwreck they suffered when they reached the coast of this country.”

“So all is lost for them! God have mercy,” I said softly, for I sensed some sympathy for the German captain and his men fighting us without arquebuses.

“Comrade!” my neighbour said with some vehemence. “It’s on our men that God should have mercy. The Germans up there have stronger artillery than us.”

And I heard someone whisper not far from me: “They’ll fire God’s quarter-cannon again.”

I had no idea what he meant. Yet a cold shiver ran down my spine when I heard the words: God’s quarter-cannon.

Our men were now not far from the summit.

Suddenly Mendoza, who had lain behind me, leapt to his feet, clapped a hand to my shoulder and cried: “You see him standing up there? Fire!”

I raised my gun and fired without taking aim, for I had seen nothing. From all around came the crack of arquebuses, and powder-smoke stung my eyes. But from the cliff top a loud clear voice cried suddenly: “Back! Or you’ll find out of what hard rock God made the world!”

“That’s Melchior Jäcklein,” I thought at once, recognising the voice even though I had not seen him for so many years.

Our men up there had come to a halt, making not the least movement. Only one had turned around, and was now leaping with great strides down the slope.

For a moment there was dead silence. Not one of us dared move. Fists of heavy dread squeezed my heart. I had no idea what would happen, yet my hands shook, there was thudding in my ears, and a constant hammering of the words: God's quarter-cannon! God's quarter-cannon! Fear seemed to flow down from the men up there like an invisible stream, to envelop us in horror.

All at once the men up there flung themselves to the ground. At the same time a mighty roar erupted, as if the very cliff were bursting apart. God's quarter-cannon! resounded in my ears, and already a swarm of wild bees seemed to take wing, and swoop down the cliff.

It was boulders, huge lumps of stone, loosened from the cliff and now hurtling down from the heights. They separated to become more like a flock of wild goats, tumbled in and out of one another and leapt and sprang towards the men, who tried panicked to hide behind rocks. Trailing the boulders a cloud of dust arose, which grew and spread and swept on down. For a moment we were able to see the glint and flash of sword blades, before the leaping flock of boulders reached our men. A mighty cry of many voices competed for a few moments against the roar of falling rubble. Then it was all over. The dust cloud swelled and reared, devouring shattered bodies draped twitching among the rocks.

Only the man who had turned at once to flee was still alive. We watched him hurtle screaming down the slope. But maddened rocks came speeding behind him in a wild race, thudding into bedrock, rebounding, tearing other rocks loose to whirl whistling through the air as if shot from a mortar. They caught up with him, knocked him down so that he lost his footing, and was tumbled by the sliding mass down into the valley.

As our hearts ceased beating in dismay, Mendoza suddenly leapt up behind me, grabbed the arquebus from my hands, took aim, and let fly. From up there where the Germans sat came a scream, but Mendoza handed the arquebus back to me with a smile, and cried: "He'll not throw any more stones."

He stretched, threw back his head, and lifted his arms high. I seemed to hear a gentle trickling and rustling, as of fine sand.

We rose to our feet, and went to the aid of the man who had been carried along by the rockslide. We found no life in him. We buried him there, heaping over him as a monument the very stones that had killed him. They had crushed and shattered his body, leaving not one little bone that the hard rock of which God made the world had not broken three times and smashed to pieces. Only his head remained undamaged, like that of a living man staring at us in shock and dismay. Long afterwards I still saw that man in my sleep, hurtling in wild leaps down the slope, then suddenly lying silent and motionless on the ground, blood-spattered and mangled by God's quarter-cannon.

THE MIST

In the dim light of memory, where events witnessed with my own eyes and those that others told me all flow into one – in the overgrown garden of bygone times there stands one solitary day, cast adrift from every other, bereft of any starry sky or dawn: the day of Cortez' disaster.

Back then we fought our hardest battle, not with men but with – a mist. For days on end it lay thick and heavy like a poisonous toad over the enemy city, protecting it from our gaze. But at night, when in its place darkness lay upon the city and concealed it, then the mist lifted and no longer stood sentinel. Soundlessly it rolled down then upon our camp, hazy scraps of cloud felt their way along lanes as if with arms, crept into tents and sat heavy on the sleeper's breast.

On the night when Cortez' disaster began, every Spaniard lying asleep in his tent dreamed, at the same hour, the very same dream.

They seemed to see Cortez lying in his tent, laid out on a bier, and his head hung down to the ground. In a corner of the tent stood the Duke of Mendoza, holding a little oil lamp. But Pedro Carbonaro, the provost, stood at dead Cortez' side, holding a fire-hook in his right hand; the left was clawing into Cortez' breast. At the same moment a distant peal of bells rang through the air, but more terrible and eerie than any ever heard pealing from a church tower.

Wakened by this dream, or nocturnal vision, the Spaniards all leapt from their cots and dashed yelling from their tents, and even those so weakened by fever that they were no longer able to brush the flies from their faces – even they dragged themselves outside. A great despondency had clutched every heart. Calling and wailing, we surrounded Cortez' tent.

The tent flap was thrown back, and Mendoza stepped out. Terror flooded our limbs, our knees began to tremble, for the Duke really did have a little oil lamp in his hand, just as in our dream. He demanded angrily to know the cause of the uproar, but we regained courage only when the tall figure of Cortez showed itself, his face betraying neither anger nor surprise.

We all calmed down once we saw Cortez alive, and some began to feel shame to have fallen into such despondency over a dream. But others ventured to dispute in low voices what secret counsel Cortez and Mendoza had engaged in at this late hour, until all of a sudden a great noise of Mordio! and screaming broke out from behind the tent, and one came running and swore he had seen the shadow of the living Devil on the canvas, horns, claws, hooves and all; he was there in Cortez' tent, gnawing a roast chicken. At once silence fell all around, everyone took a step back, those in front jabbered a panicked prayer, and someone cried: "Stand by us, Christ our Saviour, in whom I am baptised." But none wanted to go in; each prodded his neighbour.

Mendoza began to laugh out loud, and said in his clear boyish voice: "You'll be in Hell before you meet the Devil," stepped into the tent, and emerged shortly with the provost Pedro, the little limping manikin who had welcomed me on board his ship. He was gnawing a roast chicken, and it was his shadow that had so alarmed the sleep-fuddled soldier.

In shame we slunk without a word back to our tents. But some shook their head and swore they had seen quite clearly tail and hoof, and also the hellish claws, they knew well with what huckster Cortez had been haggling this night, but thought best not to talk of it.

So we all sought our own pallet, but not one of us that night found sleep again, but tossed and turned in unease and fever, and lay awake until the grey of dawn.

When I left my tent at daybreak, I saw a great crowd gathered not far from my quarters, and more came running from every side. One of those rushing past shouted: "The Secretary of

Heaven's preaching his mock sermon!" And I saw Garcia Novarro, who was known in camp as the Secretary of Heaven, up on a wooden wagon. He was lashing out at empty air, and ranting loud cries, like a priestling from his pulpit.

Garcia Novarro had been bought free by Cortez from the Debtor's Tower in Baracoa, and taken along on account of his arquebus, which never missed its target. Now the old man went about the Spanish camp preaching a pious Christian life to the soldiers. His knee clicked with every step, his head waggled in constant agitation as if he suffered brain fits, his hands were so tremulous he could hardly hold his gun, and yet from a thousand paces, in the dark of night, he could hit the nail that pinned the target. It was for this skill that Cortez freed him from the Debtor's Tower, where he had sat for three years, and taken him along. And at the great battle of Cocotlan, where the Spanish were surrounded by a hundred thousand Indians, as the Spanish lines began to buckle and the Indian cacique or hero, holding in his hand a golden net (for such is the style of an Indian banner) – as he led his forces in an assault, he was pointed out by Cortez to Garcia Novarro, whose diabolical skill sent the cacique to kingdom come. But this deed, which assured a Spanish victory over uncountable hordes of Indians, he undertook glumly and with loud wailing, and only when Cortez threatened him with the gallows did he comply. For he cursed his skill, and hoped his bullet would never hit a living being.

This Garcia Novarro stood on the empty wagon, his grey hair blew in ragged strands across his face, he wrung his hands and howled in a voice of despair all across the camp: "Woe unto you, Babylon! Murderous city! Woe unto you, Babylon, the Devil wanders through your lanes like a raging lion! Woe unto you, great lords! Woe unto you, courtiers and haughty men, who invite the Devil to your table; woe unto all those of you who have frittered away eternal bliss for the buffoonery of this world!"

He paused, exhausted and wheezing, and struggled for breath. We had played our little tricks on him often enough, laughed at him, mocked and teased him, but this time no one felt any desire to laugh, for it seemed to us that Garcia Novarro knew more of the secrets of this night than we did.

Then the Secretary of Heaven began anew his cry of woe: "Take care! Take care! The hellish bird of prey has made its nest in your camp. Pray and repent! For the hellish mole digs and delves beneath your feet. See him standing there, the hellish cockerel ..."

"That's enough!" we heard the provost cry, as he suddenly stood among us. "Down from your pulpit, or you'll have business with me directly."

Garcia Novarro uttered a loud wail, and a nameless terror twisted his face. "Help me, dear brothers!" he howled. "Help me, the Devil wants to take me away."

The provost began to laugh his crowing laugh: "You're drunk! You see a black devil in every nook! Now, off to jail with you."

All at once he leapt up on the wagon and seized Garcia by the throat. They began to tussle, fell from the wagon, rolled about in the dirt, throttled, scratched, bit one another, hissed and snarled like a pair of cats at Candlemas clinging and biting.

At last Garcia Novarro managed to regain his feet; he was in a terrible state, scratched and scraped raw, bleeding from mouth and nose. He quickly slipped away, leaving a clump of his hair between Pedro Carbonaro's teeth.

The provost smoothed his cock's feathers, straightened his coat, and crowed after Garcia Novarro: "You crack-brained scabby flyblown ninny! I'll teach you to make jokes once I have you in my power! When you've fired your last bullet, I'll delouse your head so your soul can make its way out."

But Garcia Novarro had fled to the other side of the camp, where he again set up his cries of woe, and as before a large crowd at once assembled about him. Now young Mendoza appeared from nowhere, on his shoulders an exquisite silken cloak with a fine fur trim. When Garcia spotted him, his laments fell silent, he pointed to the Duke and began to berate him: "Woe unto you, strutting in your pride and frippery! Look on the life of Christ, you'll see no silken cloak trimmed with fur, but only poverty, meekness and an austere life. But you want to be lord of the world, you have taken shelter beneath the Devil's wing, and think your eternal bliss a mere nothing!"

"He's a fool, no harm letting him run loose," said the Duke's lieutenant. Mendoza threw back his head, crossed his arms at his breast, and laughed: "Mister Secretary, are you unwell, suffering such fantasies? I have just the remedy, and shall scour your hide with flog-weed, to make you better!"

Garcia paid him no more attention, but continued with his lament, pointing with both hands towards the Indian city that lay hidden beneath the mist in the valley: "Take care! Do not be led into the Indio Sodom, where the Devil is worshipped on his golden throne! Go home! Do not let yourselves go down with Cortez into the hellish maw of Satan!"

At this the Duke was seized with sudden rage. He clapped a hand over Garcia's mouth and cried: "Now you've rebelled for the last time. Take him and hang him. Let him drown in hemp on a green tree."

The Duke's equerries at once seized Garcia Novarro. But when they tried to take him away, a dreadful miracle occurred that saved Garcia from the Duke's wrath, but at the same time aroused such dread in the Spanish camp that we all seemed to lose heart.

A gust of wind arrived, which tore a gap in the mist concealing the Indian capital, and so for a brief moment withdrew the veil of mystery from the enemy city. But what we saw there was not palaces, not churches, not towers, not gardens, nor marketplaces, no, nothing of that kind. What we saw was a great high terrace, and throned upon it a monster of stone; it was bigger than the Giralda in Seville, and sat in the heathen manner on crossed legs, and its mouth was open, and its hellish face glared across at us, and its hands were raised as if reaching for us ... And then the sea of mist swallowed this monster, closed over its head like a veil that no human eye could penetrate.

Horried howls went through the Spanish camp, in stark terror they threw themselves to the ground, and many wrapped a cloak around their head, for none wanted to see the stone Satan. All discipline and order were lost, none listened to the Duke and his commands. The

Spaniards formed a howling melee, and from their midst came a rebellious cry: "We want to go back! We shouldn't be led to that city, where Satan sits enthroned as king!"

"We don't want to attack the Devil's citadel!"

"Did you see him? He hurled fire from his eyes!"

"Smoke came out of his mouth!"

"They're taking us to the cathedral of Hell!"

Now there lay in the Spanish camp a captured German, his leg shattered by a bullet. He was laid low with wound-fever, but when he heard the desperate outcry he crawled from his tent, pushed himself up on all fours and cried: "What's this you're yelling! You fools of the Emperor, fighting his battles for him while back home priests and lordlings steal your homes and fields, and handle your women worse than the emperor of the Turks, or the Devil himself! And: "Did the Emperor make you lots of promises, so that you let yourselves be used against the Indios? Ha, heat, cold, hunger, thirst, broken bones, and so much hardship you've no skin left on your frame!"

And with this, open rebellion broke out in Cortez' camp.

Fifteen pikemen, at their head one by the name of Pedro Barba, started it. They came together, dragged a heavy cannon forward and aimed it at Cortez' tent. And they began to fire on officers with their arquebuses, whenever they saw one. Men came running up from every side, and the entire mob screamed and raged: "We won't go into the Devil's jaws!" And: "We won't lie in a hellish bed!"

And out of the mob a voice called for quiet, and said: "Let one of us go to Cortez in his tent, and tell him bluntly what the mood is."

"Let Pedro Barba go! Pedro Barba!" the mob roared.

Pedro Barba stepped forward. He was a big bearded fellow, who looked as if God slapped him together from a lump of clay. He climbed on the cannon and cried: "I shall go to Cortez, and break his obstinate godless will. I'll not be overawed by his might."

The rebellious mob surged roaring through the lanes of the camp. Pedro Alvarado, one of Cortez' chief captains, was standing guard at the entrance to the tent.

Pedro Barba halted, turned to the mob and cried: "Stay here and wait! You are to lend my honest words their proper force. Seignior Alvarado, let me pass. I would speak with Cortez."

Alvarado made no reply, stayed put, and barred the lane with his pike. Now Cortez' cook came running from the other direction, a Moor from the island of Malta, in one hand a little dish of roast meat, in the other he brandished a loaf impaled on a breadknife. Alvarado let him through, and Pedro Barba pushed past behind him into Cortez' tent.

The rebels stood outside, not moving. Each held his head inclined towards the tent, believing they could make out snatches of Pedro Barba's declaration, and Cortez' response. But inside Cortez' tent all was quiet, you could have heard a fly buzz. Those at the rear of the mob grew impatient and agitated, and one called out: "The business isn't going right!"

Suddenly the door-curtain was pulled back, and Pedro Barba appeared in the entrance. The Spaniards raised a great cry: "Pedro Barba, did you persuade him? Did you reach agreement?"

Pedro Barba stood in the entrance and thrust out his jaw. He came slowly towards us, flourished his hands in the air as if trying to catch a fly, and came to a halt.

"Pedro!" the mob yelled. "Come to us!"

Pedro opened his mouth, and closed it again. He thrust out his jaw, took a big step forward, and again came to a halt. He held his hands as if trying to lean on a stick for support.

"Pedro!" the mob roared. "Answer us!"

Pedro Barba stood, stared at us pop-eyed, and crashed all of a sudden to the ground, as if struck by lightning.

We leaped to his aid, and tore off his jacket. Cortez' breadknife had been driven up to the hilt into his chest.

At that moment Cortez himself came out of his tent. He saw Pedro Barba lying on the ground, furrowed his brow, raised an arm and said: "Begone from here, rebel!"

Horror runs down my spine even today, when I recall what happened next.

Verily, the dying man got to his feet, stood straight and proper, set one foot in front of the other, and began to walk, obedient despite the breadknife in his heart, and walked, and crashed to the ground as soon as he was out of Cortez' sight.

Cortez turned about, paid us no more attention, and went back into the tent. And not a sound was to be heard all around, and none dared to breathe. Only when Cortez vanished into his tent did a tumult erupt.

"Murderer!"

"Death on your shoulder, murderer, every day of your life!"

"Set fire to his tent! Let him choke on the smoke!"

"Strike him down, the rabid dog!"

"He has a stone in his chest, instead of a heart!"

Alvarado stood all alone against the tumultuous mob, barring the narrow lane to Cortez' tent with his pike. A rebel struck his arm with an axe, two hung on his pike, one pulled the cuirass off his shoulders.

At that very moment a Spaniard came running up, one of those deployed to keep watch on the Indian capital. He ran up gasping, mouth open wide, and leapt over Pedro Barba's body towards Cortez' tent. Not far from it he collapsed to the ground, lay there a moment, got up, took two strides, fell down again, and crawled a little way along the ground. His chest rattled, and a whistling came from his throat.

Alvarado, already overcome by the rebels and defending himself as he lay prone on the ground, turned his head and cried: "Alvarez, what news have you?"

The Spaniard made no reply. He kept crawling along the ground, tried to stand, could not, then screamed towards the tent, his voice a howl: "The Indios are coming!"

In a flash the rebellion was at an end. Alvarado climbed slowly to his feet, and looked around. But he saw none of those who had assaulted him; he stood alone before Cortez' tent.

Now officers came dashing up from every side. One, Juan de Leone, ran through the camp crying: "To arms, soldiers! To the cannon! Heathendom is coming!"

But the Spanish army was gone and away. The Spanish army that Cortez had led with such bravado right up to the Indians' capital city now hid in the hollow trees that stood all about the camp, the Spanish army had fled into the thickets of Indian forest, the Spanish army had crawled into empty ovens, into cisterns, into the dungheaps by the stables, the Spanish army had squeezed itself down mouseholes, and the few cavaliers remaining in the camp were down on their knees, crying out to God, and howling litanies.

Then out of the mist came the dull chink of bells that we had heard in our dream that very night. The bleak melancholy sound flew towards us from all sides, as if a hundred church towers had risen against us, echoing over our heads, filling the air with a woeful clangour.

It was the Indian tocsin, sounding the hour of our death all around us.

From the right, where the crossbowmen had their quarters, there came suddenly a hoarse bellow, and immediately upon it many voices crying woe. It was Antonio de Quinones, commander of the crossbowmen, a hot-tempered man who lost his powers of speech when beset by rage. He had come upon his men in a claypit, huddled together trembling like a flock of sheep. So he had bellowed his fury, and struck out at them with his sword, stabbing and slashing. No one took up his weapon, for their senses were so disordered by dismay and terror that they lay like cattle ready for slaughter.

Mendoza rode slowly through the deserted lanes of the camp. Culverins and mortars lay overturned, their barrels filling with sand. Mules and horses had torn free of their halters, and raced through the lanes with no one to attend them

Officers stood dumbly outside Cortez' tent. A bugler sounded the call to arms, but it blew into empty air, and no one heeded it.

"Someone go to Cortez and make a report!" Mendoza ordered.

The officers made no move, and no response.

"Someone go to Cortez and make a report!" Mendoza ordered again, in a louder voice.

"It's no use, Cortez won't listen!" said one of the captains.

"He punched de Neyra in the face!"

"He'll clap anyone in irons who advises retreat."

"He's out of his mind, no one would leave the tent alive."

Mendoza dismounted and threw the reins to de Neyra, standing distraught beside him with a swollen face. Haughty and decisive he looked, as he went into the tent, and to Cortez.

The officers waited in silence. One moved closer to the entrance to listen. A gust of wind came, lifted the tent flap, and slapped him away.

“My oath, he’ll not come out again, it’ll take four of us to carry him,” de Neyra said quietly.

But just then the Duke emerged from the tent. He threw his head back in his boyish fashion, and, in a hoarse voice that quivered a little, ordered: “Have a man go through the camp with a drum, and proclaim that it has pleased Seignior Cortez to place in my hands command over this camp, and over the disposition of all war materiel, cannon, powder, ammunition, and all provisions, and with it plenipotentiary powers on this day.”

Cortez’ officers took a step back, and stared at the youth in wonder and amazement. But the Duke drew himself up to his full height, flung the hair back from his brow, and continued: “But I, Juan, Duke of Mendoza, have decided on withdrawal out of this land to the coast, and to the harbour of Veracruz, to which we shall all come as long as you obey me in each and every matter, and may God grant us success.”

As the drummers proclaimed this through the camp, Spaniards emerged in droves from their hiding places. Some set about catching and corralling the strayed horses, some piled provisions of wine, bread and salted meat in a heap, some loaded mules up with sacks and chests, and some began burying the heavy guns that could not be taken along. And all these tasks they performed with great alacrity, for the enemy war-drums sounded really quite near.

While the Spaniards so zealously obeyed Mendoza’s orders, Cortez stepped from his tent. He held a sword in one hand, an arquebus in the other, and accorded the busy Spaniards not a moment’s glance. His face was as stony and rigid as ever, showing no anger, no pique, no grief. He went haughty and silent through the clamour of the troops, departed the camp and headed for the wall of mist through which the song of enemy war-drums resounded.

But in Cortez’ train went nine of his officers and cavaliers, determined not to join the Veracruz march but to stay at Cortez’ side, and fight and die.

Gonsalvo de Sandoval was at their head, followed by Antonio de Quinones and Pedro d’Olio. Behind them strode Christoval Diaz, Pedro Alvarado, Juan de Leone and Diego Tapia, and behind them were Jeronimo d’Aguilar and Panfilo de Neyra.

I went with these in Cortez’ train. We, like him, meant to offer resistance to the Indians, and block their way with our guns and blades long enough to enable Mendoza and the rest of them to gain a sufficient distance.

As we stood waiting, there suddenly sounded very close by, from two sides, the shrill squeal of Indian conch-horns. Death had surrounded us, like hounds around a rider. Weapons chinked behind the mist. The enemy was still invisible, but fear lay upon me like heavy armour. I glanced at Cortez, tried to absorb courage from him, but his face remained immobile and stony, showing neither assurance nor fear. He held a sword with letters of flame etched into the gleaming blade. I tried to read them, but the letters jumped out of sequence

and began to dance before my eyes; I tried to count them – two, six, eight, nine, ten – it was useless, mist slid between them and they were blotted out, and I heard the tramp of a thousand Indian feet, and could see nothing, and could not know if arrows were already whistling towards us that would pierce my breast ... or maybe an iron ball will shatter my skull, or a knife strip the flesh from my throat; and in me was a screaming that wearied of the torment of waiting, and was filled with despair at such an ending.

Then all at once the mist revealed its secret.

Indians emerged from the gloom and took on a shape, and behind them more and still more, an endless train, and at the very front was one who stood beneath a baldachin of green feathers hung over and over with little plates of gold; he bent down, pressed his hand in the dust, and rubbed his forehead, and said words I could not understand, but suddenly d'Aquilar sprang forward yelling : "Merveille! He's talking peace!"

A great cheer arose, everyone thronged about Cortez, the Indian leapt back startled behind his baldachin, and I regarded Cortez.

The sword in my hand fell to the ground with a clang: Cortez' face had suddenly grown lively again! He had the face of a living man, a face in which fear, care, grief were deeply engraved, along with the chagrin and distress of the last hours, and over it all lay a smile on lips and cheeks, a happy and beatific smile, such as lies sometimes on the lips of a sleeping child. Behind me someone cried out: "Cortez is laughing!" and Sandoval, Diaz, Tapia shook one another by the shoulder as they cried: "Cortez is laughing!"

But now Cortez found his formidable stony face again, and his gaze bore down cold and cruel on the Indian, so that we thought a dream had played tricks on us, or it was only the mist that twisted his stony face so strangely. And a voice of thunder roared from Cortez' marble mouth, the voice that had torn dead Pedro Barba up from his grave, and it resounded deep into the brows of the mist, and over the Spanish camp, and over the enemy horde:

"Inform the king, Lord Montezuma, that there shall be no peace, but only war and bloodshed, until the very moment he himself sets foot inside my camp. And if he should not deign to do so within three days, then shall he feel the force of my cannon!"

SCARLET HOSE

In this war, when so many people were intent on plunging one another into dolour and grief (for each of us is Devil to another), in this terrible war, the last blood to be spilled was the blood of an innocent child. And it may be that it was Delilah's lamentation that made its way up to Heaven and God's ear, and awakened his wrathful sense, so that for the sake of this child's lamentation he granted these suffering people, Spaniards and Indians, the mercy of a brief peace before the final great misery and bloodshed.

The Duke of Mendoza had thought up a cunning stratagem to defeat Grumbach and his Germans, and bring under his control the sources of the water carried by pipes into the city. Under cover of night he set off with some twenty cavaliers on a ride of more than two hours

through the darkness, until they came to a narrow gorge, overgrown and completely filled with Indian scrub. Here he had his men dismount, and led them along the dry bed of what was once a stream, with two in front to clear a path with their matchets through the thorny Indian ivy. Having hiked another hour or more, they reached the narrowest of valleys between two steep cliffs, one of which the Spaniards recognised as the height on which the Germans sat, but its steeper side that lay towards the east.

But it was not this cliff that the Duke intended to climb; rather he led his men up a steep open slope, strewn with rubble and boulders, that lay opposite the Germans' lair. Within a short time they reached a narrow outcrop of savage aspect, soaring high out of the slope, in form almost like a tower.

At this spot the Duke ordered his men to stack their arquebuses and swords and what other weapons they carried with them, their armour too, so that they might climb more easily. They all tarried a while, but as soon as the full moon came out from the clouds, the Duke began to clamber up the steep rock face, placing his feet in little cracks and hauling himself up by his fingers on knobs and jags of rough stone. Behind him climbed brothers Christoval and Guzman d'Orgiva, who came from the mountains that lie south of Granada, and were accustomed since boyhood to climb on pathless rock. The rest of the Spaniards followed at a suitable distance, one behind the other, but not all were such nimble climbers as Mendoza, and most found it detestable toil. But they all climbed with much wearisome grasping and fumbling, none knowing why and to what end, having left all their weapons at the bottom to be watched over by Mendoza's lieutenant. For none would have been able to climb the awful cliff with an arquebus in hand.

But now for one of the Duke's people, a lad from Ronda, there came a point where he could no longer retain his grip on the steep wall he was to clamber up; he lost his wits, and let go of the handholds he had been clutching with both hands. Down he tumbled, and although he was not very high above the ledge where the weapons were stacked, only about the height of two men, his fall was horrendous enough that he broke both legs. Mendoza's lieutenant tried to lift him, but the lad broke out in awful terrified screams at the lieutenant's gentlest touch. Since his cries might prematurely betray the plan and Mendoza's assault, the lieutenant grabbed him by the throat so that he couldn't scream, and stabbed his body several times so that he at once sank back dead.

Once this was over, the others resumed their climb, slowly and with extreme caution. No one lifted a foot from its place until he had found a safe hold for both hands on a jagged spur or rocky point. In this manner they arrived without further mishap at the heights. Meanwhile day was dawning, even though the moon still shone, unsettling and spooking the Spaniards with doubled shadows on the rocks. Only as it grew lighter could they look at one another, and see that the cliff they had climbed was steeper than the outside of a church steeple, and each one stood over the head of others, and uppermost was Mendoza himself, and those who saw him so high above began to tremble in fear, so that the heart wanted to stop beating.

The Duke was able to look across from his eminence to the summit of the cliff opposite, on which the German camp could be seen. He spied a broad grassy expanse, in the middle of

which lay a dark pond, overgrown with reeds and rushes. Nearer than this, hay had been spread out, on which four or five fellows lay sleeping. One woke up, lay on his back and stretched his bare hairy legs in the air, ready to pull on his hose. Another stood at the pond, scooping water into a wooden tub. Two had started a fire at the edge of the cliff, and were boiling a watery gruel. Indian fowl ran hither and thither across the grass.

One of the two Germans at the fire sat down, broke an egg into the gruel, dropped in some lard and a handful of salt, and said: "Last night I had a dream about my wedding, there was a young roast fowl, and a little salad of green leaves. If you hadn't woken me just at the wrong moment, Neighbour Dillkraut, I'd be able to praise God on a full belly."

"Bedbugs kept me awake," said the man with hairy legs. "There's no useful cattle in this country, neither cow nor sow, but of lice it has a-plenty." He gave the hose he was holding a shake.

"Hoy, Dillkraut," shouted one of those lying on hay. "Here's my advice. Take a needle and thread, and sew up the mouth of every louse, then you'll have peace!"

Hearing this inane chatter among the Germans, the Duke could not hold back a laugh. The Germans leapt to their feet, pricked up their ears, gazed down on the rock wall, and at once spied the Spaniards. One in his fright dropped his bowl of gruel, stared at the chain of Spaniards clinging to the rock one above the other, and roared: "Schellbock! Eberlein! My dear suffering Lord, there's an arquebus running up the cliff!"

And indeed, Mendoza's lieutenant had loaded an arquebus, and passed it to the Spaniard lowest on the cliff. This man let go with his left hand, and bent down with utmost caution while clinging on with his right to grab at the arquebus. He passed it at once up the chain, and in this manner the loaded arquebus passed from man to man, until it reached Mendoza.

On the cliff to which the Spaniards clung, some distance above them an Indian oak tree grew out from the rock, and it was behind this that the Duke lay concealed from the Germans. The Duke now rested the barrel of his arquebus on a branch, and yelled across to the Germans: "You're in my hands now! Any who disobey will learn the funniest jumping lessons from my arquebus!" The Germans stared back open-mouthed, arms dangling, and were so shocked that not one stirred from the spot. Only the man who had been about to pull on his hose ran about waving them in the air.

"Each of you, tie another man's hands behind his back!" the Duke commanded. "You are to go down the mountain in single file."

Now the Germans found their tongues again, and one came in great vexation to the edge of the cliff and cried: "Is there to be no end to killing and slave-driving? We were in this country before you, we all ploughed our own furrow and kept peace with the Indios, until you came, you gallows-birds and clowns, bringing troubles and misfortunes. May God curse you to eternity, so you all return home in disgrace!"

The Duke, hearing this, remained calm. Now he commanded once more: "Each man tie another man's hands behind his back. I shan't tell you a third time." He pointed to the German whose name he had caught, and said: "You, Dillkraut, you make a start."

But Dillkraut came running in his woollen shirt, waved his hose at the Duke, spat, and said: "A hundred times better to stand up to my ears in the Rhine, than accede to the will of a rascally scoundrel."

Mendoza said not a word, pushed the gun barrel forward a little, aimed, and fired. Dillkraut screamed, dropped the hose, and fell to the ground.

Now the Germans fell into a great despairing rage, and one, Melchior Jäcklein, yelled: "Throw stones, knock them down!" They at once began to pull stones from the earth and fling them at the Duke and his men. But none of their efforts reached Mendoza, as all were caught by the branches of the oak, and dropped harmless to the ground far below.

Mendoza had meanwhile handed the smoking arquebus down to Christoval d'Orgiva (for in his confined space he could not load another shot; there was no room for such handiwork if he hoped not to fall). Christoval handed it down to his brother Guzman, who stood below his feet, and in this fashion it passed from hand to hand until it reached Mendoza's lieutenant, who reloaded it and sent it back on its travels. And the Germans watched in great perplexity and dismay as the arquebus made its way back up, and was sure to take another life from them.

When the gun was again Mendoza's hands, he at once took aim at the German who had been foremost in hurling curses and threats, and who at that moment was approaching with a huge stone. When this German, a peasant from the village of Pfinsingen, Stephan Eberlein by name, saw Death stand so close before his eyes, and saw no hope of outrunning it, he must have thought of Germany and the little village where he was born. For sure, in his last extremity the image of that little village must have stood before his eyes, for he pointed a clenched fist at his belly and called across to the Duke: "You'll be made to swallow down all the dung in the streets of Pfinsingen!"

The Duke fired, and with that single shot the peasant fell to the ground, before he could wish on him a tasty dish for dessert.

When Stephan Eberlein fell, the others ran about screaming in impotent rage, and Melchior Jäcklein cried that if he only had an arquebus, he would send the Spaniards all together down from the cliff with one shot. Amid the tumult, the Duke suddenly recognised Grumbach, who stood among the peasants, not shouting, seemingly not despairing, merely hanging his head, hat pulled low over his brow.

All of a sudden he straightened up, looked left and right, sought out Melchior Jäcklein and cried: "A rope! Strips of leather! I shall build you an arquebus!"

A gentle tremor of anxiety ran through Mendoza's heart when he recognised Grumbach's voice; but he knew not why. It was the first time he had seen Grumbach at such close quarters in the New World. And at once unease and dismay seized his heart, which up till now had been merry and untroubled. He wondered why Grumbach had called for rope.

Meanwhile Melchior Jäcklein came running with leather straps. Grumbach threw one end to a peasant and cried: "Claus Lienhard! Help me catch that tree over there, and haul it closer."

“Whatever does the mad German want with a tree?” went through the Duke’s mind, but he had to turn his attention to the arquebus that was making its way up to him. Meanwhile two of the Germans had caught in a sling the topmost branch of the oak tree that clung to the cliff opposite, and began slowly to pull it closer to them. Others set to and helped, but had no idea to what end.

The tree creaked and groaned in its branches, resisted and refused to bend. But the Germans kept going, pulling ever more strongly, as if dragging a recalcitrant ox from its stall. Once they were able to grab it with their hands, they forced it closer and tied it with ropes to a boulder, so that it could not spring back.

“Tie rocks, spear-points and sharpened sticks to it!” cried Grumbach, and from every side the Germans dragged lumps of wood and spear-points and tied them tight with ropes to the branches of the oak tree. And as they went eagerly about this work, the Duke’s arquebus fired again and one of the Germans, shot through the head, sank to the ground.

“That was your last shot. Now you’ll be trampled by my wooden pony!” Grumbach shouted in utmost fury across to Mendoza. The Duke had pulled his hat low over his face, and kept his head in the shadow of a rock, not wanting Grumbach to recognise him.

“Knife!” cried Grumbach. “A sharp knife!”

With the knife in his hand, his glance fell on the three slain peasants, and an idea coursed through him, strange and almost without purpose, yet filled with a savage cruel fancy: “Lift up the bodies. Let them ride the tree, bind them on tight!” he ordered. “Dillkraut, Lienhard and Eberlein shall ride their last ride, and give the Spaniards what for, one last time.”

So the Germans hoisted the dead peasants onto a thick branch, and bound them securely, tying each man’s lance to his body. “Now cut the ropes, and may God help you, my Spanish cousins!” Grumbach cried.

The Duke had just received yet another loaded arquebus from the hand of Christoval, when he saw Grumbach cut the ropes. He at once saw the danger, and cried: “Christoval! Guzman! Watch out!”

The ropes were severed. The fettered bent tree violently straightened. The three dead peasants flew like a tempest through the air. The trunk of the tree slammed into the cliff. For one brief moment, the dead peasants and their spear-points and sharpened sticks tussled with the Spaniards. Then the tree whipped back upright as before.

Deathly silence all around. The three dead peasants, Dillkraut, Lienhard and Eberlein, remained sitting in the tree with their bloody spear-points, heads dangling. The Germans stood crossing themselves. They could not believe what they had seen with their own eyes: that Grumbach’s cannon had brought them such tremendous help.

Christoval and Guzman d’Orgiva had been crushed and dismembered, and hurled by the force of the blow down into the depths. But in their fall they took with them all the others who stood clinging to the rock below them.

Only Mendoza was still in place. He stood high enough to be mostly out of the way of the whipping branches. But the topmost branch lashed the Duke's foot, and delivered a sharp blow to his knee. He was still holding the loaded arquebus.

Melchior Jäcklein stared down into the depths, where the shattered Spanish bodies lay. He had a soft heart, and horror engulfed him. "Squire!" he said. "How did you manage that master stroke! Now they're all wearing scarlet hose, and their cloaks are trimmed with purple." But then he mastered the horror and sympathy that had engulfed him, and said: "There's no need to mourn them, they were murderers and rascals one and all, and the best of them for sure murdered his own mother."

But then his glance fell on Mendoza, and he cried: "Catch hold of the tree again! One of them's still here! Hey you, why weren't you hurled down into Hell with your friends? They're enjoying a private audience with the Devil. Now you can stay there till the ravens see you!"

The Germans had meanwhile secured the tree again, blocking Mendoza's escape. They were overjoyed to have in their power the one still living, who had killed three of their comrades. They began to insult and mock the Duke: "Hey, Squire Kristoball! Squire Spewguts! You talked so big a while ago! Now you're sweating your oleum bappoleum in sheer terror!"

There were still three there in addition to Melchior Jäcklein and Grumbach. The old man with the pockmarked face, called Jakob Thonges. And the one who had dreamed of roast fowl: he was Ruprecht Schellbock. The third was a skinny scowling fellow, Mathias Hundt by name, during the entire battle he had said not a word, and kept silent now. And so it was Schellbock who called across: "Why purse your mouth so, you could use it to turn vinegar sour!"

"You thought God told you to climb up, but all the time the Devil was shitting on you!" Thonges crowed.

Grumbach said not a word, but kept a close watch, held the knife ready to cut the rope as soon as Mendoza attempted to clamber down.

Mendoza stood rigid with shock on his tiny platform, with no idea what had happened to him. Mortal terror had entered in and gummed up his throat, he tried to breathe but could not. Now, as he stood all alone on the rockwall, with no living being below him, the cliff he had thought within his powers to climb filled him with horror. Darkness came over his eyes. The jags to which clung seemed suddenly to shake and twist. The cliff he leaned against began slowly to sway this way and that. He began to feel the pain in his foot. He lifted it, felt with it along the cliff trying to find a secure foothold, but found none, and so left it dangling.

Jakob Thonges, seeing this, began to laugh: "Hey, Squire, if it's dancing you desire, I'll provide good peasant music!" He ran to fetch his trumpet-fiddle, or tromba, and began to bow. Schellbock, who was sitting on the grass, stood up, stretched his neck over the edge of the cliff, puffed out both cheeks, and began the song sung in Germany to mock Spanish cavaliers:

*Harlot in a castle,
Spaniard on his steed,
Louse on a skin sore,
Proud courtiers all three.*

Mendoza raised the arquebus. His mortal fear flew away as rage at Schellbock's song overtook him, and went to his head. He positioned the gun and took aim, intending to shut Schellbock's stupid mouth.

But at that very moment he happened to catch a glimpse of Delilah.

As soon as the shooting started, Delilah had fled to the pond and the shelter of the reeds. There she lay hidden, up to her neck in dark water. But now, hearing the peasants fiddle and sing, she came out.

As she came, she swayed her little hips to the beat of the music from Jakob Thonges' tomba. Her wet brown hair fell left and right over her shoulders. Her body was covered in hundreds of water droplets, sparkling and playing in the morning sun.

When the Duke saw Delilah, he lowered the arquebus and forgot all about shooting Schellbock. He held his gaze on Delilah's wet brown body, and caressed her small dark face with his eyes. A hot craving lust rose in him to have possession of the young maiden. And in his cruel heart a love for the child awoke, a curious love replete with cruelty and malice.

And so he raised the arquebus one last time, and fired the bullet intended as payment for Schellbock's scurrilous song – right through Delilah's hand.

Delilah screamed, sank to the ground, and pressed the bleeding hand to her lips. Grumbach, in a great fright, threw down the knife and leaned over her, the others got up from the ground to fetch water and cloths, and paid no more attention to Mendoza.

When the Duke saw that the Germans at that moment were no longer concerned with him, he was astonished, but quickly saw his advantage, and made haste to climb down in order to extricate himself swiftly from this business. He quickly descended far enough to be out of sight of the Germans, quite unmindful that he had left his hat dangling on a thorn-bush.

Once the Germans had staunched Delilah's bleeding and dressed the wound, they remembered Mendoza, and were greatly angered and vexed to find that just this one man had evaded them. They began to swear savagely, and wish him a heap of nice things: the hangman, the devil, and a bloody flux from the throat. And they swore a leg off the hangman's grandmother, they'd pay him back with it at the point of their lances next time they saw him, be he ever so armoured up like the giant Goliath.

But their threats fell like hail on stubble, meaning: too late. For none had glimpsed his face well enough to know him again for certain.

Only Delilah had taken a good look, when the thorn-bush whipped his hat off. The Duke of Mendoza's image was etched vividly in her little head. She could paint his likeness in words: hair brown and curly, lips full, eyes big and clever; and the face pale, proud and lovely.

THE HERON THOUSAND-RED

The Duke of Mendoza, as he slipped from the Germans' grasp, was in such a disordered state that he strayed about in the confounded mountains for seven hours, before he came upon the

gorge where he had secreted the horses. When he arrived back at the Spanish camp, it was already late in the evening. He took himself at once to his tent, so profoundly weary that he fell deep asleep before removing even his sword-belt. He slept all night through and the next day, not waking up even when his Moorish servant came into the tent to report that the Indio Great Lord, along with his chancellors, courtiers and counsellors, had appeared in the Spanish camp, to conclude a peace with Cortez.

Cortez awaited the Great Lord leaning on his sword, attended by the most imposing of his officers, in the open space in the middle of the camp. A double line of armed men was in position on all sides, commanded by two captains, Juan de Leone and Antonio Quinones.

A curious sort of music could be heard as the Indian court procession turned into the camp. For in the van were the king's players; in their hands were copper cups with which they threw silver balls in the air and caught them again. And each ball had its own note: one sounded a deep note, the others made a descant, resulting in a melody not unlike the one that peasant lads sing in Castilian as they spread dung on the fields. So the Spaniards began to laugh as they recalled the words of the simple ditty, and one even dared to sing along: *Slaughter the sow, and you'll soon have a sausage!*

Behind the musicians came exotic creatures: conjurers, jugglers, clowns, creatures who spun wheels in the air or ran about on their hands, fellows whose antics delighted the Indian king. Behind these came cripples and dwarves, people born without arms, others who were born white-haired, some with six fingers on each hand, and one had the mouth of a fish. They strutted proudly along, were treated by the Indians like rare birds and precious game.

Then came Indians holding flowers, they hastened to Cortez and placed garlands of roses on his shoulders and brow, and on other Spaniards, soldiers and officers who had never expected such courtesies from the Indians. Behind those came four others, whose only office was to run before the Great Lord's palanquin and sweep clear of every little blade of straw the ground that would be trodden by their lord. Finally came the Great Lord himself, in a palanquin, and alongside to left and right trotted many of his relatives and courtiers, all barefoot and in tattered garments, and as the Great Lord allowed himself to be helped from the palanquin, they made a great pageantry of hand-kissing and bowing. Then they stepped back, and one only remained at the emperor's side, a little fat man the Great Lord called Calpoqua, meaning: Master of Materials. He alone stayed close to the emperor, taking the measure of Cortez and his men with his sharp eyes.

The Great Lord was most gorgeously attired and adorned with gold medallions, girdles and rings, and wore a pearl at his breast of a size that none would ever dream of finding the like again, if he were to go to the very ends of the Earth. The Spaniards were delighted to see it, thinking it a pretty piece to get hold of, if they were all to take a stroll towards the Great Lord with fingers curled.

Cortez received the Indian king, whose name was Montezuma, meaning Stern Lord, with great respect, showing him every reverence. He then spoke at once of the august person and sacred majesty of the Roman Emperor, King Charles of Spain, in the course of which he informed the Indians that in reality their lands and many bigger lands belonged to the realms

of the Spanish king, and that all who desired to be his vassals would be honoured and granted favours, whereas rebels, in accordance with the requirements of justice, would be chastised.

The Great Lord of the Indians listened in silence, and as soon as Cortez finished he began to speak. He said he was greatly indebted and obliged to this august King of Spain, who had thought it worth his while to ask, from such a distant land, after the Great Lord's health. He would gladly become a vassal of such a magnanimous monarch. All Cortez needs to do is declare how much tribute in gold, silver, precious stones, and in woollen goods and other things, his king will require yearly. He will deliver it all via Cortez, whom he invites to go back home at once, with the tribute, to the city where his king resides. For on this occasion he will not be able to visit the Indian capital, as it has not been made ready for such guests, and food supplies have all been used up.

Whereupon Cortez replied that he can't return home before he and his army have paid a return visit to the Great Lord in his capital, and tarried there a while. For he is under an obligation to deliver to his king an exact report of the Great Lord's exalted personage, and of his royal life in the city of Tenochtitlan.

These words threw all the Indians into great unease and dismay. Two of them, the Great Lord's brother Cacama and the latter's son Guatimotzin, approached Montezuma, and urged him not to comply with Cortez' demand, but to prevent his entry into the city. The Indian Calpoqua again pointed out two Spaniards at Cortez' side, and spoke low and reverentially into his king's ear, while his left hand described curious figures and curved lines in the air.

"What's that fat Indio saying?" Cortez asked his captain d'Aguilar, who was able to talk a little with the Indians in their own language.

D'Aguilar had no idea what Calpoqua was saying, but not wanting Cortez to know this, after brief reflection he said: "He says the Spaniards have the nose of a vulture: they can sniff out gold even in graves, and steal it."

Now Cortez had ordered the wounded German who lay captive in the Spanish camp to be brought along, intending to use him alongside d'Aguilar as interpreter. He wanted also to show the Indians how he, Cortez, exercised power over even the Germans, who had entered this country before him.

The German, a big tall fellow by the name of Balthasar Strigl, suddenly began – though mortally wounded and with not more than a few hours more to live – to advise the Indians in their own language never to allow the Spaniards into their capital. "Their intent is to cause you harm!" he cried. "If you once let them in, they'll drive you all into the ground and kill the lot of you." And sitting up painfully to face the Great Lord, he called out: "The Spanish bird of prey makes itself out now to be pious enough, but have you ever known a hawk not to eat a pigeon?"

And to the princes Cacama and Guatimotzin he called out: "The Spaniards steal everything! They'll not bury the wedge in just one kind of tree!" He turned back to the Spaniards and began to berate them in Spanish: "Shame on you!" he cried. "You came over here because here you're free to commit any disgraceful act forbidden to you back home, you want all your days to be pleasant and idle, to wear fine clothes and fill your bellies without need for work."

Pedro d'Olio, one of Cortez' senior officers, a most pious man, stepped up to Balthasar Strigl and said: "We did not come here to wear fine clothes, but to point these Indios to the true faith of our holy Church, which Jesus Christ built with his sacred blood."

The German laughed out loud and said: "What do you know of the true faith! All you lot want to do is the gentry's handiwork, even if you yourselves were all once peasant lads and artisan's apprentices."

Now among Cortez' officers was one Diego Tapia, who in his youth had indeed been apprenticed to a carpenter. But now he favoured gorgeous clothes and gold rings, was always fragrant with valerian and liquorice water, and was never seen without black silk hose and a cloak trimmed with fur. The German's words annoyed him. He drew his sword, flourished it in Balthasar Strigl's face, and cried: "See here what I have, a sword! I shall polish it on your hide until it gleams like my iron helmet." He pointed to his helmet, and made a face like an owl about to snap its prey.

Balthasar Strigl gave him a look of contempt, and turned away, growling: "No matter to me if you have a sword or not." And spoke not one word more before they carried him away.

Meanwhile the Indians had debated among themselves, and were of one mind. The Great Lord turned to Cortez and said he would do all in his power to prevent even a single Spaniard from entering his city, which was consecrated to the gods, and sacred to the memory of its illustrious ancestors.

Hearing this, Cortez too began to prate grand words, and utter threats about the size of his forces, both mounted and on foot, how many cannon and other weapons he has, how much he has captured and conquered, how his army has often put Indios to flight and driven them back to their main city, and how many of their most prominent chieftains he has taken prisoner.

This speech, directed now at the Great Lord and now at Calpoqua (who seemed to him a man of some importance, for he alone was allowed to stand at the Great Lord's side), had such an effect that the Great Lord fell again into indecision and hesitancy. Observing this, Cortez began again to address the Great Lord in a friendlier tone, and with great courtesy. He ordered that the Indians be formally led in to a feast.

But before this could be done, the Indians who were gathered around the princes Cacama and Guatimotzin suddenly began to wail; they flung themselves down, pointing their arms up into the sky. Cortez glanced up, but all he could see was a large heron, or stork, circling at considerable height over the camp.

But the Indians were seized with great agitation, and one, a relative of the Great Lord named Cuitlahuac, came up to Cortez, took hold of him reverently in the Indian fashion with both arms, walked a little at his side addressing him eagerly in the Indian language, with frequent gestures towards the heron in the sky. Two Indian abbots or prelates, faces painted with ochre and cinnabar, so that they were more the visages of devils than of men, approached in haste, and threw themselves down, and danced fearsome dances.

Meanwhile Cortez asked his interpreters to explain these foolish capers, and learned that the Indians believed to see in the heron one of their hellish demons, who reveals himself from

time to time in the guise of a bird, in order to presage calamity. None has ever seen this bird, or demon, close to, for it builds its nest not in a treetop or on a cliff, but up in the clouds, and only seldom shows itself to people, and the last time was fourteen years ago, when the father of Great Lord Montezuma passed away.

Now the hard-nosed princes Cacama and Guatimotzin approached Cortez with a hostile demeanour, saying it was the immutable will and prerogative of their emperor not to allow a single Spaniard entry into their city, for it would be counter to their war-god's command. Hence Cortez was advised, in light of the Great Lord's intention, to undertake without delay an orderly withdrawal back to his own country.

As they spoke, the Indians around the Great Lord brandished their weapons and uttered loud yells, indicating their desire to come to blows with the Spaniards. Even those Indians in Cortez' service began to grow rebellious when they saw the ungodly heron; they no longer wished to fight against the command of their god, and showed a strong inclination to go over to the Great Lord's side.

At this critical moment, when victory over the Indians seemed to slip from his hands, Cortez resolved to show that he possessed power even over the Great Lord's gods, and called loudly for Garcia Novarro.

So Garcia Novarro came creeping, wearing a little red cap and dragging the butt of his arquebus in the sand behind him. His knees clicked as he came, and his lips moved constantly. Cortez grabbed his arm, pointed to the heron circling high over the camp, and said: "You see the bird? Fetch it down to me, now!"

Instead of a reply, Garcia Novarro flung himself to the ground, and began to howl so that no one could tell if he had been hacked, stabbed, or burned.

"What's this?" cried Cortez. "Shoot, or it'll be the worse for you!"

The bird had now climbed so high, it seemed no more than a tiny cloud in the sky.

"Why force me to kill an innocent creature?" wailed Garcia Novarro. "Do you really want me to lose the blessings of this world, and the bliss of Heaven?"

Cortez began to rant and threaten in a great rage, for the bird had climbed so far it was almost undetectable to the eye. "Shoot! Or I shall send you to the rope-maker to test his rope!"

But Garcia Novarro pushed his arquebus away in great disgust, and cried in a truculent voice: "Let anyone else shoot the bird, but I shall not spill Christ's precious blood, which flows in every creature!"

"Take the rascal away and hang him!" Cortez commanded.

Pedro Carbonaro, the provost, made a great leap through the air, and seized Novarro by the neck. "Now I have you, fool!" he cried in triumph. "You'll make a fine pastime for the crows." Garcia Novarro rolled his eyes in terror. His little red cap had fallen off.

"Make way!" cried the provost, as he shoved the poor sinner before him. "Now for some high jinks!"

When Garcia Novarro realised he was heading for the gallows, he was overtaken by mortal dread. He fumbled for his arquebus and babbled: "Let me go, let go, I'll shoot the bird."

"Too late now. The bird's vanished!" Cortez raged. And truly, not one of the Spaniards could spy the bird, which seemed to have disappeared behind clouds.

But Garcia Novarro raised his arquebus and fired, without taking aim. There came a whoosh and a rushing through the air, and the heron came hurtling down to fall on the ground at our feet. Garcia Novarro's bullet had pierced its head.

It was a bird of a size such as none of us had ever seen, with a span measuring nine feet when the wings were extended. Its form was that of a heron, but with feathers blue and green, ornate as those of a peacock; but at throat and belly it was painted in exquisite reds, every shade of red to be found on the Earth, the red of wild berries, blood-red, rose-red, scarlet, purple, cinnabar, and crimson.

The Indians pressed forward in a throng, for none had ever seen the Heron Thousand-red so close to. They were dismayed that the Spaniards were gifted with such great powers as to bring one of the most eminent of their deities down from the sky, and kill it. They lifted the bird up in sorrowful silence, and took it away in a ceremonial procession; but the Great Lord no longer objected to the entry of Spaniards into Tenochtitlan, instead agreeing that two Spanish officers, Quinones and de Leone, together with a few soldiers, should accompany him at once, while Cortez himself and the rest of the Spaniards should follow on later, once quarters had been prepared for them all, and the mist that still lay over the city had dispersed.

When this was conveyed to Cortez, he approached the Great Lord, embraced him, and placed a string of glass beads around his neck; and he did likewise with the princes Cacama and Guatimotzin, as well as the Indian Calpoqua, who, standing as he did at the side of his Great Lord, appeared to him to be an Indian marshal, field commander, or arch-chancellor. But secretly he instructed Quinones and de Leone to keep a sharp eye on those three gentlemen while they were in the capital.

Then, without delay, he ordered all his officers and men to strive their utmost to acquire another such heron, for he hoped one day to present it to his own king, and to the pope, and to the whole of Christendom, along with other marvels and curiosities of the New World.

But no Spaniard ever set eyes on another Heron Thousand-red. It seems that the bird shot by Garcia Novarro was the only one of its kind. Perhaps there were once many such, and the skies of the New World were filled with such a giant sort of heron, long before the Spanish ever came into the country; but only this one remained. And for sure this one, the last of its kind, ancient and wise, had wanted with its own eyes to see the future masters of this country, having received reports of their arrival. And thereby lost its life.

By now the Great Lord was back in his city of Tenochtitlan. He was deeply troubled, his heart was heavy, for the savage intemperate behaviour of Cortez and the other Spaniards, whom he saw today face to face for the first time, alarmed him greatly. On any other day he paid no heed to the Indians who, encountering him, invariably dropped to the ground and

shuffled on their knees out of his way; but today he thanked them most amiably, by raising and lowering his arms.

Reaching his palace he felt hungry, and demanded food. His servants came, bringing all kinds of dishes: meat, fish, fruit, pickled vegetables, all in bowls kept hot atop warming-pans of glowing coals. But although there were so many dishes that their aroma filled the whole hall, he touched none, but sat silent on his leather couch, his eyes downcast.

Towards morning he received a visit from Calpoqua, the Indian believed by Cortez to be a marshal, and hence a threat, even though later he had embraced him and presented gifts. Calpoqua brought figurines of Cortez and two of his officers, all three no higher than a finger, which he had wrought, very delicately and true to life, in silver, copper and wood. Also a figurine of Garcia Novarro aiming his arquebus at the Heron Thousand-red, and other figures of a horse, a mule and a sow; but the sow had only one ear, for by chance the original that came to Calpoqua's sight had had one ear squashed and severed by a wagon wheel, and so the Master of Materials believed all sows to be one-eared.

The Great Lord studied each figurine attentively, and praised the fine delicate work, which had been his purpose in taking Calpoqua with him to the Spanish camp. Only Garcia Novarro's arquebus gave cause for criticism, for it lacked the puff of smoke that had suddenly sprouted from the end of the barrel. Calpoqua explained he had tried many ways to depict the puff of smoke, but no material – gold, silver or wood – had proved suitable. But he would persevere, until he had satisfied the Great Lord's desire by reproducing the smoke artificially.

The Great Lord had the figurines carried to a big hall, in which all creations of the Earth and also of the sea, of which the Indians had knowledge, were reproduced with great exactitude in gold, in silver, in precious stones and also in feather-work, all so perfect that they seemed almost to be their originals.

He had the images of Cortez and his men set out with great care in this same hall, and once this was done his mood became calmer, almost merry, for it was as if he had no more surprises or terrors to fear from Cortez and his band, now that their images were placed among these old familiar things. He betook himself to another room, to which his dancers, conjurers and marvellous cripples were summoned to amuse him with their antics. And as they cavorted, he slowly took into his throat the fumes of Santa-Croce herb,⁴ which makes those who consume it reflective and wise.

The two Spanish officers with their men were already waiting outside the palace for Calpoqua, the Master of Materials. They had seen him go into the palace, and noted that he remained there more than one hour in confidential conclave with the Great Lord. They no longer had the slightest doubt that he had received secret instructions from the Great Lord as to how best to harm the Spaniards, or break free from them.

And so Quinones grabbed him when he emerged roughly by the shoulder, shook him, called him (in Spanish) a heathen, a rogue and a rebel. Calpoqua had no idea what he was saying, but slowly and deliberately drew from under his skirt a little rod of wood, and with this he tapped Quinones twice on the fingers. Now Quinones hesitated no longer to punish him

for his treason, by taking his life. He took two paces back, raised his arquebus, and shot Calpoqua through the chest.

At first Calpoqua had no sense of being hit, but he was greatly surprised and delighted suddenly to see smoke from an arquebus once more. And in a flash he knew how and from what material he could represent the cloud of smoke: using the down that a certain kind of reed warbler, frequently spotted in swampy ground to the north of the capital, wore at its throat. And he recalled how those downy feathers had already by nature the same colour as the cloud of smoke, being white, pale blue and green; and this pleased him.

Then he fell to the ground.

THE DEVIL'S WHEAT

During the night following Mendoza's assault on the Germans, Delilah fell into a severe wound-fever, and began to groan, scream, and gabble confused words. In the morning Grumbach woke Schellbock and Jäcklein, and instructed them to carry Delilah through the dense forests to the city of Tenochtitlan, to one of the Indian wound-surgeons who practised their skills there. He prepared for them a little message in the Indian manner of knotted strings, with many little leather tassels, for Indians cannot read written material, but weave their reports, much as we weave a linen sheet or a carpet.

Schellbock constructed a kind of pallet from ropes and a cloak, laid Delilah on it, hoisted it onto his back, and set off with Melchior Jäcklein. Both hoped to be back before nightfall, for they feared another Spanish assault on the source of the piped water.

Before dawn that same morning, Alvarado left the Spanish camp with some men to fell trees in the forest. As they made their way through the thickets they came by chance upon the two burdened Germans tripping over tree roots, and at once with loud cries set off in pursuit. Schellbock and Jäcklein, seeing they had no means of escape, stood their ground, set their burden down, and each trimmed a branch for a wooden cudgel. They went for the Spaniards dealing blows left and right, but being outnumbered were overcome and flung to the ground.

Alvarado had meanwhile stumbled on the pallet. He lifted it in the air with both hands, and cried that this booty was surely one of the Indio Great Lord's treasures, worth more than all King Croesus' fabled gold and jewels. Hearing his cry, the Spaniards ran to him, abandoning the two Germans, in order to claim their share.

But then Alvarado, who had meanwhile picked up one of the pitch torches, uttered a curse and pulled Delilah out from the pallet. She was scared to death, blinded by smoke from the torch, had no idea what mousehole to run to. Alvarado, unable to contain his disgust and vexation, smacked Delilah twice on the head with the flat of his hand. This at once revealed that she had clasps, rings and all kinds of golden trinkets woven into her hair, and he lost no time in tugging these adornments from her head. But he pulled so roughly at her hair that Delilah screamed, and in a loud voice called Grumbach to her aid. She cried: "Squire! Squire!" for she never called Grumbach by the name with which he had been baptised, but addressed him as she always heard Melchior Jäcklein call him.

“Who’s your squire?” asked Alvarado, removing his hand from her hair.

“My squire,” said Delilah, “is bigger than you, stronger, and prettier.” But just then into her senses, disordered by fever, came all of a sudden the Duke of Mendoza instead of Grumbach, and she wailed: “He made me so ill, my hand hurts, it’s bleeding.” And she was seized with fear, and wept and wailed: “What do you want with me?”

Alvarado, feeling sympathy, took her and the two Germans back to camp. On arrival he had them locked in a wooden hut, and set two sentries with loaded guns outside the door. Then he went off to report to Cortez the capture of two more Germans.

A short while later, Pedro Carbonaro came limping up to the hut where the Germans were confined, and announced that Cortez had desired and ordered that they be freed to go as they like about the camp, and to keep whatever they had about their person. But if they showed any sign of rebellion, or tried to flee the camp, he, Pedro Carbonaro, was charged to prepare quarters for them in the upper storey of the gallows. And he pointed a finger at himself and said: “I am Cortez’ provost and hangman.”

Melchior Jäcklein was outraged to hear this bowlegged hangman threaten him with the gallows. He came out of the hut and said: “Hey, Master Tie-knots! Is the Spanish camp so short of straight legs and washed mouths that Cortez has to send his hangman to make his proclamations? Now you’ve performed your task with such noble seemliness, you can clear off!”

The provost glared at Jäcklein with an arrogant and evil eye, jammed his fists to his hips, and crowed in his bird-voice: “I shall exorcise this villain’s tongue, or may I have no hands!”

These words enraged the Germans, Schellbock especially, who now also crept forth and cried behind the provost’s back: “Hey, Stink-mouth! Why do you say such filth! The Devil will blow you hindmost into his lair!” He squatted beside Melchior Jäcklein, shook his head and said: “Hangmen are a coarse, ugly, hostile tribe, they’ve no breeding or comportment, practice a disagreeable trade, and if you dressed a sow in a silk shirt, it would still wallow in the muck.”

By now bread, wine and cold meats had been brought to them, which they attacked with a will, while, in the tent behind, the surgeon sent by Alvarado cleaned Delilah’s wound.

When Grumbach heard Delilah’s distant call of “Squire! Squire!” he was deeply shaken, and waited impatiently for the return of Schellbock and Jäcklein. At daybreak next morning, when they had still not returned, he set off down the mountain with the two peasants still remaining to him, Jakob Thonges and Mathias Hundt.

An hour later they came upon two Spaniards who had felled a tree, and were now trimming branches away with their axes. A fire was burning nearby, over which a hunk of horseflesh was roasting on a spit.

Grumbach came along like a hunter, with two Indian fowl tied by the feet over his shoulder. His hat was pulled low over his left eye. Behind him came Jakob Thonges and Mathias Hundt, each with Indian game slung over his shoulder. The Spaniards failed to recognise Grumbach and his men, believing them to be some of the newly enlisted cavalymen who had accompanied the provost to the camp.

One of them laid down his axe, turned to Grumbach, and asked: "Where've you come from? Been hunting?"

Grumbach sat down, threw dry wood on the fire, and began to whittle a roasting-skewer. "We've been hunting, bagged such a pheasant or crane, now we're going to roast a chunk."

The Spaniard saw that none of the three was carrying an arquebus, and asked: "Where did you leave your guns?"

Grumbach clapped a hand to his forehead and yelled at Thonges: "Ha, we all left our guns at the spring where you absolutely had to have a drink, you idiot, Devil take you, now hurry back there and fetch them!"

Thonges began to laugh out loud, but stayed sitting and showed no sign of moving, for he knew nothing of any spring, or water, or arquebuses.

"Have you forgotten that Cortez swore by gallows and ladder to hang anyone who loses his arquebus?" asked the Spaniard.

"I haven't forgotten," said Grumbach. "Hey, on your feet, and tell your legs what to do!" But Thonges sat with a puzzled simple expression on his face, and began again to laugh.

"Hand over your birds, you dolt!" cried Grumbach, lifting the fowl from Thonges' shoulder. They were brightly-feathered birds no bigger than a fieldfare. Grumbach pointed at them and said: "So many crazy things in this dense forest. Frogs that howl like wolves, crayfish that climb trees, little lizards that bleat like sheep, but these birds sing in a human voice."

The Spaniard looked up from his work, shook his head and asked: "You making a fool of me? How can a bird sing in a human voice, when it's no Christian and hasn't been baptised!"

"Ha," cried Grumbach, "so don't believe me! I myself, yesterday morning, not far from this spot, heard it cry for its little mate. It cried three times, wailed almost, in a little girl's voice."

The Spaniard began to laugh, and said: "Who set such a fool's cap on your head? What you heard was the cry of an Indio lass, captured by Alvarado along with two Germans."

Grumbach put down the crane, or pheasant, and asked: "Where's the lass now? What did Alvarado do with her?"

"I honestly don't know. You can ask Alvarado yourself," said the Spaniard, turning over his horse steak.

"Enough of your nonsense!" cried Grumbach, in such a terrible voice that the shocked Spaniard dropped the steak into the fire. "I am Grumbach. Take me to your camp!"

Hardly had Grumbach uttered his name when the other Spaniard abandoned his axe, and dashed off down the slope in mortal dread, vanishing at once into undergrowth. The other dug around in the fire for his roast, and tried to vanish likewise, but his way was barred by Matthias Hundt standing behind him. He looked hopelessly all about, spat in his hand, blew on it cursing, for in fetching out the roast he had burned his fingers. Then all at once it came into his head that his life might be spared were he to offer Grumbach some courtesy, and greet him as a highborn gentleman. But in his terror, the only thing that came to him was a little

Latin phrase: *Ora pro nobis*, believing that this phrase must mean something like “Good day!” or “Welcome!” So he whipped off his cap, and said as he bowed low: “*Ora pro nobis*, good gentlefolk!” And with this, he thought to have favoured Grumbach with a gracious welcome.

But Grumbach flew into a rage, punched him on the shoulder, shook him, and cried: “What’s this jabbering, am I a priestling? Go pray with the hangman! Now, run on ahead and take me to your camp.”

The Spaniard could hardly believe Grumbach really did want to go to Cortez in his camp, having fought so hard against him not long ago. He was afraid, and suspected that Grumbach wanted him to go on ahead only the more easily to knock him down or stab him. He twisted like an eel in a net, pretended to be greatly concerned for Grumbach’s safety, and said: “Good sir, what do you look for in the Spanish camp? Cortez will for sure cut your head off.” And in his fear he began to tell eager lies: “Good sir, follow me and go well away from here, before my captain, Diego Tapia, hears you. He’s not far off, digging out foxes with a couple of officers.”

“Let the Devil himself dig out foxes, for all I care!” cried Grumbach. “Now move!”

When the Spaniard saw there was no escape, he heaved a sigh and began to walk ahead of Grumbach, all the while stealing glances behind to spy out what wicked mischief Grumbach might have in mind against him. But Grumbach and the other two just followed along in silence for more than an hour, until they came out of the trees and stood hard by the Spanish camp. But now the Spaniard grew bolder, and began to hurry on with great strides. He still believed the Germans would change their minds, and all at once turn about and disappear, but now, being so close to the camp, he was determined that Grumbach should not be allowed to escape. As he passed the first line of tents, he was astonished to see the Germans still hard at his heels. He began to make furtive gestures towards Grumbach, so that those who happened to come past would know what bird it was he had caught, and go to tell Cortez. But no one took any notice of the Spaniard and his gestures, until Pedro d’Olio bumped into them. He had seen Grumbach close to at an earlier engagement, near Qualtepec, where Grumbach had fallen on Cortez and destroyed a bridge of boats. Pedro d’Olio recognised Grumbach at once, and signalled to two of his men to follow behind with their guns loaded and ready. But he himself walked up to Grumbach, doffed his hat with great courtesy, and suggested that the captain would of course wish to see his two servants who had fallen into Spanish hands the previous day. He would gladly convey the captain to where the pair were quartered. And just then Grumbach spotted Jäcklein and Schellbock, sitting on the ground outside their wooden hut. Schellbock was patching his shirt.

“What a marvellous bird he must be!” said Pedro d’Olio, pointing to Schellbock. “In one day he’s eaten six pounds of meat, two loaves of bread, and drunk three jugs of wine, but it wasn’t enough, and he demands still more. Such strange mortals on this Earth!”

Meanwhile Jäcklein spotted Grumbach. He leapt to his feet and ran towards him, crying: “Have they caught you too, squire? So it’s all is over and done with for us.”

“Where have you put Delilah?” Grumbach demanded.

“She’s in the hut, sleeping,” said Jäcklein.

Grumbach went in, and saw Delilah in a corner, asleep on a mat. Her breathing was regular, for the fever had abated ever since the surgeon cleaned her wound.

Thonges and Mathias Hundt followed Grumbach into the hut. Grumbach did not waken Delilah, but stepped to the plank wall, where there was a hole through which he peeped out at the Spanish camp.

Three Indians were out there, loading corn onto a cart. Two others piled timbers, bricks and stone slabs into a heap. A boy led an officer's mount up and down outside his tent. Down the lane between the tents a squad of riders came charging towards the hut.

"So the Spaniards overmastered us, after all!" said Thonges in a low voice.

"Who overmastered us?" demanded Grumbach.

"The Spaniards. They've captured us, haven't they?"

"You, maybe. Not me!" said Grumbach. "I came in here, now I'm going out."

Thonges looked through the hole. "They've surrounded the hut. There's more than ten, all well armed."

Instead of replying, Grumbach drew his sword, pressed it on the ground, bent and tested it. "Mathias and Jakob! Both of you, pay attention! The first one to set foot in here, I shall run through and through. Then both of you leap in, take his arquebus, his ball and powder as well."

"What then, squire?" asked Thonges.

"What then?" cried Grumbach. "Hell's bells, once I've an arquebus in my hands, I shall be master. If I'd had one at the start, not a single Spaniard would have ventured two miles into this country."

"It won't go well," Thonges suggested. "Much too weak, three men's fists."

"If you're afraid, you can stay back here," said Grumbach. "Mathias, are you ready? Blow out the light!"

Mathias Hundt said not a word, blew out the light, and stepped behind Grumbach. Grumbach raised his sword, his head leaning forward as he pricked his ears.

For a while all was completely quiet. The three of them stood with bated breath.

All at once they heard a slight crunching of sand outside the door.

"Someone's coming!" whispered Thonges.

Grumbach leaned farther forward, as if about to storm the door in a single leap. Delilah was still asleep.

The door opened.

The figure of a Spaniard could be seen. He bent down, keeping his head low as he stepped across the threshold. He hesitated a while, then slowly closed the door behind him.

Thonges grabbed Mathias' hand, gave a loud sniff, and waited for the moment when Grumbach would let loose at the Spaniard.

But Grumbach made no move.

The Spaniard stood up straight, took two steps towards Grumbach. His feet made no sound, and all that could be heard was a slight rustling and trickling, as of fine sand.

And Grumbach's sword clanged back into its scabbard. He pulled his hat lower over his face and said: "Mathias, make light!"

Mathias Hundt shook his head, deeply puzzled that Grumbach had not, as previously agreed, taken a good swing at the Spaniard. But he said nothing, and struck a flame.

When the light came up, the Duke of Mendoza stood facing them, smiling and unarmed.

He at once hastened to Grumbach, flung his arms around his shoulders, and endeavoured with every kind of courteous phrase and compliment to raise his spirits.

"Wildgrave!" he said. "Truly I have at all times held you in the highest regard. It saddens me, God knows, that you have fallen into Cortez' hands. For Cortez is no nobleman, as commander in chief it behoves him no better than to force a peasant's curved sickle into his scabbard, instead of a sword. But as happens so often in war, a head filled with cleverness and knowledge falls to the ground, just where coarse buffoons attain to every power." And he added: "One must await happier times, when perchance it will go better."

And none of the Germans recognised in this youth the Spaniard who two days ago had so cruelly felled three of their comrades with his arquebus. Only Delilah, who had just woken up, recognised him at once, and in her fright ran to Grumbach, flung her arms around his neck, and hid beneath his cloak.

Mendoza began to chatter in a cheerful and amusing way, thinking thereby to cheer Grumbach up. "Ha!" he said, pointing to Delilah. "What's this you have, such a lovely sumptuous cloak of brown satin! Enough to turn a monk rebellious. Wildgrave, my first sweetheart was a coat of brown satin. It belonged to a pretty Italian miss, with whom we two boys used to sit in the castle at Ghent, learning the lute. Do you remember? Oh how I loved to stroke my fingers over that brown satin! And even today, when I see such a dark pelt, I am overcome with memories of my boyish first love. Then a sinful Italian lute song plays in my ear, I have to close my eyes and slide my fingers over the soft fabric, and then I give a start and I'm afraid someone might have seen us, me and my darling, the brown satin ..."

And the young Duke glanced anxiously around, and acted scared and very confused, and let his finger glide over Delilah's cheeks, shoulders and breast. And so daintily did he assume the bashful demeanour of a lovesick youth, that Thonges jabbed Mathias Hundt in the ribs and burst out laughing.

Delilah still clung to Grumbach, unwilling to move. But her clever eyes glanced over the Duke's slender figure, and came to rest on his boyish face.

Mendoza turned now to Grumbach, and asked: "Wildgrave, is it true that the women here conceive in pain, and give birth in delight? Surely you must know." At this question the two Germans renewed their laughter, but Grumbach kept silent.

Then all at once the laughter ceased.

A cold wind swept suddenly through the hut, causing Grumbach to shiver and huddle freezing into his cloak. He sensed a dark dread that lay heavy as stone in his breast, pressing on his heart.

When he looked up, there in the doorway stood Hernando Cortez.

He tried to grab his sword, but his arm was suddenly heavy, as if hung with leaden weights. He tried to call to Thonges and Jäcklein for help, but fear squeezed his chest.

Mendoza had already crept to Cortez' side, whispering: "I have the bears by the paw." Turning to Grumbach he cried: "Hey, come here, Wildgrave, so I can introduce you to Seignior Cortez. Seignior Cortez, this is my friend and cousin, Franz Grumbach, Count of the Rhine..."

Now on the very day when the Spaniards attained victory over Grumbach because of a child's cry, it happened that they themselves were overwhelmed by the green living ivy of the Indian forest. It came from every side out of the dense woodlands, and began by surrounding the Spanish camp like a thorn hedge. But by evening it had advanced even closer. Like a spy it slithered by night across the ground, down the lanes between tents, and when it came upon a pole or some wooden implement, it climbed high up around it. It twined about the sentries' halberds, and tied arquebuses to the ground. It lay all around like a sudden carpet, the wooden water trough was engulfed in green latticework, bridges were built from tent to tent. It thrust forward ever more strongly. Narrow lanes between tents suddenly became barred. Any who had slept outside awoke next morning to find, instead of sky above, a green mesh of ivy lying over them. If one tried in a sleepy daze to climb to his feet, the ivy pulled his helmet off. Unmatched objects were flung together. A gauntlet hung on a flagpole. A clay wine jug dangled free in the air. Horses were unable to stand, pressed to the ground by the weight of ivy. For two whole hours Cortez himself was unable to leave his tent, until by axe and firebrand a path was cleared for him through the rampant greenery.

This ivy, marvel of the Indian forest, stayed three nights and three days, and on the third night came suddenly into bloom. The scent of the heavy yellow flowers made heads drunken and fuddled. Then it vanished as swiftly as it had come, and the Spaniards dubbed it Devil's wheat.

But on this third night, when the Devil's wheat bloomed and its baneful breath confused the wits of men – this very night, Grumbach acquired the three bullets and the arquebus.

DREAM OF GERMANY

For two days and two nights Grumbach lingered in the Spanish camp, and it seemed he had made his peace with Cortez and the Spanish army. But the peace did not last; it ended on that night when Cortez and Grumbach both dreamt, at the same hour, of Germany.

That evening a cousin of the Indian Great Lord had come to the Spanish camp in the company of Juan de Leone, one of the two cavaliers who were Cortez' envoys in the Indian capital. These two delivered to Cortez a golden throne, artfully worked and decorated with all kinds of engraved beasts - eagles, gryphons, lions and ghastly sea-dragons. To this were added

thirty bars of gold, a hundred sticks of silver, and two sacks filled with gold dust. The golden throne alone was worth more than ninety thousand gold pesos. The Indian handed it all over to Cortez with many compliments and fine words, as a gift from the Great Lord.

Cortez was overjoyed to receive such treasures, and at once ordered the golden throne cut into pieces, for he meant to divide the gold into two piles. He called his cavalry captains and chief officers to him at once in his tent.

The big antechamber to Cortez' quarters quickly filled with officers and cavaliers, who thronged in great amazement about the heaps of gold, for none had ever seen such a mass of treasure all in one place. And none of the officers spoke one word aloud, but whispered timid furtive words to one another, and for a long while dared not take up a single little piece of the gold, until at last one of them, Christoval Diaz, knelt down to study the broken chunks, and said: this gryphon claw is worth thirty gold pesos, and that dragon's mouth sixty. Then the others overcame their bashfulness, and d'Aguilar said: "You know what rubies are worth! I'll give two hundred gold pesos for them." Then Signior Diego Tapia picked up a piece, weighed it in his hand, and called out that for what he holds, he can provide himself with servants, steed, coach and coachman. At which d'Olio cried: "Oh, the vanity!" and another, Signior de Sandoval, became clouded and confused in his wits, said he was weary of war-making, and would use his gold to become a merchant prince. But Alvarado circled silently around the heaps, glaring evilly at any who dared come too close, like a cat guarding its saucer of milk.

The golden treasure lying there surrounded by the officers exercised a marvellous effect, in that each man cried out louder than the others, and all at once Alvarado himself began to roar: "Hang! Hang!" in such a voice that the others were startled, thinking that anyone creeping out with a piece of gold tucked into his shirt would surely be hanged, and de Neyra declared that God had up until now curbed his sweet nature with a bridle in his cheeks, but from now on he would do nothing but fight, brawl, drink, make merry, and enjoy himself; but Tapia cried over him that a crazy fool and a donkey such as he would get nothing, the gold was only for the elect, while Sandoval on the other hand loaded himself up with gold like a pack-mule, and was unable to move a limb, and Alvarado had him by the throat and screamed in his face: "Hang! Hang! Hang!" and de Neyra grappled with Tapia, and Pedro d'Olio kept wailing: "Oh the vanity! Oh the vanity!" and into this castle of fools stepped all of a sudden Grumbach, and did not doff the hat on his head. At once Tapia let go of de Neyra and screeched: "Just look at him! Thinks he's the German Emperor's chief judge, won't remove his hat in our company."

"Quiet," de Neyra said softly, "he can't humble himself or bow down, he was once a count or a prince among the Germans, that's more than a Spanish grandee."

"Once! Once! My cape-collar was once a great lord's deathbed shirt," de Tapia cried.

"Who died in your cape-collar, sir?" asked Grumbach.

"The biggest ox in Baracoa, sir, the saddler made my collar from its hide!" cried de Tapia, and all the officers began to laugh loud and raucously. But in an instant silence fell, for Cortez stood in the doorway.

In his hand was a torch of burning pitch. He placed it in a copper ring that hung on a chain from the tent roof. He squatted down and began to separate the treasure; its reflections sparkled and flashed on the officers' helmets. And he made one large well-layered heap of gold, and one very small, and when he had finished this task he stood, and at once initiated the battle for the King's share of the treasure.

"Gentlemen!" he said to his officers, "Just as the greater part of the credit for all the honour and war-fame we have won in this campaign, and still think to win, is due to God, and, second only to God, to the exalted person of our King, and only a small portion to ourselves, so we shall manage matters with this gold, namely, on this occasion a part only of what we have won shall be retained for me and you and communal use, while the other part shall belong to our supreme Catholic Majesty, to apply as is most fitting to royal purposes."

All the officers were struck dumb by this speech, for none wanted to admit into their heads the notion that some of this gold should belong to the King, were it only the little pile that Cortez had separated from the heap.

But it was to the big heap that Cortez pointed, saying: "This gold shall be assigned to the King, whose actions in Germany have torn a disastrous hole in the royal purse, and allowed every gold pfennig to leak away. But the smaller heap, with your gracious permission, I shall divide among the army, so that each one of you gentlemen shall receive gold worth twelve pesos, and the common soldier shall receive two and a half."

When the officers realised they were to wave goodbye to the big heap, they began loudly to object, and Diaz grew coppery in the face for rage, crying: "Have I understood rightly, we're to receive no more than twelve pesos? It's a blatant injustice, and the most aggravating insult."

"Seignior Diaz!" said Cortez gravely. "Our exalted monarch has written urgent letters to every governor in his threefold realm, insisting that they collect many hundreds of thousands of gold pesos. For there is pressing need to gather in Germany a great army, and maintain it, and there are allies who must be paid, if insurgency and rebellion are not to prevail."

"You're quick enough to repeat what they like to hear at court, Seignior Cortez," cried Sandoval, "but what business is it of ours? If the King needs money, let the peasants be shaved, not us!"

Cortez did not deign to reply, but his silence was caustic.

"Seignior Cortez forgets his officers and soldiers, but he has a kiss for every courtier's backside!" cried de Neyra from the back of the throng.

"If I have forgotten my officers and soldiers, then you have forgotten the glory of Spain!" snapped Cortez in a fury, taking a step back so that he was almost entirely in shadow. Only his helmet glinted and gleamed as it reflected the gold. Into Grumbach's head, as he leaned against the canvas wall and kept silent, there came all at once a thought so strange and foolish he could not hold back a smile. As if the gleam and shimmer from the helmet were nothing other than the glory of Spain alluded to by Cortez, and it rested entirely on Cortez' head.

But Pedro d'Olio now stepped forth from the throng, kicked at the heap of gold, and said:

“All right, off you go! You want to see the King’s court? They’ll turn you into gold plates for the capons, grouse, little pastries and marzipan they guzzle, while we have black bread mixed with bran. They’ll turn you into gold chairs lined with satin, while we sleep on hard ground ...”

“Enough!” cried Alvarado, pushing d’Olio aside and standing at once before the heap of gold. “I had Cortez’ word! He promised us every one that our hats would be stretched full to the brim with gold! You do as you like, gentlemen, but I shall take my share.” And he knelt by the heap, took off his hat, and began to fill it with the King’s gold.

Cortez fell into a foaming rage, drew his sword from its sheath and pointed it at Alvarado’s head. But Alvarado saw and heard nothing, he was down on all fours, grubbing with both hands in the heap. Then Cortez thought better of it, turned his back on Alvarado and the gold, sheathed his sword, and said not a word.

But now all Cortez’ cavaliers and officers came forward one by one to fill their hats in silence, and step back. The heap of gold became smaller and smaller as it disappeared into the Spaniards’ hats. And the gleam and shimmer on Cortez’ helmet likewise faded, and Cortez’ head vanished into darkness, and it was as if, at this moment, Spain’s glory was extinguished on his own head.

The torch swayed on its chain, and emitted a thick smoke that enveloped Cortez’ officers in such a treacherous glow that that they seemed to waver back and forth, as if they faltered, or were intoxicated by the gold that they stuffed into their coats.

Of the Great Lord’s treasure, nothing was left apart from one poor lone ingot of gold and a few small sticks of silver, strewn about the middle of the tent.

Cortez stood aside, in the dark, his eyes directed resolutely at the ground, and he had a waking dream of Germany.

He saw Germany as an endless muddy field with not a tree or a bush, on which a drizzle of rain fell without cease. A small pack of riders leapt away across the field; there were bishops and prelates, the Imperial Chancellor, and privy counsellors. At their head rode the Emperor. His cloak dragged on the ground, sorely besmirched with wet mud. But none of those riding behind him gathered up the cloak as they fled away in such haste. The Emperor tucked his head between his shoulders to hide from the rain, his lip hung slack, and he was very angry.

And when Cortez saw his King’s angry face, he jumped out of his dream, and began anew the battle for the King’s share, now almost lost. His eyes sought out Grumbach; he saw him leaning against the canvas, hat low over his brow, and called to him: “Truly, it saddens me no less than you, that yet again it has to be a German who sets off all this tumult and rebellion.”

Grumbach looked up: “Herr Cortez,” he replied, “what are you speaking of? I know little of events in Germany. There’s tumult and rebellion all over the place, for the peasants are tormented with rents, feu duties, taxes, soccage, and the heavy tolls along the Rhine.”

“Tsha!” said Cortez, “I don’t mean that! Are you blind? Really it’s a shame to talk of it, how the Germans with their new religion are becoming a pack of heathens, heretics, Turks and Tatars!”

“True!” Sandoval interjected. “All the news from Germany is of public gatherings, and lords and subjects forming a league against the King’s majesty. Ever since the Devil awoke that godless enemy of the Church, all has gone to rack and ruin.”

“Pestilence take him, that scorner of God and his community of saints!” Alvarado, squatting on the ground fondling his gold, suddenly burst out. But he at once fell silent again, and continued to caress and tally his gold.

But Grumbach went over to him, shook him by the arm, and cried: “Who is it that you call scorner of God, and what religion does he teach?”

“He’s a rascally perjurer from Wittenberg,” said de Neyra, “not worth a penny, he preaches and asserts there’s no need to confess sins, that Mass is an abomination, that pilgrimage is superstition, and priests should abjure their celibacy.”

Grumbach turned pale, took a step back and asked, his voice low: “What’s he called, this man to whom God betrays such secrets?”

“The executioner,” Tapia yelled, “will cry his name loud enough as he puts the torch to the pyre. I don’t know what he’s called; must I know every rascal’s name? Rascal, I say! Rascal!”

“All the ancient ceremonies of the holy Church he wants to clear away, he won’t hear of repentance and self-denial, he scorns indulgences...” screamed Diaz.

“And so he’s in the right!” replied Grumbach with a mighty roar. “And it’s no heresy, but the truth, and I have never held to any faith but this!”

At these words the Spaniards all fell silent, and retreated from him, so that all at once he was alone in the middle of the tent. De Neyra said quietly, gazing across at him in shock: “Oh Jesus have mercy on us all!”

Tapia was the first to regain his voice, he spat, and cried that he’d always known it, every German’s no more a Christian than a bat is a bird.

“So you want to tear down altars and drive out the priests?” demanded Sandoval.

“Out with monks and priestlings!” roared Grumbach. “They’re the Devil’s own pageboys.”

“To a heretic, offerings and prayers are fool’s work!” Alvarado raged.

“You give rein to your mockery in graveyards!” Tapia screamed.

“Take care, you heretical wolf of Wittenberg. Someone shall come to bind you with ropes, and deliver you to the Emperor,” Diaz howled.

“I well believe the Emperor can find a Judas,” said Grumbach. “But silver pence elude him!”

“The Emperor will have money enough to wage war on all heretic rebellious ravaging wolves!” cried Alvarado.

“He’ll not need to draw a single mite from his purse,” said Grumbach. “He just needs to leave us to our own ways.”

“He’ll have money enough to rid his lands of heretics.”

“So let him first redeem the golden crown he pawned to the Jews!” Grumbach cried into the tumultuous din.

All at once there was Pedro d’Olio, standing pale with rage right in front of Grumbach; he tried to speak but could not form words, so he lifted his haul of gold with both arms into the air and hurled it jangling at Grumbach’s feet. And behind d’Olio stood Tapia, who shoved him aside, threw down his gold too, keeping none back, and cried: “What do I want with gold, here it is! What are the glories and luxuries of this world to me!” And now de Neyra’s gold too landed on the ground, as he screamed: “You shall have steed and knight and cannon, Carolus, you shall have gold, as much as you like!” And Sandoval, and Diaz, d’Aguilar and all the other captains and cavaliers, they all hurled their gold onto the heap crying: “May God chastise you, you hell-fiend and heretic!”

“Pish on Germany, it’s a dirty cloth, and I spit on it.” And: “Carolus, buy falconets and quarter-cannon, shoot all heretics dead!”

And last of all came Alvarado to let his gold fall, his face twisted. Sorrowfully he said: “The King’s raiment and mantle are always woven of others’ misery.”

When Grumbach saw what calamity his angry words had wrought on his new religion, he clenched his fists and cried: “The gold must not fall into the Emperor’s hands, even if I must go for a robber and footpad!” But no one listened, for now in a frenzy all the Spaniards threw onto the pile everything they possessed: gold rings and chains, one of them a silver sword-belt, and one a gold crucifix, and Tapia his buckle with a ruby and two emeralds, and in the middle of them all stood Cortez, lifting his iron countenance to the heavens, and gold gleamed on his helmet, and in a voice of thunder he shouted over them all:

“Now hear me, you most insolent magister of Wittenberg, you who disdain to know all of God’s wisdom and so do not know that today, in the New World, Hernando Cortez has shot you through the heart!”

At the same hour when Cortez all alone prevailed over all his officers in this battle for Spain’s glory and world power, at the very same hour the Duke of Mendoza crept to the hut where the Germans lay, for he was seized by such hot lust and desire for the body of Delilah that he forgot all about King, Cortez and the world’s affairs, and all his thoughts turned craftily to stratagems for cheating Grumbach of the little maid. But he couldn’t go to her in the hut, for Schellbock, sitting by the door, saw him creep through the dark and took such good aim with stones that the Duke had to leap nimbly aside if he wanted to forego large bruises.

And so he summoned Pedro Carbonaro to his tent, and urged him most insistently for help in consummating his love for Delilah, and assuaging his lust.

“Is that all?” asked Pedro. “Your Grace has entrusted me with harder tasks than this.”

“Oho!” cried the Duke in anger. “I don’t mean that. I’ll have no succubus, no hellish charm in my bed, so that in the morning I see I’ve had my way with a lump of charcoal, or a toad.”

“Your Grace,” said Pedro eagerly, “you shall indeed frolic with Delilah herself, for all things are obedient to me. The gateway to her shall stand for Your Grace two fathoms wide.”

Out he went, and found a cat lying on the ground, three days dead and stinking dreadfully. He picked it up, and his arts of sorcery sufficed to blow on this cat as on a set of bagpipes. With this instrument he crept to the back wall of the Germans' hut, where he began to pipe and wail like a shawm.

When Delilah inside the hut heard this music, she could not keep still, but had to trip and skip and leap about. And when she was tired of dancing, she stuck her head through the window-hole and the dense mat of Indian ivy, whose yellow flowers had bloomed this very night. And she saw Pedro standing on one leg by the hut, blowing with puffed cheeks into the cat. She asked him: "Who are you? What's your name?"

And Pedro said: "I am World's-hatred."

"So come back tomorrow morning and play some more, but not when my squire is here with me, for he dislikes the shawm, and he doesn't like me dancing, either."

"Your squire," said Pedro, standing all of a sudden on his other leg, "your squire is one of those devils, or demons, so watch out for yourself, that's what I came to tell you." And he began to blow again on his cat.

"Who are they," Delilah asked, her curiosity aroused, "those devils or demons?"

"Devils plague, vex and frighten people, and they're the ones who make thunder and lightning," was Pedro's reply.

"So my squire is for sure no devil, for he has never vexed me," said Delilah.

"And yet," Pedro crowed in her ear, "he desires nothing more than to take your heart and your blood."

Now Delilah began to laugh, and said: "Oh, World's-hatred, you're telling tales! Whatever would he do with my heart and blood?"

"Because he himself has no blood in his veins, and no heart in his breast, that's why he wants to take yours," Pedro whispered.

Now Delilah was angered, and cried: "Oh see how you lie, World's-hatred! I myself have seen his blood flow, and heard his heart beating!"

"You must come with me," said Pedro, pressing in on her. "For I have a better sweetheart for you, slim and handsome."

"Is his hair brown?" asked Delilah. "Is his face proud and pale?"

"His face is proud and pale," the provost responded eagerly, "and his heart burns for ever and ever!"

Hearing Grumbach's footsteps at the door, Delilah pulled her head back from the window-hole, and whispered to Pedro: "Go now, I hear my squire approaching." So Pedro slipped away, and she ran to greet Grumbach.

Grumbach was in a temper, and worried, Delilah could hear it in his tread. He came to a halt in the middle of the room, took a deep breath, and said: "There's a stink of pitch and

sulphur, can't you smell it?" Schellbock, Jäcklein, Hundt and Thonges, following him in, began eagerly to sniff, and Thonges said: "It must be that Indio ivy, the scent's heavy enough to make your head ache."

Grumbach settled on a chair, threw off his cloak, was about to remove his hat when he noticed a light burning in the room. He cried: "Jakob, blow out the light!" – for he removed his hat only in pitch-darkness.

Delilah came gingerly to his side and laid an arm around his neck. For a while all remained silent in the darkened room, then Grumbach cried: "I must have my arquebus before morning, the gold must not fall into the Emperor's hands. What sort of timid wretches are you!"

"Squire," said Schellbock, "it's not our fault, we tried it with lies, and stealing, and haggling, And we kept jangling the gold in our purses. But there wasn't an arquebus to be had, even if we'd offered eternal bliss."

"Reason being," said Jäcklein, "Cortez swore that anyone who becomes parted from his arquebus will be hanged there and then. And he's a hard man."

"The gold must not come into the Emperor's hands, even if I have to go for a footpad!" Grumbach yelled. "They mean to use it to suppress the new religion, and slake the papists' vengeful thirst."

"Squire!" said Thonges. "Today is the Jagoes' carnival night. And every Spanish soldier has two gold pesos in his pouch, so they'll drink themselves silly, for the Spaniard prefers his vine-berries without the peel. They'll all be senseless tonight, and if anyone loses his arquebus, it won't be me who cuts him down from the gallows."

"He's right!" Schellbock confirmed. "Come, comrades, if we don't get hold of one tonight, we never will till the Day of Judgement."

"I'm not so hopeful," said Jäcklein. "The Spaniards are crazy about their arquebuses, they pay court to them as if they were a Lisa or a Greta. May they all be eaten up by lice! Farewell, squire."

The Germans stomped out, only Grumbach remained in the dark room, sitting on his chair with his head in his hands, for he had received a curious vision of Germany.

At first he saw nothing, only heard as if from far away a tune of drum, drone-bass and fife, and always the same one, probably repeated for the sixth or seventh time, brief and shrill.

Suddenly he glimpsed a little village, it was winter, night time, but he could still see clearly what was happening.

He saw snow on roofs, and the well was crusted with ice. A troop of imperial cavalry stood in the open space by the well. The captain was a strapping young fellow, in a Spanish blue silk shirt, and he had teeth like a horse. His cavaliers stood all around, so many that their lances made a forest of points aimed at the sky. Others came running out of cottages, dragging wooden chests, geese, hens, and stuck pigs. Three cavaliers swung a wooden beam at a barred door. One hugged an old man and pointed his pistol up his nose. A barn was ablaze. A boy lay on the ground bleeding, his chest shot through. A woman threw herself on him, wailing. Two

more women ran panting up the lane, chased by a rider, and both held the hem of their skirt between their teeth.

All of a sudden Delilah screamed, and asked: "Squire! Why does your heart pound so loud?" Grumbach emerged from his dream. The vision of a little village raided by the Emperor's people vanished, but the shrill tune of drum, drone-bass and fife sounded even now in his ear. He passed a hand over his eyes and said: "My heart pounded because I thought of Germany."

Delilah held his hands tight, and asked: "Squire, why does your blood race so wildly?"

Grumbach stood, shook free of her and said: "My blood races because I think of Germany."

"Where are you going?" Delilah wailed. "I don't want to be left alone." She pulled her dress off her shoulders, clung to him, and pleaded: "You must stay, squire!"

Grumbach became angry, pushed her aside, and cried: "Enough! I have to go now. There's no time for such entertainment tonight!"

Once he had gone, Delilah ran to the door, and there sat Mathias Hundt keeping watch. Delilah drew close, leaned her head on his shoulder, and asked: "Mathias, what do you do all the long night, while you stand watch?"

Mathias just growled, and made no answer.

Delilah tugged at his beard, and said: "Don't growl, Mathias! You must answer me. What do you do all night long?"

Mathias, resentful and peevish, said: "I think of Germany."

This angered Delilah, and she smacked his head, because Grumbach and all his men did nothing but think of Germany, and left her all alone. She stepped back indoors and went to sleep, for the scent of Indian ivy had made her little head tired and confused.

And she too that night had a dream of Germany. She saw Grumbach in his leather cape-collar, but hatless, so for the first time she glimpsed his forehead, his temples, and the left eye he kept hidden under his hat. And she saw that his hair was brown and curly, and his face was very handsome and proud, and pale as never before. But suddenly she realised he was holding a strange woman in his arms, hugging her tight, and it was not Delilah. The woman had a plump face, sturdy thighs, strong breasts, and her breath heaved fast and loud. And suddenly Mathias Hundt was there, pointing his finger at the strange woman: "Germany!"

CARNIVAL NIGHT

After Schellbock, Thonges and Jäcklein left the hut, they stumbled for a while through the lanes of the camp, until they heard in the distance the sounds of a fiddle, fifes and whooping. They headed towards the din. They came to an open space where the Spaniards were celebrating the Shrovetide carnival. They lay in the mud, carousing. So the three of them had to lift their feet high one behind the other, as if in a stupid dance in a dance hall, so as not to kick or step on any of the revellers.

What the Spaniards were guzzling was no proper wine, but false Indian wine distilled by the natives from the sap of a reed. It heated the brains of the Spaniards, and changed them to the extent that they began to curse, swear, scuffle and brawl, with nothing in mind but how to play tricks or hurl the coarsest insults.

In the middle of the ground were several musicians with fiddles and bagpipes. But they showed little skill in handling their instruments, and made a spectacle lamentable enough to arouse pity and wonder. A sharp-kneed fellow danced before them, his head leaning to one side, eyes tight shut, crying: This is the passy-measure, a pure chaste dance, all should join in.

But the rest paid him no attention, all wanted to be the one who downed the most. The raw spirit had rendered many sluggish, slow and dull, overcome with melancholy, drinking so they might be dissolved into Christ, for everything that happens on Earth goes ill with them. Others however discussed matters of war, heroic deeds they claimed to have performed in Holland and Italy, but none believed anyone else, and they called one another black sheep, milksop, fake-feather, all the while wetting their whistles copiously with Indian wine. But now the one who had been dancing the passimezzo had clambered onto a wine-barrel and was leaping about, desiring to be recognised as the King of Apulia.

As the Germans stepped stiff-legged through the scuffles, someone cried out: "By Christ, the Germans have sniffed game, their noses tell them where wine is flowing!" And another grabbed hold of Jäcklein's foot as he tried to step past, crying: "Hey, where are you going? Stay, you think we don't have wine enough? The Great Heathen himself honours us with his wine!"

The Germans could have met with no more welcome a command, so Jäcklein at once squatted down, saying: "Who'd not want to drink, where the fiddle speeds it so merrily down the throat!" Schellbock and Thonges too lowered themselves to the ground, and Schellbock drew a big hunk of cheese from his pouch, bit into it, and eased every hard unappetising mouthful down with a gulp from the wine-jug.

"You lot are in a merry mood," said Schellbock after a while, his mouth full. "Does the heart good to see it."

"Should I not be merry?" one of the Spaniards answered, his beard tangled enough to hold a swallow's nest; "Should I not be merry, when tomorrow the Great King of the Indios will curry my horse with the same hand that today bore the golden sceptre?"

The Germans pricked up their ears, stared at the fellow, and Thonges turned to a Spanish corporal, an undersized little man, and asked: "Your worship, what's he talking about?"

"Oh," said the corporal, who really was no bigger than a dwarf. "Tomorrow morning the entire army will pull out of here, and take possession of the Indian city. For the wind has blown away all the mist and cloud that lay upon it." And the little man began to draw himself up, stretching and swelling as if s he alone had blown away the mist.

Thonges wanted to ask more, but a confusion of voices drowned him out, and a drunkard shouted: "Fat Mondays forever! Drink up, drink up, even if you spew a thousand times!"

"Today's Shrovetide carnival," another roared. "All must be downed, everything we've got hold of up till now. Tomorrow I'll snatch away the golden bowl from which the Great Lord sups his pork dumplings, from right under his nose!"

"The Great Lord," cried a third, "sent Seignior de Leone a pair of spangled shoes, one gold spangle, the next silver, the third gold again, and de Leone struts about camp in those shoes."

"The Great Heathen honoured Seignior Quinones with four jugglers or players, they have to keep him amused with their antics."

"If it's carnival night," someone cried, "then we should have a carnival game."

"That would be good amusement," another agreed. "Let's play like the lansquenet and the hangman having a race, but the hangman runs the shorter course."

"I know a commedia about a Hebrew horse-dealer, he's being hauled in a wheelbarrow down to Hell by the Devil himself, but he's gulled the Devil into buying a blind nag to haul the barrow, instead of his own horse."

"I know another funny play about two Jews," cried Thonges. "About Abraham and Isaac, I saw it at Cologne on the Rhine, and Abraham thwarted God's little angel with a foul trick."

"So let the Germans play their carnival piece!" the corporal declared. He stood up and shouted: "Stop your noise now, stop your quarrelling, the Germans are going to play a commedia about two Jews!"

The Spaniards all climbed to their feet and stood in a circle around the Germans Thonges, Schellbock, Jäcklein.

"Neighbour," Thonges told Schellbock, "you must play Isaac, all you have to do is lie on your belly, and grizzle like a baby. You, Melchior, are God's angel; open your flies; but I shall play Abraham and God the Father, at the same time. But I need an arquebus."

"What d'you need an arquebus for, you rogue?" asked the Spaniard with the tangled beard.

"Because Abraham has to fire one off at Isaac, that's why I need an arquebus. Lend me yours!" Thonges took the gun from the Spaniard's hands, winked at Schellbock, and both of them believed they had won.

Schellbock lay down on the ground, Thonges knelt beside him, placed the arquebus barrel against his cheek, made a fierce face, and began to sing:

*Abraham pointed at Isaac his gun
And said: "Now your life is done.
I have to shoot you, beloved son.
You've time for just one little prayer
But after that you must prepare
For execution!
Now keep quiet, and fidget not,
For I want a nice clean shot."*

Having sung this, he pointed the arquebus at Schellbock's hind parts, and the Spaniards began to laugh uproariously to see Schellbock's teeth chatter, as he groaned and writhed on the ground as if he had the colic.

Thonges, all of a sudden God the Father, scratched behind his ear, and sang:

*God the Father an angel found:
"Fly right now down to the ground,
And do just as I say.
So the Jew can't fire his ball,
Wet his powder good and all,
So the shot will go astray.
Take care now, a big wind blows:
Shame indeed if your blood flows!"*

Once again the Spaniards grew helpless with laughter as they watched Jäcklein, more frisky than a puppy-dog, play his crude trick on Abraham's powder. But Thonges, with artful discretion, slid the arquebus towards Schellbock, and quickly sang the song to the end:

*To Jewtown now he flew pell-mell
And moistened Abraham's powder well,
True to the Lord's command.
"Mort de ma vie! Now who did that?
Hell's bells! Must be some stupid brat!
Damn and blast and a thousand curses!"
How the Jew his rage disburses
Seeking the culprit on every hand.*

*Renounce, oh Jew, this wicked plot,
A musket is no pepper-pot.
Your curses melt like dew!
Gunpowder is no papriká,
Shooting is a knight's affair!
Ne'er one for a Jew.*

As Thonges came to the end, he was rewarded by applause from all the Spaniards. One brandished his sword in the air as if he meant to spit sparrows, crying: "Lightning strike all murderous, usurious, hard-necked Jews!"

A second interjected: "In Utrecht, three of 'em took a boy down to a cellar and stabbed him there, with my own eyes I saw the Jew's crooked knife stuck in his throat!"

"Back home in Pfinsingen," cried Schellbock eagerly, "when a Jew was being buried, the ox would bring the corpse under the gallows without being led. It knew where a Jew belongs."

"Hell's boils and buboes!" the man with the tangled beard burst out suddenly. "Where's my arquebus got to, give it back!"

"I don't have it," Thonges replied. "I'm sure you got it back already, sir."

“Liar!” the Spaniard cried, and in his terror his eyes rolled like a calf’s heading for slaughter. “I don’t have it. ‘Od’s wrath, give it back, or else I must wring your neck till the red juice flows!”

“Oh, spare me your silly japes, I don’t have it,” said Thonges, turning his back on the man.

The Spaniard, who not long ago imagined the Great Lord combing his horse, goggled mad with fear from one to the other, hoping someone would come to his aid. But all kept silent, except for the drunkard hoping to be taken for the King of Apulia, who lay on the ground snoring loudly.

“Oh Jesus!” the Spaniard began to plead, “I don’t want to be hanged. What did I ever do to you, that you lead me to the gallows? For suffering Christ’s sake, give me back my arquebus!”

Then someone behind gave him a nudge. “Why make such a fuss? It’s Isaac there who has your arquebus.” And truly, the arquebus had slipped out from beneath his cloak, and was in plain sight.

“Hell’s bells, I was only joking, just a bit of fun,” said Schellbock with a sheepish grin.

“You can joke and have your fun with the Devil, but not with me!” the furious Spaniard screamed. In his terror he had decanted through his mouth all the wine he had swallowed this evening, fouling shirt and jerkin, so that he made a most unpleasing sight.

Thonges took the arquebus from Schellbock, and handed it to the Spaniard. “Here’s your arquebus, pig!”

“He called me pig!” the Spaniard cried, his courage restored. “Fetch my sword, one of you!”

“Enough!” someone cried, hauling him back by the collar. “We won’t gain Heaven this night just by drinking, cursing and quarrelling. Why haven’t we yet seen the dice?”

“He’s right!” someone cried. “We’ve wasted too much time on these Germans and their antics. Bring out the knucklebones!”

They spread cloaks on the ground, hunted in their pouches for silver stuivers and pennies, and at once began to jostle one another mightily as the dice rolled, ignoring the Germans.

The Germans sat sullenly where they were, mouths hanging open, saying not a word, for they were chagrined at not having held on to the arquebus. In silence they drained one jug after the other, but the longer they drank, the more mulishly they determined not to leave the spot before they could make off with the arquebus that filled all their thoughts.

Far off, dawn began to glimmer. A chill morning wind blew in the faces of the Germans and overturned a wine jug. The damp aroma from the spilled wine crept into their noses, and made them queasy.

As they sat apart, mulish and disgruntled, one of them hit on the notion that they might win the arquebus at dice. For they noticed that many of the gamblers had lost everything they brought with them, while others, in order to play on, had in utter desperation sold cloak, hat and sword to the fellow who served as referee, and who also rented out the dice and changed gold pesos into silver coin, and thereby gained profit and advantage from every win.

When the Germans saw so many loitering in despair and misery, unable to play on, they began to whisper urgently among themselves. And then Schellbock jumped up, pushed into the throng of gamblers, and prodded one in the back, saying: "I want to join in."

"Ha, get lost! You haven't a single red penny in your purse!" the Spaniard replied.

Schellbock slowly squatted down, put a hand in his trouser-pouch, and started to empty it. First he drew out a little red neckerchief, then a knot of string, a knife, a cheese, a flint and tinder, a cloth he used to wax his boots, two beets, a big molar that had come loose in his mouth the day before, some bacon, and finally a handful of gold grains, smoothed by water to the shape of a lentil, each worth perhaps half a ducat, that he carried in his trouser-pouch.

When he showed the Spaniards the gold grains, the Germans were at once welcome guests again. The gamblers gathered around, and called for fresh dice.

Schellbock placed several grains on the ground in front of him, and a Spaniard cried: "I'll see you with two gold pesos!"

But Schellbock shook his head. "We don't want your money."

"Well then, in my tent I have nine ells of red cloth from Mechelen, for making a cloak."

Schellbock again shook his head.

"I have a pair of gloves of the finest workmanship," another offered.

"I have a picture of the blessed Virgin, painted by a proper painter on a bird's egg. To that I'll add two hunks of fat bacon, and a leg of lamb pricked with garlic."

But Schellbock stuck mulishly to his intention, even though he dribbled all down his chin to hear of two fat hunks of bacon. He swept the gold grains into a heap, and said: "Match these with your arquebus!"

The Spaniards all goggled at one another, and their eyes flashed secret signals to the fellow who rented out the dice. Then the one who owned the painted egg turned to Schellbock, and said airily: "Oh, why not! I'll set my arquebus against your gold!"

Schellbock was astonished to see a Spaniard so blithely entrust his arquebus to a throw of the dice, when a loss would bring the rope around his neck. He was mistrustful and annoyed, grabbed hold of the arquebus and checked it over on all sides, but soon saw it was neither defective nor broken, as he had suspected it might be.

"Powder and lead too!" he said at last, after scrutinising it from end to end and side to side.

"Oh, powder and lead too, if you must!" the Spaniard cried impatiently. "Take up the die, you have first throw."

Schellbock took up the die, threw it in the air, saw that he had thrown a deuce or an ace, and growled: "Damn, I've thrown a monster here, it's a deuce."

The Spaniard grabbed the die from his hand, threw a five, and yelled: "Cinq! I've won! Hand over the gold!"

Schellbock shoved a grain of gold towards him, and cried: "Keep going, keep going, don't waste time!" He threw the die to a great height, but secured only an ace, and so lost again.

"Hey, let me throw," said Thonges. "My hand's steadier."

Schellbock wouldn't hand over the die, yelled that he'd played this game a lot longer than Thonges, because in Germany he used to keep a tavern.

But Thonges snatched the die, and shoved Schellbock aside. He too failed to win a single throw, so one little golden grain after another came to rest in Spanish purses.

But the more the Germans played, the more they were consumed by gambling fever. With their heads so heavy, they failed to see that the Spaniards were slyly cheating them with loaded dice.

And so, with much scolding and cursing, the Germans lost one gold grain after the other, but as they sat there, Garcia Novarro happened to come by, bent over, unsteady on his pins, in his hands a leather pouch, and he was counting his gold as he went.

"Hey, Seignior Secretary," someone in the crowd taunted him. "Didn't you count your gold a few hours ago? You think it's grown over night?"

"How many are missing, until you have your twenty all together?" someone else called out.

"Still missing three," Garcia Novarro mumbled. "Three gold pesos, then I have the twenty."

"The coin-demon has them all. No food or drink goes in his gob, and he fences with a Jew's pike," a third said with a laugh.

"He wants to pay Cortez back the twenty ducats that bailed him out from the Debtors' Tower, he's only three short now," said the one playing at referee.

"I will no longer shoot unlucky creatures made by God from the same clay as myself," Garcia Novarro said softly.

"Well, look over here!" said the referee, pointing to the dicing Germans. "You can win your three ducats on a single throw!"

"Am I to entrust my sweat and my toil to those scandalous dice?"

"It's not your ducats you should set against the Germans' gold, it's your arquebus."

Garcia Navarro's face took on a frightened look, he would gladly win the three ducats, but was deeply hesitant. "Go for it," whispered the referee. "You can't lose, the dice are loaded, they're from Holland, roll them sliding on the ground, then you'll have a five or a six, but the Germans throw them in the air, and all they have is an ace, a deuce or a terce."

So Garcia Navarro gathered his courage, stepped up to Jäcklein, and said: "I set my arquebus against your three ducats."

The Germans turned out their purses and collected their last remaining crumbs of gold. Jäcklein said: "All right, one more go, and if we lose this one it's all over, and we can dance our way home with empty purses."

“Three throws!” the referee cried. “Seignior Secretary, you have the first throw.”

Garcia Novarro took the die in his trembling hand, made the sign of the cross over it, and rolled it as the referee had advised.

“Five!” called the referee.

Jäcklein picked up a die, and threw a three. “Terce! Another terce!” cried Jäcklein in a fury. “Why can I never throw a cinq or a six?”

“You have two more throws,” Thonges encouraged him, “you can still win.”

Meanwhile Garcia Navarro made his second throw, and again achieved a cinq, or five.

Jäcklein with his second throw again achieved no more than a terce. Jäcklein was struck dumb with anxiety, for he had set his all on this game. But Schellbock whispered: “Not lost yet. Now he’ll throw an ace, and you a six.

Garcia Novarro made his third throw. “Six!” he cried. “Game over! I’ve won the three ducats. Give them here, those three ducats.”

“I have one more throw,” Jäcklein yelled.

“You great ass!” cried the referee. “You’ll have to make eleven on one throw to win. How will you do that on a single die?”

“I still have one throw!” Jäcklein insisted. “And I’ll take it, in the Devil’s name!”

When Garcia Novarro heard this, he thought Jäcklein was summoning the Devil to his aid, and grew very uneasy, crossing himself again and again.

But Jäcklein grabbed the die, and threw it so high in the air that it was lost to sight.

As they all stared into the heights, suddenly they heard a whooshing and a whistling, and the die came hurtling back down to bury itself in the dirt at their feet.

Jäcklein bent down to see what he had thrown, raised his head, and said calmly: “Eleven.”

Schellbock and Thonges bent down their heads, stared at the die, and cried: “Eleven!”

The referee said angrily: “You trying to make a fool of me?” and bent down to the die. He quickly stood upright again, clapped his hands together, and cried: “Upon my soul, he really has thrown eleven!”

For in the impact of its landing, the die had divided, and looked as if a sword had split it in two. The two pieces lay side by side, one showing on its back a five, the other a six.

“So he’s won,” said the referee. “Seignior Secretary, you must give him your arquebus, he has won.”

Garcia Novarro regarded Jäcklein with an apprehensive and troubled look. He whispered: “I well know who aided you in this. He has taken great power to himself in Cortez’ camp.” He handed the arquebus to Jäcklein, saying: “Take it away. I leave it with you in the knowledge that it has brought me sorrows enough.”

“Powder and lead too,” Jäcklein demanded.

"I still have a handful of powder, but no more than three bullets," said Garcia.

"Give 'em, give 'em!" Jäcklein urged. "I'll even give you three ducats for them."

At the sight of Jäcklein's gold, Garcia handed over his powder and lead, tucked the grains into his pouch, and slipped away.

The Spaniards stared after him as one already mounting the steps to the scaffold. But Garcia Novarro took no notice, he counted his gold, and his thoughts were elsewhere.

The Spaniards drew close again and dived some more, but the Germans slipped away to admire the arquebus.

"We have an arquebus at last!" said Thonges.

"But powder enough for only three bullets," Schellbock pointed out.

"It's enough, it's enough!" Jäcklein whispered. "We need no more than these to give the war a different aspect."

"Then I wish the first bullet on that bowlegged provost and hangman who threatened me with the gallows," Schellbock muttered.

"The second I award to Mendoza, that fop, that coxcomb, he ran my first master through, outside the town of Ghent!" Jäcklein raged.

"And the third to cruel Cortez, right in his flinty hard heart!" growled Thonges.

"See the Germans over there!" a Spaniard cried. "What are they doing with their heads stuck together? What are they whispering and conspiring about?"

But Schellbock, now he had the arquebus, paid the Spaniards scant attention. "What's it to you?" he roared back. "Stick your nose up your own arse, you stuck-up Spanish dolt!"

"We're dividing up what's left of our property," Jäcklein called out.

And Thonges brandished a fist, jutted his chin, rolled his eyes, and cried: "You've had it now, you pious knaves, and I'm sorry for it! Our powder's not enough for all of you, so may you succumb to the plague, the itch, and the falling sickness!"

THE PROVOST

Meanwhile, late in the night, Grumbach had returned to his hut.

The arquebus that occupied all his concern and all his desire had proved impossible to obtain. But his heartsick melancholy could not prevail for long. A wilder and more audacious plan had suddenly come to him, and gave him no respite.

Mathias Hundt, lying outside the door on watch, discerned already from a distance his squire's truculent obdurate expression, knew that all the duplicitous fawning was now over and done with, and Grumbach would whistle a different tune. But he said not a word, asked no questions, regarded his master with a curious and expectant gaze.

“Mathias!” said Grumbach. “You must keep close watch now, so that no one enters this hut. Let nobody in, not even Thonges, Jäcklein or Schellbock. For I am now about to acquire the arquebus, even if I must cozen it from the Devil in Hell.”

Mathias obeyed at once, drew his knife, and braced his long legs against the doorpost, so that not even a louse could creep unseen across the threshold.

Grumbach entered the hut, closed the door, picked up sleeping Delilah and carried her to the other room, so that she would not be wakened by the Devil’s howling. For what he had in mind was to conjure the Devil to his presence using black magic, and compel him to provide an arquebus.

So he built a fire in the middle of the room, drew a circle in the dirt with his sword, and stepped into it. He pulled strangely-shaped roots and poisonous weeds from his pouch, and threw them onto the fire. And he began to murmur Latin conjurations and incantations that made his own hair stand on end.

But all remained quiet, no Devil appeared, and Grumbach stood alone in the room rubbing his eyes, for the fire emitted acrid stinking smoke.

“Ah, such an ignorant Devil,” Grumbach thought in annoyance. “He doesn’t understand Latin.” He began to chew on some fresh occult formulae, this time in the Hebrew language, for he thought: If the Devil’s not Catholic, then he must be a Jew.

But still the Devil would not appear. Grumbach raged to see the Devil show his backside in such insolent fashion, and resolved no longer to be the ninny and butt of Hell’s laughter. So he made a cut in his arm with his sword, and let three drops of blood fall into the fire. And three times he called the Devil by his name, in Spanish.

Flames of blue, red and yellow flared, so that Grumbach stepped hastily back out of the circle, thinking the Devil must be about to come down in such a dreadful tumult of storm winds that beams would bend and be smashed to pieces.

But all remained calm, the fire burned as placidly as before, and no Devil appeared.

When Grumbach turned towards the door, he realised at once why all his toil and effort had been in vain. For in general the Devil will become visible and reveal himself in his hellish guise only when nobody, whether out of ghoulish curiosity or foolishness, is there to spy on the nocturnal conjuring. But now Grumbach saw, standing in the doorway, Pedro Carbonaro peering in, holding two eggs in one hand and a pannikin in the other. He was hopping in great humility and confusion from one leg to the other.

Grumbach became irate and peevish, because the provost’s stupidity had rendered all his toil in vain. So he advanced on Pedro Carbonaro with hard words: “You rogue! Stupid beggar! Bowlegged piece of junk! What do you want here, who summoned you?”

“Squire!” Pedro said, fear in his face. “I saw smoke from your chimney, and thought you must have a fire I can boil my eggs on. With your permission, squire!” And he came all the way in, set the pannikin in the fire, broke the eggs into it, and warmed his hands.

“How did you persuade my man to let you in?” Grumbach demanded sternly.

“Squire, your man’s lying outside the door, snoring fit to scare wolves away,” Pedro replied.

Grumbach went out, and found Mathias Hundt before the door, so deep asleep that no amount of shaking and kicking could arouse him and set him on his feet.

“It’s that Indian ivy,” Grumbach raged to himself. “It’s made him slow and spiritless, damn and blast the man! But I must be rid of Cortez’ hangman, then I can start over again.”

He went back into the hut. The fire had fallen in and burned low, so the room was almost dark. In the corner he heard Pedro slurping his egg broth and smacking his lips.

“Aren’t you done yet, you dirty beggar?” he shouted at him. “Does your belly have no floor? Go now, you can belch and stink up the air with your farts outside!”

“Ho, Squire Hackles! Do you seek another quarrel? At your age, up to your ears in troubles, and no clue how to come free of them!”

“Do you always open your gob and snarl at someone, once you’ve stuffed your belly full?” Grumbach shouted at the hangman. “Skip now, you most wretched creature on all the earth!”

“Not so wretched!” he cried from his corner. “Not so wretched! It won’t go well for you to scold me! I’ve always been a good friend to you, my good advice has often served you well!”

“Ha, you wicked fool and fantasist!” said Grumbach, greatly taken aback. “I can’t bethink anything you’ve done for me, and don’t know when I ever had a hangman for a friend!”

“So you don’t remember me?” came an angry retort from out of the darkness. You don’t recall when once, on Saint James’ Day near Pfingsingen, you were leading rebellious peasants against the Bishop of Speyer? Good advice I gave that day: leave the Bishop alone, it’s hard to swim up the Rhine. Keep well away, I said, it’s too big a quarrel for you. But you wouldn’t listen, you just had to brawl and fight and come to blows with everyone.”

In his mind, Grumbach was all of a sudden back in Germany with his forlorn venture, he had no sense at all of today, yesterday and tomorrow, and forgot who it was talking to him. He was seized with anger when he thought of the Bishop. “He took it too far with my villages, the varlet!” he roared. “Robbing, stealing, grinding the poor!”

“Oh, but you could make a fine show of it now!” came mockingly from the corner. “You’d have the edge and the advantage everywhere you went! But that’s how you got yourself expelled from the Empire, driven from your estates, and so beggarly poor you own almost nothing but your baptism and your Christian creed!”

“I never wasted my life in idleness,” Grumbach sighed, his head drooping sadly. “I never stood leaning on a broomstick behind the door.”

“Oh, back then you were idle enough!” came a cry from the shadows. “When I said you should go to help Spanish Carolus, and take up his cause to be crowned Roman Emperor in Aachen! – ‘Is it contrary to your honour? Honour’s but a shadow,’ I told you. ‘Charles of Ghent will reward you with money and lands and people.’ – But you wouldn’t listen, and I’ll tell you why: because you yourself nursed a secret desire for the great Te Deum in Aachen Cathedral. You wanted to reach out with your own hand for the Emperor’s golden throne.”

“Shut up!” Grumbach screamed. And in a trembling voice he enquired of the shadows: “Who revealed my secret to you? That moment was known only to me, and to God.”

“God knew nothing of it!” came the cry from the corner. “God bothers himself but little with the haughty acts of princes and lords. God cares more that a poor man has some millet gruel at noon, than for all the vain worldly dealings of kings! But I, Squire Hackles, I knew it. It was with me and not with God that you conversed that day.”

Now cold shivers ran down Grumbach’s spine. He blew into the embers, poked them and pulled out a burning brand, and with this torch shone a light into the corner. But the brand fell from his fist when he saw the Devil himself sitting there; and it was the Devil who had so cruelly mocked him. But his indomitable heart at once mastered his fear. He picked up the torch, stepped towards the Devil, and said with a laugh: “Oh, Godfather Valentine, I didn’t at once recognise you from your wicked tongue! I waited long enough for you to turn up.”

“Not much time,” growled the Devil as he stood there in the corner. “Lots of good clients in this Spanish camp. I must be of service to two great hidalgos, ever at their beck and call.”

“Who are those two that you have in thrall, Master Beelzebub?” Grumbach asked, very curious to know.

“The Duke of Mendoza,” said the Devil, “and Hernando Cortez. To the one I’ve granted powers of seduction and lechery, to the other, glory and power. But what is it you want from me, Squire Hackles?”

Grumbach was astonished and alarmed to learn that Cortez and Mendoza had pledged themselves to the Devil, but he now understood why resistance to Cortez’ army from himself and the Indians had all been futile.

“What is it you want from me?” the Devil repeated, stepping very close to Grumbach. “Am I to carry you back to Germany on my hump? Am I to help you regain your estates, where now the Bishop rules with arson and bloodshed? Am I to restore your fortified manor at Hohenrhein-stein, that the Bishop burned down and demolished? For me nothing is impossible, I have tremendous power down here on Earth.”

“I want nothing so grand, Squire Lucifer,” said Grumbach. “All I want is an arquebus, along with powder and shot, nothing more.”

“Squire,” the Devil scowled, “I cannot supply you with an arquebus. It would go counter to my pact with Cortez and Mendoza.”

“So not even you will bring me an arquebus!” screamed Grumbach in full fury, shaking his fist under the Devil’s nose. “So take yourself back to Hell, and catch the plague, and I can find my own way back to Germany without your hump!”

“Ah, so our dealings have fallen by the wayside. I shall not bend, I can carry someone else on my hump!” the Devil said equably, turning his back on Grumbach.

Grumbach paced up and down in a rage, but soon realised he had been too fierce and impetuous. So he came to a halt, took the Devil by the shoulder, and began to speak nicely to

him, calling him lord and master. "Lord Cleverdick," he said at last, "what did Mendoza give you for your help?"

"The Duke of Mendoza," said the Devil proudly, "promised me ownership of his red blood."

"What?" cried Grumbach, slamming his fist on the table. "Is the Devil so easily gulled? In Granada, every priestling preaches from the pulpit how Mendoza has from his mother's side not red blood in his veins, but sand from the Moorish desert!"

"You know this for certain?" cried the Devil, aghast.

"As certain as Whitsun comes after Easter," Grumbach laughed.

"So the vulgar rumour that floats about the camp is no lie! I refused to believe it," the Devil wailed, and he began to grind his teeth horribly, and huff and puff through his nose.

"And what did Cortez promise you?" Grumbach asked.

"Cortez promised me his beating heart," the Devil admitted, guardedly.

Now Grumbach's laughter became immoderate, he threw himself down on the wooden bench as if his legs couldn't hold him, and at last he cried: "So the Devil's been cheated again! Everybody knows the Imperial plenipotentiary Seignior Diego Velasquez sent Cortez here to conquer this land in the cruellest manner for the Imperial crown, precisely because in his chest Cortez has not a heart, but a pebble of flint. Oh, how shamefully you've been deceived!"

The Devil tore his hair wildly with both hands, and banged his head again and again on the wall in utter despair.

"Because those two have deceived me so shamefully," he said then, "I shall help you to obtain an arquebus. But what will you give for my help?"

"You may take my left eye in return," Grumbach said quietly.

When the Devil heard that he was to have Grumbach's eye, he forgot all about the previous mishaps, and swooped like a hawk on a flock of hens. "Mordio! Agreed!" he cried. "It's a done deal!" And he hastened to the corner where a wooden tub filled with water stood, and dragged it wheezing to the middle of the room.

"Look into it!" he told Grumbach. "What do you see?"

Grumbach bent over the tub. "I see there as in a mirror some fellows lying on the ground at dice. I can make out my men, Thonges, Schellbock and Jäcklein. The others I don't know."

"What else can you see?"

"Jäcklein's picking up the die, he makes a throw. Now it's the other one. Jäcklein's head droops, he's lost, the dolt. Now he's going to throw again."

"You pledged me your eye," said the Devil. "So let me see if your eye is sharp enough. When Jäcklein makes his third throw, lunge out with your sword and strike the die before it falls back to earth."

Grumbach drew his sword and stared into the tub.

“Jäcklein’s lost again. They’re arguing. Now he wants his third throw. The die is flying up ...”

“Strike!” roared the Devil. “Hit it! Swing your blade!” Grumbach’s sword whistled through the air and hit the water with a great splash, sending angry gouts of spray up on all sides.

“What do you see now?” the Devil asked.

“Nothing!” Grumbach said. “The water’s too disturbed, the mirror’s broken.”

Both of them, the Devil and Grumbach, waited quietly for a while, not saying a word. Grumbach stared into the tub.

“Now I see!” Grumbach said suddenly. “An image is forming. I see Jäcklein, Thonges and Schellbock, huddled together – and they have an arquebus!”

“So you struck well!” said the Devil, pleased. “The arquebus is yours! Now you must pay.”

“Is it really mine?” Grumbach asked suspiciously. “No one can take it from me?”

“It’s yours, as surely as if you had it in your own hands right now. And if Cortez tries to take it from you by force, just tell him: ‘Seignior Cortez, I bring greetings from your dear cousin, he’s thinking of you, and licking his lips!’ Then Cortez will have to leave you in peace. Remember the message, word for word. But now I want your left eye.”

At this, Grumbach began to laugh a third time, and he cried: “So the Devil always lets himself be cheated! If you want my left eye, you’ll have to go fetch it, for I left it with the Spaniards on the island of Ferdinandina. Off you go to look for it!”

He swept the hat from his head, and showed the Devil the empty socket, and the face scarred and disfigured by the knives of Spanish slavers, so hideous that the Devil screamed out loud and turned his head away in horror.

When Grumbach saw how even the Devil was repelled by his appearance, he stopped laughing, and glumly placed the hat back on his head. At once he stepped smartly back into his circle, for the Devil deceived began to rage and foam dreadfully, and belabour himself with his own fists. Grumbach watched as the Devil flitted in the air all about the hut, banging his head alarmingly against every wall, until at last he disappeared through the window-hole.

As Grumbach stood in his circle, terrified by the ghastly savage torment the Devil had revealed, he became suddenly aware of a knocking at the door, and heard the voice of his man Jäcklein. “Wakey wakey, squire! It’s morning! The Spaniards are moving out, the mist has lifted!”

Grumbach opened the door and stepped out. There stood Thonges, Schellbock and Jäcklein. Mathias Hundt, too, had woken up and was rubbing his eyes.

“Ha, Mathias!” said Grumbach. “You slept a big enough hole in the night!”

Mathias made no reply, but hung his head. Jäcklein, however, brandished the arquebus, crying: “See this, squire! We have an arquebus, and three bullets, and a handful of powder too!” But he checked his jubilation, stared at Grumbach, and asked: “Why are you so pale? Did you dream of your mother’s death?”

“Did you notice someone leaving through the window?” asked Grumbach.

“I saw a bat flitting out of the window,” said Schellbock.

“No you didn’t!” said Thonges. “It was an owl.”

“Rubbish!” cried Jäcklein. “It was a black cat that leapt from the window.”

“Hey, look there!” Schellbock suddenly shouted. “There’s Cortez’ hangman slinking away, Pedro Carbonaro. Give me the arquebus. He deserves the first bullet, he wanted to hang me!”

“Are you mad, Schellbock?” cried Grumbach. “Hands off the arquebus! We have only three bullets, so we must discuss and mull each one over, seven times.”

“Od’s bodkin!” Schellbock muttered, reaching for a stone. “How did the hangman come past just now? Did either of you see him approach? I didn’t.”

He raised his arm and hurled the stone at the provost. But Pedro Carbonaro unexpectedly skipped aside, so the stone shot past. He turned, and brandished both fists menacingly at Grumbach. Then he made haste to get away, limping and leaping with great strides over stones, wooden beams, and scrub.

THE ARQUEBUS

By midday the Spaniards had struck their tents. Carts were laden with huge tightly trussed bundles of tent pegs, ropes and iron clamps. Mules and donkeys stood in long lines, and behind each beast lay already the load that would be heaped on its back. Cannons, mortars, culverins, *passevolantes*⁵ and quarter-cannons were already hitched to oxen, but only two – a long *passevolante* and a small mortar, dubbed by the Spaniards “The Sexton” and “The Sexton’s Dog” – had been loaded with powder. Their thunder was to drown out the neighing of horses and the braying of mules, giving the Spaniards the signal to move out – and at the same time render the Indians of Tenochtitlan subdued, timorous and docile.

Cortez had taken himself with several officers to a hilltop not far from the camp, and was listening to a report from de Leone on the condition of Tenochtitlan, its organisation and governance, as far as he had seen.

But the day was dull and rainy. Clouds darkened the sky, but, even so, many of the city’s plazas and streets were clearly visible. There was the artisans’ market, with its countless booths of blue, slate-grey and white wherein weavers, cloth-cutters and dyers, knotters, tanners and wood-turners plied their trades. Two lanes led into the market, Hunters’ Lane, offering quail, flycatchers, reed-thrushes and herons, and broad Gardeners’ Lane, where flowers, fruit, honey, onions, garlic and cress were sold. Not far from these two lanes was Potter-street, where people went who needed earthenware bowls, jugs, pots, tiles, all glazed and prettily painted, and, to the left of the market, de Leone could clearly make out Cooked-food Lane, and he imagined the smell of fish dishes, fowl pasties, and cakes made with eggs already wafting up his nose.

But all these lanes and little alleys are stinking and filthy, de Leone told Cortez; the ground being covered in the muck of humans and beasts. "A suitable stabling for such cattle," said Tapia, who every day rubbed lotions and salves onto his skin, and dyed and curled his hair. "For all heathen are lousy, hairy and scurfy, and walk about all the time covered in fleas."

"That idol statue," continued de Leone, "that you can see from here, Seignior Cortez, is considered by the Indios to be an image of their most eminent deity, who enjoys their great trust and confidence. But behind the statue lies the mosque of this chief deity, a plaza so extensive you could build on it a town of twelve hundred people, or set down upon it Seville Cathedral – which is of course a marvel to the whole world for its size; the whole complex, including the Giralda, the Alcazar, and the two royal palaces of Granada as well. But the Indios are so far removed from any true knowledge of God that their priests go untunsured, and wear their hair unshorn. And every day they desist from the enjoyment of meat, but guzzle porridge and slurp water, like any coarse peasant."

Cortez made no comment, but Mendoza could not hold back a laugh. He cried: "Ha, what stupid priests! Do they not know, I wonder, where to find by night the keys to the sanctuaries of their young women? Truly, they've drawn no benefit from their study of Horace and Virgil."

"On the plaza of this mosque," de Leone resumed his report, "on the night of the full moon, the sons of all the princes, governors and counsellors assemble in their most splendid cloaks all hung with gold. Each holds a wooden devil-mask before his face, and they dance hideous night-dances to that chief idol of Satan."

Now Cortez, who had stood mute, seeming hardly to attend to de Leone's report, all of a sudden lifted his gaze to look de Leone straight in the eye, and asked, choosing his words carefully: "Do the lords Cacama and Guatimotzin take part in these dances?"

"Everyone who is of the nobility joins in the dancing," de Leone replied. "And those two gentlemen are related to the royal house."

Cortez again fell silent, tugged his white ruff higher, and turned a half-circle, whereby his gaze fell on his captains, on Diaz and Tapia, on Sandoval, de Neyra, and Alvarado. For no reason, Diaz' fat face suddenly grew very red, and he cried: "Those two princes, I remember them well, they were most haughty, spouted defiant words all around, as if they had no idea that a human being is as transient as a bubble on water."

"In the town of Chalula too, the Indios were rebellious," roared Sandoval. "And how did we deal with them? Made a bright red olla potrida of them, and in place of salt used gunpowder, and lead shot for peppercorns!"

"Let's hack into those Indios, till they no longer know if they're men or cabbage-stalks!" cried Tapia.

"We must capture the king himself, so he hands over all his gold, or else forfeit his life!" screeched de Neyra.

Alvarado clenched his fists, shook them towards the city, and all he said was: "I'm looking forward to the parish fair!"

Only one of Cortez' officers, Pedro d'Olio, was unaffected by these fits of anger. He was astonished to hear Tapia and the others flare up so suddenly with such cruel, mocking and furious words against innocent Indians. He shook his head, saying: "Such attacks of cold fever. What's got into you, that all of a sudden you roar such raging nonsense of murder and olla potrida? If you've such murderous notions in your heads, for fear of God I shall let my hand ..."

But he never preached his pious sermon to the end, for Cortez' eye glided over him for a moment. Then a memory stirred, he suddenly thought of an old man in the Great King's retinue, an ugly humpbacked creature who scratched himself like a monkey all the time on his head and hump, using a little stick or whisk. And when he saw this old Indio in his mind's eye, anger rose up in him and he was overcome with savage ferocity. And he began to rage and roar like the others, crying: "Let's scratch them with our lances and delouse them with our cudgels, those stubborn, lousy, god-denying heathen, since they don't want it any other way!"

"Will the mad German and his doltish retinue join the dance?" cried Sandoval. "They won't want to stand idly by when the fun starts, when we set the table and serve the great olla potrida."

"Leave it to me!" declared Mendoza. "Grumbach won't ride with us into the city, this I promise."

"Will you drop a bullet down that heretic's gullet?" Tapia asked eagerly. "You're a man of the world, you know a dead steed never trampled anyone."

The Duke shook his head. "That won't do. He has powerful relatives and supporters at the Emperor's court. It would cause an almighty stink."

"Ha!" Diaz cried. "Why treat them so gingerly! Those Germans have nothing but their lances and their teeth. What can they do against our muskets and our cannon! They must learn to keep quiet, and make themselves invisible."

The officers said not a word more, but gazed with greedy cruel eyes down onto the city of Tenochtitlan, its streets filled with busy people suspecting nothing, intent today as every other day only on earning their little crust of bread by haggling and toil, buying and selling, woodwork and metalwork, carrying messages and hauling loads.

But in their heads these Spanish captains divided up the people and all their possessions, and each one saw himself lord over many acres of land with forests, meadows and fishponds, together with uncountable hordes of slaves, who by ploughing, mowing, threshing and woodcutting had only to increase their master's wealth.

Alvarado alone had no such idea in his head, for his thoughts were all of the gold that, according to de Leone's report, the Indians at their full-moon dance wore on their clothing. He saw it there before him on the ground, big heaps of gold spangles, those little wafers in the shape of crabs, fish, goats and snakes that they wore at the throat; rings with stones of blue, red, and wine-yellow; helmets chased in gold, and armbands padded with cotton or leather. All this Alvarado saw lying there before him, and he closed his eyes, raised and lowered now the left hand, now the right, opening and closing it as if voluptuously pouring endless gold chains from one hand to the other.

Down below in the hut, Schellbock had attired his master in cape-collar and cloak; he had concealed the arquebus under the cloak, and when he finished he inspected Grumbach from every side and asked: "Have I hidden it well, squire? No one will suspect what fierce beast you carry beneath your cloak."

But Grumbach made no reply. Schellbock became annoyed, and grumbled: "Squire, what fever did you catch, that you've not said the least little word to me all day? Damn me if you don't look like you've swallowed a jug of sour beer!"

Grumbach held his head in both hands, and stared into the distance.

"What's up with you?" Schellbock insisted. "Squire, tell us!"

"Ruprecht!" Grumbach said. "Last night I saw the Devil."

"Od's blood and blisters!" Schellbock replied. His mouth hung open as he crossed himself.

"The Devil was here with me," Grumbach muttered. "He wanted to see my face. He sat right there in the corner. And when I took off my hat, the horror shook him to the core, and sent him howling on his way. I can still hear his howls!"

"Scabs and scurvy on him!" said Schellbock, shocked.

"Jesus! How he covered his eyes with a hand, so as not to see my cursed face a moment longer. Jesus, how my face must be ruined and ravaged beyond the human, to make the Devil himself shrink back in horror."

A notion suddenly entered Schellbock's head. "For sure you ate lentils and a bit of bacon for your supper. When I eat lentils and bacon at night time, I often see the Devil in my sleep, along with loads of old women."

"The Devil himself turned pale when he saw my face. He ground his teeth and brandished his fists, as if he wanted revenge, and I was never more to enjoy my time on the Earth."

"Od take his tail and claws!" Schellbock swore. "If you never again conjure up the Devil with lentils and bacon, he won't come back, and won't be able to take revenge. For God in his almighty wisdom has laid such a bridle on the Devil, that he can only vex a Christian when said Christian has eaten too much at supper."

"Ruprecht!" Grumbach commanded. "Run out and find a piece of mirror, or glass. I want to see my face, my much-slashed forehead and my empty socket. I've kept 'em hidden from human eyes under my hat for long enough!"

Schellbock went out, and at once returned with one of those slivers of mirror-glass that Indians accept from Spaniards in exchange for gold and silver, to hang as an ornament about the neck. "Here's a mirror for you, squire, take a look. Your face is really not so ruined as the Devil made out with his antics."

Grumbach took the mirror, but at once let go, for fear of the monstrosity he would surely spy in it. "I hear Delilah out there, laughing and singing!" he prodded Schellbock. "Shut the door, let no one in." Schellbock closed the door and shot the bolt. But Grumbach still hesitated.

“Now close the window holes, so no one can peep in. No one must see how the Spaniards marked me with their knives on Ferdinandina.”

Schellbock ran from one window hole to the next, and closed each so tight that not the least shimmer of light could enter the hut.

“Now strike a light!” Grumbach commanded. Schellbock passed him a burning brand. Grumbach reached for the mirror, but again dropped it as if it was red-hot iron. He grunted at Schellbock: “You still there, you dolt? Stick yourself in the corner! You’re not to look, no one is to look, just me alone.”

Schellbock obediently took himself off to the corner. Grumbach slowly and hesitantly pulled off his hat. But at the very moment when he meant to turn his gaze to the mirror, there came a loud knock at the door, and he heard Thonges call out: “Squire, the Duke of Mendoza is here, he’d like a word with you.”

Grumbach at once threw the mirror from him, quickly rammed the hat back on his head, pulled it low over his brow and his left eye. Then he stepped out.

The Duke of Mendoza had come mounted, and with him were a black horse and a white mule filly. Both were magnificently saddled and accoutred. As soon as he saw Grumbach, he leapt down, embraced him and cried: “This black horse I bring you as a present from Cortez, who requests your presence at his side during our entry into the Indian capital. But for your tender brown satin thing, I’ve brought along this mule.” He flung his arm around Delilah, hoisted her lightly up, held her a while in the air, and set her down on the mule’s back, saying: “Now you can ride in state behind your sweetheart, you brown satin thing!”

“Schellbock will be better pleased than Delilah,” said Jäcklein, “for up till now he’s had to carry her on his back, with a load of sweating and puffing and snorting.”

“Ha, Melchior Jäcklein!” Mendoza cried. “Is your head still filled with crickets and doves, and do a thousand fancies still lie hidden there? Horses are a rarity in the Spanish camp, otherwise I would surely have brought a hack for you, so you wouldn’t need to wear out your legs. You were the best of servants to my late friend; you used to sing so many nice songs. How did it go, that song of moonlight and wine that you sang to us, to your first master and me, with the lute, that last time in my garden at Ghent?” The Duke pondered a while, then began to sing softly in his delicate voice:

*The Moon serenely sails the sky
And now the evening hour is nigh.

You shall be my companions tonight:
Cool wine, and the Moon’s calm light!

For sleep tonight has forsaken me;
And worse, my love’s untrue to me.*

This put Melchior Jäcklein into a melancholy state, for it was this song that his first master, the young Castilian slain by the Duke in a duel, had desired him so often to sing and strum on the lute. But the Duke abruptly broke off before the song was ended, crying: “Devil take it,

here I stand singing, while Cortez awaits us along with all his captains. Mount up, Rhinegrave, and come along, for the Sexton's Dog is about to bark."

Delighted, Grumbach mounted his black horse. It was so long since he'd had a horse between his knees. For the New World at that time had neither horses nor mules: the most majestic animal the Indians had was the chicken.

But Mendoza had cooked up a plan by which he thought to deceive Grumbach, so that he would not enter the city with the army. As Delilah rode her mule alongside Grumbach, the Duke spent a good while favouring her with smooth friendly pretty words, as he stroked her cheek and arms. Then suddenly he lifted his head to the sky with a mournful look, and said: "See those clouds, Rhinegrave! For sure there'll be wind and rain today, much to Father Agostin's chagrin."

"Why Father Agostin especially?" asked Grumbach.

"Well, just before daybreak Cortez despatched the monk and several riders back to Veracruz, on an important mission that brooks no delay – for the monk is more astute and reliable than anyone," said the Duke. And bending towards Grumbach, he whispered in his ear: "He's to carry the rarest of all treasures from this country back to Spain, for no one in the Old World will ever have seen the like."

When Grumbach heard these words, he felt stabbed to the heart, believing that the monk was carrying away the Great Lord's treasure, so that gold was already on its way to the Emperor's purse. His face lost all colour, and his hand felt discreetly for the arquebus.

Meanwhile they had reached the crest of the hill where Cortez stood with all his officers. They leapt from their horses. Mendoza joined the group around Cortez, while Grumbach passed behind them, gesturing furtively to Jäcklein to follow him.

In his hands Cortez had a mappa, or plan, of the city of Tenochtitlan, prepared by Quinones and delivered to him by de Leone. It showed many of the streets and the biggest palaces, as well as the city walls, fortified towers, and some of the watercourses that crisscrossed the city. And with this in his hands, he assigned tasks and instructions to his officers: where each was to take up position with his detachment, how many sentries they should post, where the cannon should be positioned, and all these commands he issued in a low voice, so that the Spanish officers had to listen most attentively to his words, lest any be lost.

Only Grumbach heard none of Cortez' remarks. Fear of the Devil's vengeance kept gnawing at his heart. He was haunted by the Devil's savage threats. Shudders of terror ran through him, and he looked trembling around for Delilah, wanted to hold her close, as if she might protect him from the Devil's malice and revenge. But Delilah stood apart, playing with her mule and oblivious of her squire.

But suddenly there came into his mind the words Mendoza had spoken about the monk's secret mission, and he at once regained his courage and his defiant nature, and in his heart swore again his oath: the gold must never reach the Emperor's hands. "Melchior!" he whispered to Jäcklein. "Be ready. We two shall not ride into the city. We must chase after a beggarly monk, who is already on his way to Veracruz with the gold."

“Is that what Mendoza blew in your ear?” asked Jäcklein. “He lied. Everything he says, he says with a forked tongue.”

“The gold must not be allowed to enhance the Emperor’s unjust powers. Not one grain of it must cross the ocean, even if this cause should deliver me to the hangman’s mercy!”

“Squire,” Jäcklein warned, “Mendoza’s a thoroughgoing villain. You must not trust him. He was a villain to my first master. A fox in its den is not safe from the Duke’s deceptions.”

“Squire, what would we do without you?” Thonges asked in dismay. “Will you leave Delilah all alone? You know, any one of these Spaniards would like to get their hands on her. None of them’s so gappy-toothed and stupid he wouldn’t be greedy for such a tasty morsel.”

“You three,” said Grumbach, “take Delilah to the residence of Prince Cacama. He’s my friend, he’ll give you lodging, and serve up his very best dishes. And you mustn’t let any Spaniard cross his threshold, if he seems to have lecherous intentions towards Delilah.”

“Squire,” Schellbock replied, “heed well what I now say. I saw that gold not two hours ago, lying in Cortez’ tent, sewn into pigskins. You’ve been deceived!”

“Ruprecht, you can stay here and bake pears in the oven, I don’t need you. I know you hate chasing hares, unless they’re skewered and roasted,” Grumbach mocked him.

“Squire!” Thonges yelled. “On the contrary, you snap after Mendoza’s lies like a wool-weaver’s dog after a scrap of meat!”

“Fool! Dolt!” Grumbach let loose on him. “Leave me in peace, and the gout take you!”

“Squire, he’s right!” cried Jäcklein. “You’ve been deceived, even a pig would laugh.”

“So you stay here, and I’ll ride alone. Blue flames burn you! Your heart’s as thin as poorhouse gruel,” Grumbach cursed. “If Stefan Eberlein from Pfinsingen was still here, he’d ride with me, with no such impudence.”

The Germans had whispered quietly enough to one another at first, but as the argument grew more heated, the louder it became, and Grumbach’s final words were screamed loudly into Jäcklein’s face.

The Germans became suddenly aware of the silence all around them. The Spaniards had all looked on as they quarrelled, and Cortez himself had broken off his lecture to stare across with his rigid immovable face. And they were all staring indignant and annoyed at Grumbach and his men, and Diego Tapia made a sour scowling face and said: “Those people must always thrust out their snouts, and squabble and curse.”

The Germans fell silent in shame, and uttered not one word more.

But Cortez did not resume the talk interrupted by the altercation among the Germans. He stood, head leaning forward, motionless, and stared at Grumbach as if at a sea monster, and all the others began to gape and inspect Grumbach from top to toe, to see what Cortez found so strange in him. All at once Diaz cried: “Holy Mother of God! Don’t you see? He has an arquebus!”

For Grumbach had opened his cloak, and Garcia Novarro's arquebus was revealed to every eye. A great tumult and hurly-burly ensued; they all surged towards Grumbach; Diaz and Tapia drew swords as they ran. Sandoval screamed: "Treason!" and de Neyra: "Scoundrel!" and "Cut him down!" But Thonges and the other three placed themselves between Grumbach and the Spaniards, and levelled their lances. Only Mathias Hundt had no lance, but a cudgel, and did not delay in delivering to de Neyra, who screamed the loudest, two hard knocks to the head. But a sudden silence fell, for Cortez shoved both Spaniards and Germans aside, and stood face to face with Grumbach.

When Grumbach saw Cortez standing there like that, he knew at once that more was atfoot than Garcia Novarro's arquebus. And that more was at stake than the fertile soil of this land in which he and his men had planted barley, wheat and Turkish corn; and more than the victory or defeat of a pack of Spaniards. For what he saw facing him was not Cortez, but the huge Spanish World-dragon, with Germany in its maw, now reaching its claws across the ocean to the New World. Defiant and filled with hatred, Grumbach looked Cortez in the eye, and felt himself strong enough to defeat the World-dragon.

Like a cold wind in his face came Cortez' words, sounding hoarse and strangely altered: "Whose arquebus is that, Wildgrave of the Rhine?"

Grumbach shook his head, tried to speak, but his throat was suddenly blocked, as if his neck was gripped in strange cold hands. A slight fear stirred in him, and thudded against his heart. But he shook it all off, drew himself up to his full height, and said in a firm voice: "The arquebus, Seignior Cortez, is now mine!"

The veins at Cortez' brow stood out with rage, his fists clenched, and all his officers began to quake, and step back behind Cortez, as if afraid of the storm about to be unleashed.

Cortez called a second time. His voice sounded dull and menacing, as if it came from far away, from the black clouds in the sky: "Give back the arquebus! It is not yours, I know it well."

All at once Grumbach felt a heavy weight on his chest, he couldn't breathe, he seemed to be buried under a mountain. Hammer-blows of fear beat mightily in his soul. But again he mastered the fear, gathered his courage, and said calmly: "The arquebus is mine, and I shall not give it up!"

Cortez stepped back a pace, turned his head to the right, and then to the left, and glanced in frustration at his officers as if to seek their help, as if they could support him in averting the great calamity facing the Spanish army that he saw in Grumbach's hands.

And now it happened that he was visited by a dreadful grisly nightmare of the great carnage Grumbach and his arquebus would conjure up for the Spanish army.

He saw his officers standing all about him, but suddenly they all lay dead. Here's Sandoval, a brave resolute man, yet now he seems to sway back and forth, his jaws gape open, and the handle of a dagger protrudes from his chest. Here's Tapia, his dandyish clothes are torn and blood-flecked, and his fat glutton's face has been shattered by a blow from a cudgel. Here's Pedro d'Olio, he's keeling over, his face is green and swollen like a drunkard's, and drool runs from his mouth and nose. Here's Juan de Leone with ropes around his feet, his bound hands

held up for protection against his chest, his mouth gapes wide as if he's screaming for help in his final death agony, where none can hear.

And as these dreadful scenes paraded before Cortez' eyes, they filled him with revulsion and horror, and impelled him once and for all to fall on Grumbach, and tear Garcia Novarro's arquebus from his hands.

He stepped up to Grumbach, lifted his head, and cried to him in a voice that came deep from the sloughs of horror, fit to make steel and stones quake: "Give back the arquebus, Wildgrave of the Rhine!"

Grumbach's strength was now at an end. He saw Cortez standing there right in front of him: his body loomed huge; his head lost itself in the firmament; the sky's black clouds drifted past his brow, and rain dripped from his fists. But Grumbach himself was suddenly helpless, meek and feeble, the arquebus weighed heavily in his hands, it strove towards the earth. He couldn't hold on much longer, it seemed he must let it slide to the ground.

Then all at once he heard in his inward ear, soft and low, timid and hesitant, a voice that whispered fearfully: "The gold must not reach the Emperor's hands." And at the same moment he recalled the little formula the Devil had taught him in the night. It came stumbling and stammering from his mouth:

"I bring greetings from your dear cousin, he's thinking of you, and licking his lips!"

And as soon as the words were spoken, Cortez' power evaporated

The heaviness in Grumbach's limbs lifted, the ghastly hammer-blows no longer drummed against his heart. He stood erect, took a firm grip on the arquebus, stared calmly into Cortez' eyes. In front of him was a man of earthly dimensions, not a head taller than anyone else.

And Cortez turned wordlessly about, and walked away.

As he passed Alvarado, he came to a halt and commanded: "Hang him!"

"Who?" Alvarado asked.

"Garcia Novarro," said Cortez.

THE CURSE

Garcia Novarro had lain down on straw, and fallen asleep. Pedro Carbonaro fetched him away from there, tied his hands together, and drove him along with kicks and blows, screaming all the while: "Oh you fool and rascal! Now you're in my power, at last!"

Garcia Novarro had no idea what had happened. He stumbled sleepily from side to side, and rubbed his eyes with bound hands. He had pulled his cloak over his head against the heavy rain. Wisps of straw hung in his hair and on his clothes.

"Garcia!" Alvarado said curtly. "Take leave of your gold. You're going to be hanged."

Garcia stared in shock at Alvarado, fumbled in his hose, and brought out the purse with the twenty ducats. He held it out to Alvarado, thinking he meant it was all about the money.

"Take it," he said, "and let me be. I owe no debt to the gallows."

"Where's your arquebus?" Alvarado demanded.

"Oh Lord!" Garcia wailed. "It's lost and gambled away."

"Then you're condemned out of your own mouth!" Alvarado screamed at him. "Your meddling got the better of you, and so the hour has come for you to choke on the gallows. I'll teach you to gain gold with the King's arquebus!"

"Sire," Garcia pleaded, "this arose not from meddling, nor from sacrilege. Do you mean to deliver me up to him there, with his hellish claws?"

"He did it for a knavish trick!" screamed the provost, seizing Garcia's neck in his hands. "Come now, no more words, the gallows are snatching out for you!"

"Have mercy, sire!" Garcia howled. "I beg you, please!"

"Trickery!" the provost cried. He feared lest Alvarado might let Garcia escape his clutches. "You'll hang, and today I'll swing the rope so hard, your soul will be glad to escape your body!"

Alvarado pointed to Grumbach. "That man there might have mercy on you. If you can take the arquebus back from him, you can go free, on my word as a nobleman."

Garcia Novarro turned and saw, standing in a cluster, the Germans to whom he had lost the arquebus in the night. He was glad, thought he could escape the hempen bath being prepared for him by the hangman. He believed it would not be hard to wheedle the arquebus from these German simpletons.

He went up to Schellbock and barked at him, his face sour and angry: "Why stand here with your mouth agape? Did you not hear, the Devil will hang me, all because of the arquebus."

"A nightmare, for sure!" said Schellbock, scratching behind his ear. "Truly, hemp is the most acrid of herbs."

"So give me back my arquebus, this minute!" Garcia commanded. "Why are you still here? I've nothing more to say."

"The arquebus?" Schellbock sought confirmation. "No, brother, I'll keep it, the arquebus is mine. I won it in an honest game. Don't you remember? We threw an eleven."

When Garcia heard that the Germans were in earnest about keeping the arquebus, his haughty and quarrelsome demeanour all at once fled away, and in utmost terror he wailed piteously: "You won't give it back? Can't you see the hangman at my heels?"

"It's a bad idea to thresh oats with the hangman," said Schellbock with a shrug. "He always thinks your head's the barn floor! There's no help for it, you got the worst of the deal."

"Is this how you regard the word of God?" shrieked Garcia in despair. "Did you never read the Gospels, are you Christian, or a heathen?"

Now Thonges became angry, to be scolded by Garcia as a heathen. He pushed forward, braced his hands on his knees, and began to rant: "Where does it say in the Gospels we must give back the arquebus? Did Paul preach it to those Ephesians? Or put it in his letter to those

Corinthians? Get lost! I know the Gospels better than you, there's nothing in them says you have to stay unchanged."

Meanwhile Schellbock had been thinking whether by some sly trick Garcia might be given satisfaction. A good idea had come to him, which he now shared with Garcia: "If there's no other way," he said, "then my advice is: have a manly heart, and let them hang you."

"Are you done yet?" Pedro Carbonaro cried at the same moment from up on the ladder he had leaned against a stout tree. "We can make a little row of two together, my friend!"

When Garcia Novarro heard the hangman's cruel voice from the gallows ladder, his knees buckled in terror, and his eyes roamed desperately all around for an escape. Then suddenly he spotted in Grumbach's hands the arquebus for which he was to suffer death. Hope rose in him, he stepped closer, made a deep bow, and said: "Now God has come to my aid, and let me find my arquebus again. You'll give it back to me, for what use is it to you?"

Grumbach shook his head. "I cannot give you back the arquebus. It's not mine, it belongs to the king of this land, Lord Montezuma, whom I serve."

"And for the sake of that heathen, you'll send me to the gallows?"

"God forgive me," said Grumbach. "He gave us bread, fields and tools when we suffered shipwreck on his coast. I can do no other!"

"So you will be Lucifer's acolyte, and help him wreak cruel vengeance on me."

"So the Devil wants vengeance on you too? Did you maybe bilk and deceive him somehow?"

"Listen, squire," Garcia begged, and he began to narrate in great haste:

"Squire, I'll tell you everything. In my village there's a chapel, in it there's a bell to call the people to Mass. One night the Devil wanted to steal the clapper, so the people would be late for Mass. I come by, hear the Devil leaping about inside the bell, grumbling and snuffling. I make the sign of the cross under the bell, so he can't come out. I run and fetch the neighbours. The whole night till dawn we kept ringing the bell, and the Devil's bones were all broken, he limps even today. And that's why he's leading me to the gallows."

"Does the Devil always take such cruel revenge?" Grumbach burst out.

"Today you'll be the clapper," cried the provost down from the ladder, shaking the rope. "In a hempen bell!"

"You hear him?" cried Garcia. "For the sake of God's mercy, give me back the arquebus."

But Grumbach remained adamant. Just as he had protected the arquebus from Cortez' power, so now he protected it from the sympathy that Garcia's beseeching lament tried to arouse in him. "God forgive me," he said, "your pleading is in vain. I cannot do what you ask."

Pedro Carbonaro had now completed his preparation of the gallows. He leapt down from the ladder and took Garcia Novarro by the arm. "Come along now. I'm going to bathe your neck in the ropemaker's pond."

But Garcia tore free, ran to Delilah, and implored: "Dear maid, beg your sweetheart to give me the arquebus, for the sake of Christ and all the saints, or else I must die, as you can see."

But Delilah didn't understand, knew nothing of Christ and his saints. Around the neck of her mule she had found a leather strap with little silver bells. She made them tinkle, smiling and enjoying the sound.

Pedro Carbonaro seized hold of Garcia, shoved him towards the gallows, hauled him up the ladder, and took the noose in his hand. Garcia Novarro turned again to Grumbach, and called out: "Have mercy, give me back the arquebus! You see that I'm about to die!"

Grumbach remained silent.

"In Jesus' name! In Jesus' name!" Garcia screamed.

Grumbach was unmoved.

Now Garcia Novarro no longer begged and implored. He drew himself up, clenched his fists, and in his anger delivered a curse so awful that all those standing below the gallows shrank back in shock. "So take yourself off!" he shouted to Grumbach. "And take with you God's curse, that will fall upon you with dread and misery! And let the first bullet hit your heathen king, and the second your hellish slut, and the third ..."

The hangman slipped the noose over his head, and pushed him off the ladder.

But Garcia Novarro had no wish to die before he had uttered his ghastly curse to the end. He grabbed the noose in both hands as if he hoped to pull his head free. He opened his mouth wide, twitched his lips, and tried in vain to scream out the word that sat in his throat. His eyes swelled from their sockets, and stared hard at Grumbach, filled with hate. But Grumbach was suddenly seized with sinful arrogance. He stepped under the gallows, lifted up his head, and roared: "Will you not dedicate the third bullet to me? Why so silent all of a sudden?"

Now all those standing around the gallows fled stumbling away. For out of the hanged man's throat came whistling and wheezing:

"Third – your – self!"

THE WILDGRAVE RIDES

Rain poured endlessly down. The wind drove before it a little heap of dead leaves from the Indian ivy that two days ago had besieged and overwhelmed the Spanish camp. Darkness was gathering. Grumbach stood beside his saddled horse and waited impatiently for the Spaniards to start marching out. Delilah had taken refuge from the rain beneath Grumbach's cloak.

At around the fifth hour, thunder pealed from the small cannon named the Sexton's Dog. At once the Spaniards began eagerly to rush hither and thither, to form up in companies and squadrons.

Grumbach swung up onto his horse and shouted to Jäcklein: "Make ready! The Spaniards are riding out, but we take another way!"

“Squire,” said Jäcklein, “be patient! The Spaniards aren’t gone yet, can’t you see? Bishop Olviedo has just started to address them. We must wait.”

“What’s the priestling saying?” asked Grumbach. Jäcklein listened a while. “He’s promising the Indios the Holy Father’s blessing, as well as forgiveness for all their sins up till now, if they draw near to the Christian faith, and submit to it. And from that moment on they must be useful servants to the Holy Father and the Christian Church.”

“The pope’s eager enough to spread his blessing to the New World, now that the people in Germany no longer want to pay him,” Thonges jeered. “Just look at those church-slaves, with their pious cattle faces.”

The Spaniards all around had removed their hats, and kept their eyes cast reverently down. But Mathias Hundt fiddled with his hat, undecided whether to remove it or not.

“Look at Mathias!” cried Thonges. “Ever since a priest gave him a hunk of cheese once on a country road in Germany, he’s been a good little papist.”

Mathias growled, and kept his hat on, not deigning to reply. The bishop had by now concluded his address, the Spaniards raised their heads, and glared with hostile expressions at the Germans, who throughout the bishop’s prayers had so obstinately left the hats on their skulls, and exchanged noisy words.

“Up now, to horse!” cried Grumbach. “Melchior, we must swoop along like two hawks, or the monk will get away from us.”

“Squire, whatever’s got into you? You’re quivering with impatience from top to toe, as if you have a fever. Wait a bit, the Duke of Mendoza’s about to make a speech.”

“May his heart stop! I won’t wait a moment longer on the Devil’s vengeance. Curse the young goat, is he still spouting? What nonsense is he telling the Indios?”

“He’s telling them about the King’s great power. He says Carolus the Fifth is the most Catholic and excellent of all princes. Now he’s calling him his sublime and unconquerable sovereign and emperor, to whom the whole world must pay homage.”

“When I was a lad, I saw the sublime and unconquerable gentleman with the king his father strolling down a street in Cologne. He was running away from a little black dog, and made a disgusting mess in his hose. Even the king his father had to hold his nose when he smelled the sublime gentleman!” roared Thonges, rebellious and defiant.

The Spaniards once again stood there reverent and bareheaded. When Mendoza finished, they began to cheer and wave their hats, and one, hoping to gain favour with his captain, turned to berate the Germans: “What are you doing there with your stiff necks, you woodentops, you dung-forks? Did you not hear the Duke of Mendoza call for a *Vivat* for our most gracious monarch? Is he not your king as well as ours?”

“If he’s your king, you can keep him, that Charles of Ghent! I would dress him in saffron, ginger and Muscatel wine, and dedicate him to Satan for a New Year, what do we need a king for?” was Thonges tetchy response.

Now Cortez and his officers came riding to the top of the rise. He swung down from his horse, and received a banner from the hands of Captain d'Aquilar. The manifold din of the military camp gradually subsided to a hum, then to a gentle whisper, until silence reigned. Everyone, officers, common soldiers, baggage-train lads and ox-drivers, all hung with eyes and ears on Cortez' lips.

Cortez' voice rang out with brazen menace: "Hereby, as the King's first Governor, I take possession of this land, its cities, castles and citadels. And I will rule according to God's commandments, wherein he has instructed: 'If thou seest thy brother sin, then punish him'. And I will make the name of Our Saviour Jesus Christ renowned throughout the New World, which He has redeemed, just as he redeemed the old, out of the unfathomable abundance of His grace, and by the spilling of His own holy blood."

Cortez unfurled the banner, on which a likeness of the Saviour had been painted, holding the globe of the world in his arms. The Spaniards all sank reverently to their knees. Cortez' army had abruptly become a flock of pious sheep, the military camp a cathedral full of mute supplicants. Deep silence reigned all around. Even the Germans one after the other removed their hats, and bowed down before Christ's holy name and likeness. Amid them all, Cortez knelt and clasped his hands in prayer.

But suddenly a piercing cry rang out from among the congregation: "That one there, he keeps his hat on in the presence of Christ's image!" The congregation all looked up, and saw Pedro Carbonaro with his humped back, pointing at Grumbach. Again he crowed: "That one there, he keeps his hat on before Christ's image!"

They saw Grumbach, his face deathly pale, and indeed he had not removed his hat.

From every side, the Spaniards unleashed their anger and annoyance on Grumbach: "The Devil has filled his soul with pride! He won't even humble himself before Christ!"

"His saviour has another name: Judas Iscariot, it's to him he prays!"

One brandished his arquebus in Grumbach's face, shouting: "Knock his hat off with a cudgel, and the head with it!"

Grumbach reached for his sword, but still did not remove his hat. But through all the tumult he heard suddenly the cold, biting voice of Mendoza: "Let him be! It's not his fault. It's the new German religion, which teaches that one must despise and mock Christ, and betray him once again!"

When Grumbach heard the Duke's slanderous lie against the new religion, blood rushed to his head, and Peter's regret came over him, and Peter's repentance, for having denied Christ for the sake of his face. And repentance meant he had to step forward to the likeness of Christ, and remove the hat from his head!

The Spaniards' angry hate-filled cries suddenly ceased. Quiet whispers went around as they became aware of the misfortune and anguish that Grumbach had tried to conceal from human eyes beneath his hat. All lowered their eyes or turned aside, having no stomach for a lengthy perusal of that ruined face.

Then all at once, amid the profound silence, a terrified scream shrilled out. When Grumbach turned round, he saw Delilah, who now for the first time knew her squire's dreadful secret that he had kept concealed from her. She covered her eyes with her hands, and fainted into the arms of the Duke of Mendoza, who was standing beside her.

Grumbach walked over to her with a nervous smile playing on his lips, stretched out his arms, and called her by name. But Delilah, filled with horror, buried her head against Mendoza's breast, refused to look at Grumbach, and screamed: "Leave me alone! What do you want with me?"

Grumbach turned his back on her, and without a word pulled the hat down over his brow. And all at once he saw again that day on the island of Ferdinandina, when Schellbock carried her on his back down from the cliff. And he was filled with sadness at the folly and cruelty with which all human endeavours are marked, because it was on account of the calamity that he suffered for her sake from Diego Velasquez' people that she now fled from him.

He turned gloomily to Schellbock and said: "See! This is how the Devil has his revenge."

At that very moment the second shot thundered from the jaws of the Sexton's Dog, giving the signal for the Spanish squadrons to descend the hill. Thonges, Schellbock and Hundt gathered around Delilah, and led her along on her mule behind the Spaniards. Once they reached level ground they halted, and waved their hats in farewell to Grumbach.

Grumbach alone remained on the hill, along with Jäcklein. He stared after his men, waited for Delilah to turn around and wave her farewell. But Delilah never looked back. He watched her and his men disappear into the mass of Spanish cavalry, which looked from afar like a swarm of wild hornets, buzzing and swooping noisily down on the city.

When the last of the Spaniards had vanished from sight, Grumbach swung onto his black steed and called to Jäcklein: "Climb up behind me! We're off!"

"Oh woe! Such dreadful haste and impatience!" Jäcklein wailed.

"We must reach the narrow pass at Itzaplan before Father Agostin, else he'll be away free with the gold."

"Squire!" Jäcklein panted as he clambered up behind Grumbach. "Believe me, you've been deceived, we're on a ride to nothing!"

Grumbach made no reply, but spurred the horse to a swift gallop down the hill, to go storming across open land.

THE TRIBUTE

Many paths and highways lead from Tenochtitlan towards Veracruz. Yet every one of these routes must traverse the pass of Itzaplan, today called by the Spaniards "Peter's Rock Pass".

When Grumbach reached this pass after three days' riding, he decided to stop there, rest, and wait for Father Agostin to come along.

Some Indian huts lay along the shore of a lake not far from the pass, each fenced in by a protective man-high palisade. For the Indians of this region loved nothing more than making war. All were armed with throwing-spears and small bows, and no doubt made redoubtable warriors. Grumbach enlisted six or eight of them to aid him in wresting the gold from the Spaniards. Meanwhile Jäcklein haggled with them for two big fish that he roasted over a spit he had constructed of wooden stakes.

“We’ll be sat here waiting for that blasted monk till kingdom come!” he said as they devoured the fish. “I know the Duke better than you, his greatest pleasure is telling everyone big fat lies. He once served up a little fairytale to my first master back in Ghent, about a fish that swims in the World Ocean, and greets all the sailors that come across him most courteously by raising the little hat he wears on his head. Squire, when we came across the ocean, did any fish ever show us such reverence?”

“Melchior,” said Grumbach, “have we not seen crabs climbing nut-trees to pluck nuts with their pincers? Were the fish we have just eaten not armoured like a knight, with a cuirass about the chest? There are lots of funny creatures in the New World, so why shouldn’t a fish swim around with a head shaped like a bonnet?”

“Squire, the Duke’s mother was a Moorish heathen from Granada, it’s from her he got his lying tongue,” was Jäcklein’s riposte. “You know the Moors do nothing all day long but stand around in the market place and tell one another the maddest lies and fairytales. There’s cities built of emeralds and adamants, that little dog running down the street is actually a prince or a king, and at night time every porter and mule-driver is visited by so many spirits, ghosts and demons your mouth would hang open forever. That lying Moorish heart is still Mendoza’s, despite he’s a baptised Christian, but you’ve allowed yourself to be miserably deceived and made a monkey of, squire!”

“Stop plaguing me, you booby!” was Grumbach’s angry response. “It wasn’t only his words I believed. But the evening before, as I came past Father Agostin’s tent, I saw Indios loading lots of provisions onto a cart, fish, bread, bacon, and skins of water. And they were talking of a long journey, but you never heard them, you dolt, because you still haven’t learned a single word of the Indios’ language!”

“How’m I supposed to know a word or three of the Indio’s stupid language, when I’ve only been among them hardly a couple of years? But Ruprecht Schellbock! What a clever head that man has! He knows enough to hold longer conversations with the Indios in their own tongue than you can, squire!”

“Oh yes, Schellbock,” said Grumbach. “He knows how to say in the Indio’s language: bread, cabbage, beet, fish, meat, Turkish corn, and he bothers the Indios with it all day long.”

Melchior made no further reply, but looked for a good spot in the scrub for himself and his master, where they could stretch out and sleep.

Next morning, when Grumbach awoke, Jäcklein was standing over him with a bewildered air, scratching behind his ear. He said: “Squire, the fellows you enlisted yesterday are gone, and they’ve taken the rest with them. I think they’ve run away, all the huts are empty!”

“Are you dreaming? Have you lost your wits?” Grumbach shouted. “Why should the Indios run away from me?”

“You don’t believe me? Well then, go down and take a look for yourself. Those Indios are all harebrained and fickle, their heads are filled with tangled threads instead of brains!”

“Quick, climb that tree,” Grumbach commanded. “See if you can spot any.”

Melchior did as instructed, and at once called down from the tree: “Squire! I can see them in a cloud of dust, maybe a quarter or half a mile from here!”

Grumbach quickly climbed up behind him. Hardly was he up when he slid back down, exclaiming: “That’s not the Indios! I saw ox carts, and riders among them.” He made haste to bridle and water his horse, and cried: “Come down, it’s no one but the monk, taking gold to the King of Spain. Oh you rogue, ruffling my ears with your mocking words, telling me I was deceived by the Duke! See how right I was!”

As he mounted up, he laughed to himself: “The King won’t see three penn’orth of that gold in his hands. If you want gold, Carolus, you’ll have to limp off to the Fuggers in Augsburg!”

And in his delight he turned the horse’s head towards Melchior Jäcklein and jeered: “You knew better than me, you can hear hares coughing in the forest!”

Melchior trudged on behind with the arquebus, ashamed and much confused, for now he too could see ox carts in the distance, and Father Agostin in his clerical garb – the livery of the Order of Saint Dominicus, black gown over white skirt.

“Squire, take care! Prepare some honeyed words,” he said when the Spaniards were a thousand paces away. “There’s five of them, not counting the monk, and all well armed.”

The Spaniards had by now seen Grumbach and his page, and came to a halt to let him approach. But they stopped at the very point where the military road came within twenty paces of the edge of a gorge, where far below lay a pool called by the Indians Itzaplan, meaning: Black Lake.

They were greatly astonished when they recognised Grumbach. Father Agostin greeted him with: “By the grace and favour of Christ our Redeemer!” But he at once asked how Grumbach came to be waiting for them here. For he recalled having seen Grumbach, shortly before the wagon train left camp, in the company of Cortez and his officers.

“I rode after you to relieve you of your burden. It’s too heavy for your backs,” said Grumbach curtly, pointing to the carts. As he did so he weighed the arquebus in his hands, for he naturally expected the Spaniards to defend themselves vigorously against any such notion.

Instead, he saw the Spaniards leap joyfully down from their mounts, and come running to shake him and Jäcklein by the hand. Most joyful was Father Agostin, who was almost ready to lift his skirts and start dancing. “May God reward you!” he cried. “For sure the Jews, in their forty years in the wilderness, never lost as much sweat as I have these past three days!”

Grumbach, having steeled himself for fighting and bloodshed, was greatly taken aback to find the carts laden with the Great King’s gold offered up so blithely. But as he thought it over,

one of the Spaniards asked: "How will you take on the task? There's only two of you! The six of us had trouble enough hauling the carts through reed-beds, after our Indios all ran away!"

"What?" Jäcklein exclaimed. "Your Indios too?"

"When they saw the beacons on the hilltops last night, there was no holding them back, they all made off."

"You saw beacons on the hilltops?" asked Jäcklein, puzzled. "Truly, we saw none."

"That's because we lay asleep in the scrub!" said Grumbach. He turned to Father Agostin to ask: "Of what figure and shape were those fires on the hilltops? Were they shaped like serpents, like little balls, or like a peacock's tail? Did they burn for an hour or two, or the whole night long?"

"They were like fiery wheels, and burned all night," the monk replied.

"Fiery wheels?" Grumbach cried. "Did you see them clearly?"

"Two fiery wheels burned on every mountain or cliff-top, and between them a flaming lance flickered, pointing to the west."

"Od's blood!" exclaimed Grumbach to Jäcklein. "Whatever can be happening in the town of Tenochtitlan, to cause such beacons to be lit."

They stared at one another in silence for a while, then Grumbach leapt from his horse and called to Jäcklein: "Melchior! To work, there's no time to lose!"

He snatched the reins of an oxcart from a Spaniard, along with his whip, then whipped up the oxen and steered to the edge of the gorge. Jäcklein did likewise with the other two carts.

"Where are you taking the carts?" cried the Spaniards, running behind them. "What are you up to?"

"Down with them into deepest water!" Grumbach raged. "Down with them!"

"Are you mad?" the monk wailed. "What cruellest of demons has suddenly got into you?"

But Grumbach ignored the monk's scolding. He had untied the harnesses, and was now dragging the carts with both arms to the brink of the gorge. He paused for breath, took up the arquebus, and threatened the Spaniards, saying: "The carts are to go down there! Any of you thinking to prevent it, I'll spray such a mist in his face he'll never again be able to cry woe!"

He braced himself with his whole body against the cart, trying to tip it over.

All of a sudden, from under the canvas stretched across the cart, a bearded head popped up, and then another, and another, and one of the three shouted: "Hey! Trying to add to all our sufferings by drowning us? The Devil fly down your throat!"

At once the lumpy covers on all three carts came alive, and, like cats from their lurking places, men came crawling out at the news they were to be drowned. Grumbach goggled at them, but at once thought he knew what had happened, and began to laugh uproariously. "Three, six, eight, ten," he counted. "Od's tears and terrors! How did the Duke find such wonderful guardians to watch over his lovely gold! Have you ragamuffins suddenly grown bold,

not wishing to follow the gold down into the water?" He stopped laughing, and roared at the ten men as if they were but two: "Out with you! No arguing, or you'll go down with the gold!"

"Jesus!" one of the Spaniards cried. "What gold do you imagine is here? Let me hang if I find even one copper stuiver among the straw!"

"Do you deny," Grumbach roared, "that you are travelling with the Great Lord's treasure, gold, silver, precious stones, and lots of rare and valuable jewels?"

The Spaniard stared open-mouthed, but then burst out in loud laughter, and was still laughing as he jumped down from the cart and yelled: "Yes! Wonders such as none before us ever possessed! Rarities no eye has ever seen before! Valuables the whole world will envy! Blue carbuncles! Red rubies! Ornaments and jewels that devour my flesh and bones!"

And with a howl he lifted his shirt and showed his legs and body, a most loathsome sight, marked all over with rashes, boils and ulcers fore and aft!

Grumbach stepped away, looked from one to the other, and turned to Father Agostin: "So you're not carrying the Great King's gold to Veracruz?"

"I know nothing of any gold," the monk replied. "I was commissioned by Cortez to take these sufferers of the Indian plague aboard ship and back to Spain, to find treatment and recuperation in a hospital there."

"I'd be better off buried!" one of the invalids whimpered. "There's only one medicine for me – a shovel and a spade."

Grumbach turned slowly about and went, head drooping, back to his horse. "I've been deceived!" he said. "Now I must return to the city, and have a little word with Mendoza."

"Won't you for the love of Christ first bring these poor men to Veracruz?" asked Father Agostin in dismay.

"Priestling," Grumbach shouted angrily, "know that I stay not a minute longer. I've been deceived. I'd have wagered life and limb that you were carrying the Great King's treasure in your carts, sent by Cortez in devotion to the Emperor Charles – and I was all set to spread soot and salt to ruin his dinner! Now ride on, and God preserve you, I must go back!"

He called out to Jäcklein: "Melchior, round up the oxen and hitch them to the carts, so the king has not too long to wait for his tribute! He's avid for the treasures of the New World, so ha! This dreadful disease is the true and genuine mark of esteem that the New World owes to the land of Spain, for all the calamities that Cortez has wrought upon it!"

Jäcklein turned his horse, and cried: "I know this sickness well! You acquired it through lust, through lust you'll pass it on, and if you want to give it a name, call it: Venus' disease!"

REQUIEM FOR THE DEAD

Having ridden hard till the onset of evening, Grumbach and Jäcklein saw in the distance a deserted Indian hamlet, or village, and urged their horses on so as to reach it before nightfall.

Once within calling distance, Grumbach suddenly pulled to a stop, leaped down, and said: "Melchior, there are Spaniards in this place."

"Spaniards?" Jäcklein replied. "I spy no burning huts."

"Don't you see? There's a mule over by that hut." In truth, a white mule could be seen standing in the road, chewing on weeds and thistles, which were plentiful along the roadside.

"Melchior!" said Grumbach. "We have them this time. These must be the actual carriers of the gold. Ha, now to empty those fellows' sacks!"

"Damn the sacks!" Jäcklein muttered. "Give us some peace! Is the Duke still going around pulling your leg about the gold?"

Grumbach would not listen. Gold fever had struck again. He believed he had the fish in his trap. He spurred his horse on towards the village, while Jäcklein with the arquebus brought up the rear, like a Sunday sexton following behind the chaplain with the holy-water basin.

The white mule was still there all by itself between the huts, tugging on stalks and thistles at the roadside. Grumbach peered all around, saw no Spaniards, grew impatient and stuck his head now in a doorway, now through a window-hole or smoke vent, calling out: "Hey, hollo! Hey, come out of there!"

But no Spaniard stepped forth, call as he might.

"Squire," said Jäcklein, "whenever you think of gold, you flare up dreadfully like a bundle of straw! I wouldn't give a cow's kidney for any gold!"

"Hey, hollo, hey!" Grumbach cried, now very angry. "Answer me! Come out! Plague on you!" He turned to Jäcklein: "They've hidden themselves away, they're not stirring, they're holding their breath, the rogues!"

"Oh, so they should make merry, I suppose, with cornet, fife and gittern, when they've such a pile of gold to watch over!" Jäcklein scoffed. He went up to the mule, looked it over on every side, and said: "Squire, they say every one of our god-given horses looks the same. But I would take my oath that this is the very same mule the Duke gave to Delilah."

At the same moment, Grumbach grabbed hold of Jäcklein's arm and hissed: "Listen! Someone cried out!"

Jäcklein listened a while, then said: "I hear grunts and groaning." And at once he shouted: "Watch out, squire! There's a fellow creeping up to you on his belly, in the dark! Stand up, you dolt! We see you! Stand up, or I'll stripe your back so you'll need twelve days to salve it better!"

Grumbach too had spotted the fellow, but his eye was sharper than Jäcklein's, and he said: "Melchior, you won't bring him to his feet by scolding. He's either drunk, or badly wounded."

Jäcklein ran towards the man, who lay on the ground groaning. But before reaching him he came to a halt, turned to Grumbach, raised his arms over his head, and cried: "Holy God! Squire, come quick, it's Mathias!"

"What?" Grumbach cried. "Who is it?"

And there before him, lay Mathias Hundt. His jerkin was torn, his hair was glued to his forehead. He was fully conscious, but unable to speak; his jaw clapped open and shut, and he reached for Grumbach's knee.

"Mathias!" Jäcklein wailed. "Where've you come from? What's happened?"

"Mathias!" said Grumbach, his voice husky. "Do you know me? It's me, Grumbach."

Mathias raised his head, pressed his hands to the ground and tried to stand, but sank back down. Grumbach knelt to him, helped him sit up a little, and said: "Mathias! It's me, Grumbach. Don't be afraid. Can you see me?"

But Mathias Hundt fell heavily back on the ground.

"Squire!" said Jäcklein. "There's a bullet in his back. See, his jerkin is more stained with blood than a taverner's apron with beer."

Mathias stared up at Grumbach, pushed his right hand slowly under his shirt, opened his mouth, tried to say something, but couldn't bring out one word.

"Mathias," said Jäcklein. "His whole life long he always favoured not speaking. But now, when he's dying, he tries to loosen his tongue, but he's forgotten how."

Meanwhile Grumbach had fumbled under the dying man's shirt, and brought out a little message of knotted leather strings, such as Indian notables sent to one another.

Said Jäcklein: "He was to bring us a letter, but a Spaniard sent a bullet after him. Read it, squire, what does it say?"

Grumbach had started to read the message, but lowered it saying: "Melchior! Now they can enrol Herod among the saints, and Judas Iscariot too!"

"Od's plagues!" Jäcklein cried. "What's happened, squire? Quick!"

"Five hundred Indios of the nobility, dancing their dance in their cathedral, were cut down by the Spaniards with arquebus and cannon. All are dead!"

"Squire! How did the Great Lord allow that to happen, in his own capital city?"

"Cortez has taken the Great Lord prisoner, and laid him in chains."

"Laid him in chains?" cried Jäcklein. "Oh, fickle fortune! When any of the Great Lord's dukes or governors wanted an audience, they had to crawl into the audience hall in rags, on their belly. Now Cortez has laid the Great Lord in chains! Was it Prince Cacama who wrote this to you?"

"No. Cacama's dead. Prince Cuitlahuac sent me this news."

"Is he the one with the little siskin?"

"Yes. He's the Great Lord's brother. The one with the little siskin." For one of the princes of the royal House had a little bird with yellow and pink plumage, which he loved so dearly he never went out without it, but carried it with him on a little twig of blossoms. Which is why Jäcklein called him "the one with the little siskin", as he could never remember his name.

Jäcklein now climbed back to his feet, and looked at Grumbach. "Squire, see, our Mathias is dead. Now there's only four of us left in this country."

"No!" said Grumbach, in a low sad voice. "We are the only two left, Melchior."

"Squire!" Jäcklein exclaimed. "Schellbock and Thonges ..." He stopped.

Grumbach breathed in a deep slow breath through his nose, then said: "Both are dead. Cortez had them hanged, both of them."

Jäcklein stared, unable to utter a word.

"They refused to look on benignly as the Spaniards began their butchery among the Indios. They spat scolding words at Mendoza, and Thonges slapped the Duke on the mouth. So he took them to Cortez, and he had them hanged."

"Does it say all that in the letter?" asked Jäcklein.

Grumbach nodded.

"Let me see!"

Grumbach handed him the knotted leather strings. Jäcklein stared at them, turned them back and forth in his hands, and said: "I can't read it, I never learned."

For a while they stood in silence, staring at the ground. Then Jäcklein said, raising his hand to make an oath: "We assigned the three bullets rightly, back then, Schellbock, Thonges and I, and so let the first one strike Cortez, the second the Duke, and the third the hangman."

"Melchior! With these three bullets I shall destroy the entire Spanish army, I mean it, so that no one is left to go to confession back home!"

"How will you manage that, with three bullets?" asked Jäcklein.

"I shall do it with these three bullets!" Grumbach swore. "These three bullets!"

At that moment, neither of them thought of the dreadful curse croaked out by Garcia Novarro in his dying moments.

Total darkness had now fallen. Beacons flared on the hilltops, calling Indians from all across the empire to fight and take revenge on the Spaniards.

"Squire," said Jäcklein, "lend a hand. We must carry Mathias into the hut. Those vultures are lifting their snouts, ready to sing a requiem for him."

They brought the dead man into the hut, and laid him on the floor. Grumbach sat down wearily in a corner, and held his head in both hands. "How can I sleep tonight! I am to blame for all this calamity! I've no doubt those two cried out to me from the gallows, pleading for help. I should have stayed with them, they gave me true advice."

"What's done is done. You let yourself be fooled and dazzled by the Duke. There's not much use us two starting up the 'woe-is-me' song just now," said Jäcklein.

"Some weeks ago," Grumbach moaned, "when it was bitter cold and freezing in the mountains, Schellbock asked me to give him two pieces of skinner's work that I wore under

my cuirass, for a pair of gloves. I told him, 'You dolt, why do you need gloves of fish-otter skin, if your hands are cold, just blow on them!' But now, Melchior, I would gladly make him a present of those bits of pelt, but I think he'd no longer be happy to take them. I'd give up my share of eternal bliss, if only I could bring him back to life."

In the meantime, Jäcklein had explored the room, and found two pots of the kind the Indians used for storing the liquor they called *pulque*. He dragged them to the middle of the room, and at once produced two little wooden cups, saying: "Squire, don't you want to sleep? Then we'll down one in honour of our poor dead comrade, and to his memory. Didn't we often enough lie together drinking wine, when they still bestrode the earth, and didn't we dare one another for a bet to drink whole buckets and tubs dry, not caring who it vexed?"

He filled the cups with the Indian liquor, emptied his, pushed the other at Grumbach, and said: "Tonight us two shall hold a jolly requiem for our two dead comrades, with no holy water or priestling hymns of Saints and Benedicts."

Grumbach slowly sipped from his cup, gazing down at the ground. He said: "I've heard it said, Melchior, that all is changed in Germany. Priests themselves want to show the common man how to hold a true church service, and what is true religion!" He poured another cup, drained it, and went on: "Can you believe it, Melchior, there's a priest, he teaches there should be no more indulgences, no confessions, no pilgrimages, and the Church should have no worldly power. Truly, I swear it, I wish I was back in Germany, with all my dead comrades."

"No need to swear," said Jäcklein. "I believe you."

"I'd go off there and I'd say to that honest priest: 'Don't you know me, I'm Grumbach, but once I was called Wildgrave of the Rhine. I was banished by the Emperor, because the worldly power of priests had become all too much for me. And when you call indulgences and shriving 'popish roguery', priest, then you're a rebel like me, and we travel the same road.'"

Both of them, Grumbach and Jäcklein, took deep draughts from their cups. Jäcklein nodded vigorously, and Grumbach brandished his fists and declared: "A rebel like me, yet you despise my services? Now look here, I'm not alone!"

Again he drained a cup, looked about, and his truculent imagination filled the hut with a shadow-play of dead peasants. And Grumbach pointed with his cup to a dark corner: "Look here, priestling! Honest priestling! Pious priestling! That one there is Mathias Hundt, kept his mouth closed like others keep their purses, but he's sly and clever, any two like him could catch the Devil on open ground!"

"And now you lie dead, Mathias!" wailed Jäcklein, with tears in his voice. "How much weal and woe did we shoulder together."

But Grumbach jumped up, and paced swiftly back and forth, pausing only to pour another cupful from the pot.

"And that one there, he's Schellbock!" he cried. "Had a prodigious belly, but he could still leap over the biggest dunghheap. And that one there is Jakob Thonges, he loves priests as a polecat or a ferret loves a big fat hen!"

The wine had rendered Jäcklein distraught and morose, and he began to grizzle aloud, but Grumbach paced restlessly past him, back and forth, calling his dead men by name: "Dillkraut! Peter Dillkraut! Hey, show yourself! Hairy as an ape, but good with your fists, you like a rough and tumble, and when you knock someone on the brain, he lies for all times dead on the floor!"

"Peter Dillkraut!" Jäcklein blubbed. "Spaniards shot him just as he was pulling on his hose."

Grumbach wasn't listening. He again availed himself of the wine-pot, wiped his mouth, brandished his cup, and cried: "Georg Knollbein! You come out too! Your face is creased like a sow's belly, and your mouth is full of gaps, but if anyone came with hostile intent in reach of your fists, he couldn't move for days after!"

"Georgie Kollbein!" Jäcklein lamented. "He was stabbed by a Spaniard, up on the cliff on the island of Ferdinandina."

"Stephan Eberlein!" Grumbach roared. "Klaus Lienhard! Are you present? Damn! Wild fellows, each one of a kind, I never wanted my nose anywhere near their mouth, but truly pious, honest and steadfast men ..."

But he came abruptly to a halt, stared up at the roof, lifted a hand to his head, and began to rage: "Hell's bells! The roof's dripping. Rain's getting in. Dillkraut! Devil take you! Didn't I order you to mend the roof and plaster the walls?"

"Squire!" said Jäcklein, goggling at Grumbach. "Why do you yell at Dillkraut? He's dead!"

But Grumbach's wits were disordered by liquor, and he saw the hut filled with dead comrades. "Eberlein! Come here to me! Drink, or you'll go lame. What? Don't want to drink? Is the wine too sour? Five Talers per half a cartload! Did you drink any better in Pfinsingen? Well then, down some of this, or both your ears will know about it!"

"Squire!" Jäcklein yelped. "Let go my ears! I'm not Eberlein. He was shot by the Spanish captain, when Eberlein offered him all the dung in Pfinsingen for his dinner."

The liquor had fooled Grumbach with the illusion of a different peasant. He let go of Jäcklein's ears, and began to laugh: "Haha! Balthasar Strigl! You're here too! Sit here with me. Don't want to? No time? Damn, where are you off to? Boots polished, hose strapped tight, little hat with nice feathers ... Off to the tavern, to make a dash for the landlord's pork chops?"

When Melchior Jäcklein heard his squire calling to Balthasar Strigl, he became very angry, for this peasant had once borrowed a shirt and a new blue jacket from him, and he'd never had them back. The liquor had addled his wits as well, so he really thought he could see Balthasar standing there in the blue jacket with a gloating look in his eye. He kicked out at the mirage, shook a fist and roared: "Has the Devil spat you here again? Give me back my jacket, or I'll conjure blue all around your eyes. Neighbour, your ten fingers all have thievish nails!"

"Comrades!" Grumbach interjected. "Come here, all of you! Don't be shy! Sit at my table. Why so laggard? I'm no longer called Wildgrave, no longer Count of the Rhine! I'm Grumbach, I have no power over any land or people, no one is subject to me. I plough my fields just like you, I plant beets, corn, barley and cabbages like you, and if this year the hail should fall on 'em, I shall have to come begging to you in winter, or else go on a fast!"

“Knollbein!” Jäcklein called with a drunken laugh, and saw in his fuddled state the image of an old stubborn peasant, his mouth full of gaps. “Knollbein! Have you scraped together another Taler, you off to the cowshed to bury it? Georgie, the cockroaches came looking for your cash, they’ve eaten it all up, Georgie!”

“Neighbours!” Grumbach cried. “Why stand there so strange and silent? You’ve had a drink, now I’ll order up a little dance for you. Thonges, fetch your fiddle! Lienhard, you’re to blow your bagpipes, and I’ll drum along with you. Now leap about, and throw your knees up, so the straw flies out of your boots!”

Grumbach found a branch in a corner of the room, and began to bang with it on one of the clay jugs, as if he had a drum between his knees. Jäcklein lifted his heels ready to dance, but fell over, lay on his belly and grumbled: “Ha, how Dillkraut scrapes and blows! Neighbour, those lice eating you alive again? Here’s a good tip: put ’em all in a basket, shove a lid on top, and you’ll be left in peace. Women laughing at you again? Oo, he’s hairy as an ape! Just look at Schellbock, every one of ’em would like to be his sweetheart. Schellbock! Where’ve you been hiding yourself? Lying with Delilah again? Has Delilah warmed your hands at her bosom?”

Grumbach abruptly left off his drumming, knocked over the wine-pot, and launched himself at Jäcklein.

“Schellbock, gerroff me!” Jäcklein giggled. “Hells’ bells! How’d you ever entice Delilah to bring her little body to your fat belly? You been sleeping with her again tonight? Ah, a little maid’s body tastes better than a dish of fatty calf-tripes!”

“Who’s been sleeping with Delilah?” Grumbach roared, staring wildly around to every side. “Schellbock, where are you hiding, I’ll break your head, arms and legs!”

But now Jäcklein was at last overwhelmed by his drunken stupor. He lay on his back, stretched out his legs, and began to snore.

“Schellbock!” raged Grumbach, swinging his cudgel. “Come out, you poxy bulgar!” In his drunken frenzy, Grumbach saw phantoms of dead peasants flitting protectively about Schellbock, so his cudgel could never make contact.

“Move back!” cried Grumbach. “Knollbein! Out of the way! Dillkraut, be off with you! He must take his beating. Steer clear, or else my cudgel will strip you of your lice and fleas!” And Grumbach raised his cudgel and let loose on the shocked peasants he saw goggling at him in his stupor. The phantom figures scattered wailing, leaving his path clear. And now all of a sudden he saw Schellbock standing by himself in the hut, gazing with insolent malice from small sly eyes right into his face.

Grumbach said not a word, but raised the cudgel in both hands, and struck Schellbock a mighty blow behind the ears, and struck him again and again mercilessly on shoulders, hips, hands and head. He hit and hit until the phantom Schellbock lay dead on the ground.

Then he gave a little satisfied laugh, stepped swaying to the middle of the room, where he dropped the cudgel, bent down to it, but couldn’t find it. He tried to straighten up, staggered, fell heavily to the floor, and went to sleep.

It was late morning when he awoke.

Jäcklein was standing outside, where he had already saddled and watered the horse.

"Squire," he said, "last night I dreamt of our dead comrades."

Grumbach passed a hand over his forehead. "Seems to me I too dreamt of our dead comrades, but I can't remember what."

"Squire, is it true, Thonges is dead, and Schellbock as well?"

Grumbach drew the fish-otter pelt from under his cuirass, inspected it from every side, then threw it down. "Didn't want Schellbock to have it. Let anyone who wants pick it up." His head drooped, and he sighed: "I'd trade all my eternal bliss to have him back alive!" He had no memory at all of having struck Schellbock down himself, in his dreams.

Jäcklein was about to mount the mule, but Grumbach ordered: "Sit behind me on the horse, it goes faster."

"What shall we do with Delilah's mule then?" Jäcklein asked.

"Let it find a manger somewhere!" said Grumbach, giving the mule a slap that made it leap away. And brandishing the arquebus menacingly in his hand, he cried: "Melchior, by my oath, soon there'll be Spanish steeds enough roaming this country riderless!"

THE FIRST BULLET

Now I come to the events of that night when all the gates of Hell were opened.

It is called the Night of Sorrows. And many of you surely know what Cortez and the Spanish army encountered that night, and why we call it the Night of Sorrows.

But not one of you knows that it was Grumbach who embroiled the Spaniards in this calamity. And who, with dreadful audacity, avenged himself on the entire Spanish army by means of a single bullet.

I must now give an account of this, the first of the Count of the Rhine's three bullets, and how it so cruelly brought Garcia Novarro's curse to fulfilment.

Once the Spaniards had completed their great slaughter of the Indian nobility, and taken into their possession the person of Great King Montezuma, they dared not leave their quarters again this day, fearful of attempting to negotiate with the crowds of furious Indians who could be seen in large numbers, filling the streets and plazas with their screams and loud wailing.

The Indians had swiftly found, in place of Montezuma, two new leaders whom they were willing to obey with all their hearts. These were the princes Cuitlihuac and Guatimotzin, who by chance had been unable to attend the dancing in the courtyard of the heathen mosque, and so escaped the great olla potrida.

These two princes at once called to arms Indians from all across the land by means of smoke and fiery beacons, and already by next morning many Indians had arrived from nearby, and some who lived across the lake had rowed across. By next day many more Indians had

arrived from towns and provinces farther away; they soon filled every plaza, street and building in the city, so numerous that the Spaniards had good cause to be amazed.

Prince Guatimotzin was a youth of impetuous nature, and very warlike. He urged the Indians on to dig trenches and throw up earthworks; and showed little patience, but proved in many ways resolute to besiege the Spaniards in their quarters, and engage them in earnest. Prince Cuitlahuac, on the other hand, an older and more deliberate man, would rather negotiate with the Spaniards in good faith, and not let his people attack the Spanish quarters directly. He was much occupied with ensuring that sufficient bread was baked to provide a daily ration for all the Indians arriving in the capital. And he had to appoint and name officials to smooth over any discord among the Indians, and others to assign billets for all newcomers.

Prince Guatimotzin had but few retainers and friends, while those who took Cuitlahuac's part were many, and daily increased in number. For most of the Indians from the provinces had little understanding of war. They were gentle-natured, habituated to peace and calm, and up till now occupied only with their own livelihood. Many, in Tenochtitlan for the first time, had brought along wife and children. These could be seen along every street, dressed in long woollen gowns flecked white and red, gazing goggle-eyed at the palaces, market halls, ornate wells, and mausoleums. Others had themselves rowed across the lake in big Indian boats with awnings; but all behaved as if they came to the city purely for pleasure and amusement.

Townpeople, meanwhile, had begun gradually to head for the markets, or set out their wares along the streets, so that before long buying and selling were restored almost to their previous level. Anyone with a surplus of dressed stone, construction timber, pottery wares, mussels, lobster shells or feathers took these to market to sell, so you might have thought all had forgotten about war and vengeance.

But God's will and inclination was for more blood to flow. And He gave free rein for war to flare up again, and for a Night of Sorrows to descend upon the Spaniards.

For when Cortez saw the Indians so much more peaceable than before, he sent a message to Cuitlahuac to say how earnestly he was striving to provide Lord Montezuma, who had taken up residence in Cortez' quarters, with every service necessary to ensure the Great King's comfort. But since the Great Lord was accustomed to a choice of more than four hundred delicacies set out daily for the sustenance of himself and his courtiers, therefore he, Cortez, would from now on send one of his captains every day out to the market, and would Cuitlahuac himself please ascertain the proper price for the required quantities of food.

Prince Cuitlahuac well perceived that Cortez' sole purpose was to secure flour and meat for his own army. But out of reverence for the person of Montezuma, he granted Cortez' request, much to the disgust of Prince Guatimotzin, who would rather see the Spaniards weakened and dispirited by hunger. He accused Cuitlahuac, in insulting terms, of cowardice, and threatened to show Cortez that in this game Cuitlahuac came not first, but second.

And indeed, the very next day Captain d'Aquilar was ambushed as he rode back from the market, and many of his men were knocked down and the provisions they carried were stolen. But d'Aquilar himself, much hacked about and dishevelled, managed to escape.

When Cortez learned of this, he placed various worthy personages on the walls of the Spanish quarters, to cry the news that the Great Lord wished to speak with Prince Cuitlahuac.

Before long Cuitlahuac appeared, surrounded by a strong lifeguard and accompanied by several courtiers. Cortez presented himself on one of the projecting balconies arm in arm with Lord Montezuma, who was clad in all the glory and splendour of his imperial regalia, adorned over and over with emeralds and other green stones. As soon as Cuitlahuac and the others with him saw their emperor in all his finery, they threw themselves to the ground and kept silent, awaiting his word.

The Great King began to speak, his voice toneless and barely audible, informing the Indians without looking at them that all was well with him, he was not imprisoned, but in complete freedom and at his own discretion was spending time with the Spaniards in their quarters, and had no desire to leave just yet. Raising his hands and feet, he showed that he wore no chains.

He admonished them to abstain from any assault on the Spaniards, and to supply to Cortez whatever tribute and services he might demand, just as if the order came from him, from the lips of the Great Lord himself. For he had resolved henceforth to serve the Spanish king to the fullest extent of his abilities.

Hearing his words, the Indians became so dejected they could make no response. But at last Cuitlahuac rose to his feet, and said softly that they continued to regard Montezuma as their lord, and would do exactly as he commanded.

Cortez at once left the balcony, only to reappear with wounded and dishevelled d'Aquilar. Turning to Cuitlahuac, Cortez said: Now the prince may exemplify the zeal with which he desires to serve the King of Spain. Pointing to wounded d'Aquilar, he declared it the work of Prince Guatimotzin, whom Prince Cuitlahuac should at once deliver up to him, so that the rebellious man might meet his punishment and be hindered from causing any further uproar in the streets.

Cuitlahuac considered a while, and then drew from his sleeve a small stone figure on a chain. He handed the figure to one of his courtiers, instructing him to fetch Prince Guatimotzin, without delay, to answer before Cortez for the assault.

A little later the envoy returned, to report that Prince Guatimotzin wished Cortez to know that, while all other Indians may be afflicted with an absurd longing for peace, he is not so afflicted. He will certainly enter the Spanish quarters, not to answer for anything, but with sword in hand to free Great Lord Montezuma from his subjection, and to kill Cortez, who has brought such shame upon the city.

When he heard these bold words, Cortez, his face cold and unmoved, gave the order for a gallows to be erected high on the wall for this Guatimotzin.

Then he turned abruptly to Cuitlahuac and the other Indians, saying: Soon all shall know who holds the stronger power – whether he, or Guatimotzin. They need only look calmly on and allow events to run their course. And then he will see if they really are true subjects of the Great Lord. And with these words he turned his back on them.

He swiftly assembled fifty arquebusiers and several cavalrymen, ordered them to equip themselves with ladders, crowbars and axes, and tasked the Duke of Mendoza at once to storm Guatimotzin's house and destroy it.

On this very day, Grumbach arrived back in the city of Tenochtitlan. He lay in his quarters and slept, exhausted by the heat and the long ride.

All at once he awoke, for in his dreams he had heard the thunder of Spanish arquebuses.

He leaped up, and looked out of the door. But all he saw was Indians going about their daily business. Outside the door sat an Indian tailor, sewing cloaks from bright feathers and woven cloth, which he offered for sale to passers-by. Not far off a carpenter worked at a timber roof-beam, and alongside him fishermen drew nets from the freshwater lake, boatmen in their boats bore tubs of drinking water from house to house, with their particular cry. Other Indians worked at their trade in their own way, but through all this busy industry Grumbach could still hear the rumble of arquebus fire. To his sleep-fuddled mind it seemed the rumbling must be thunder from a storm descending on the city. He stumbled sleepily back to his cot, threw himself down, closed his eyes, and in his imagination heard rain falling.

Suddenly Melchior Jäcklein was there in the room, shouting: "Christ's blessed sleep! Why do you lie there when there's shooting outside?"

Grumbach at once leapt up. While Jäcklein hastily reported on the action being taken against Guatimotzin, and that the other Indians no longer stood by this prince, he saw the Indian tailor still running after customers and extolling his wares, as if the city lay in the deepest peace. He was seized with rage, threw a wine-jug after the Indian, and swore: "A plague on these Indio dolts! At the Day of Judgement they'll still be chasing after customers with their silly fripperies!"

He turned to Jäcklein and ordered him to run to the high priest or pope of the Indians: "Tell him to sound the alarm on the big heathen drum! Or I'll come and do it myself!" For in their great mosque the Indians kept a mighty drum, tall as three men and made of tanned human skin. On it the priests sounded the great alarm when enemies approached.

Jäcklein dashed away, while Grumbach climbed stairs to the roof. He stepped onto the parapet and peered across to Guatimotzin's house.

At first all he could see was a cloud of dust and gunsmoke. Out of this cloud came the rumble of arquebus fire and the shouted commands of Spanish captains, and the thud and clink of crowbars and axes. The Spaniards were attacking Guatimotzin's house on every side, and splintering the barred door with mighty axe-blows. Gradually Grumbach's vision penetrated the thick cloud to reveal a tumult of Spaniards and Indians, and right in the thick of the fray was the Duke of Mendoza. On the flat roofs of buildings all around stood huge numbers of Indians not joining in the fighting, partly in obedience to Montezuma's command, and partly because Guatimotzin had spoken such scurrilous insulting words against Cuitlahuac. Looking idly on and chatting, they watched the tumult in fascination, as if the whole affair was just a noisy play put on by jugglers and musicians.

All at once Grumbach heard Jäcklein's voice calling loudly from below, and saw him running along the stone-flagged thoroughfare fast enough to loosen the soles of his boots. Several Indians were in pursuit with stones and cudgels, at his heels like hunting dogs. Grumbach had just rushed downstairs to rescue him when Jäcklein tumbled headlong through the door, fell down and wailed: "Squire, shut the door quick! It's raining flails out there!"

Grumbach slammed the door and barred it. "What mischief have you been up to with the Indios, that they teach you such dainty dances?"

Jäcklein lay a while like a dead sow on a dungheap. Snapped at air as if suffocating, rubbed his back, and slowly stood up. Then he answered Grumbach: "Mange, scabies and the tysyk on the lot of them! Fools and monkeys all!"

Indians were still at the door, raising a great hue and cry.

"Have they emptied your back with their cudgels? What the devil were you doing, brewing them such heady beer?" Grumbach asked.

"Squire, I ran to the high priest, but they wouldn't sound the drum without an order from Cuitlahuac. So I went to Cuitlahuac, and shouted and roared that he had to unleash his Indios on the Spaniards. But he sat there with the siskin on his hand, stroking it and feeding it breadcrumbs, while Guatimotzin's out there fighting for his life. So I shouted at him again, but again he made no answer. So ..."

Jäcklein took a cautious step back, and regarded Grumbach askance with some trepidation: "So I thought to myself, if sweet don't work, try sour. I smacked him in the face, he fell over backwards, and I came running back here. Didn't I do right, squire?"

"How did the Devil land me with such a fool?" cried Grumbach. "Now the Indios won't let us out the door! How are we to help Guatimotzin now? You've more than a cartload of foolishness in your head, and that's a proven fact."

"Squire," Jäcklein suggested, "we can go up on the roof. We can easily climb across to the neighbour's house, and slip away unnoticed."

They both climbed the stairs. Hardly had they stepped onto the roof when they were met with a hail of slingstones and arrows, and had quickly to duck back in. Indians had occupied the house next door, and were eager to avenge the blow Jäcklein had inflicted on Cuitlahuac.

Seeing that he could not leave the house without danger to life and limb, Grumbach went down the stairs, where in one of the rooms was a wide stone oriel.

At the very moment when Grumbach stepped into the oriel, the Spaniards managed with their crowbars and axes to shatter the sturdy door at Guatimotzin's house. Grumbach watched as the Indians defending the house were overcome one by one and slain. Already the attackers believed their deed accomplished, and began to cry Victory!

Grumbach reached for Garcia Novarro's arquebus.

The sun was about to set. In the last light of the fading day, Melchior Jäcklein spotted the gallows on the wall of the Spanish quarters, and at once was reminded of Schellbock and

Thonges. Full of fervour he cried: "Look there, beneath the gallows! It's Pedro Carbonaro the hangman! Squire, give me the arquebus, I'll make such a hole in his body, the sun can shine through his belly!"

Grumbach made no reply. All his thoughts were on how best to use his three bullets to destroy Spanish power, and save Prince Guatimotzin from the gallows.

But Jäcklein had already spotted a new target for his arquebus. In the midst of the brawling mob he saw the Duke of Mendoza, and at once began to pester Grumbach: "There he stands in his foppish vanity! Give me the arquebus, I'll stain his satin shirt!"

But Grumbach ignored him. He weighed the arquebus in his hand, and thought and thought, and tormented his brain to see how he might destroy the Spaniards altogether from his perch in the oriel. He knew the war would be lost, and this land forever remain under Spanish rule, if ever Guatimotzin fell into Cortez' hands. So he pushed Jäcklein away as he reached for the gun, and menaced him with an evil glare.

But all at once Melchior lost his wits to impatient rage. He forgot it was his squire standing there, and snorting in anger he grabbed Grumbach by the shoulder, saying: "You won't give me my arquebus? Fool! Villain! Arch-thief! Give it me, or I'll ram your teeth down your throat!"

But Grumbach had at last seen what he was looking for. He shook off Jäcklein's hand, and cried: "See him there on the wall? Cortez! Shake out powder! Strike fire! Light the slow-match!"

Grumbach knelt down, raised the arquebus, and aimed it at Hernando Cortez.

"Shoot him, squire! Knock him down!" Jäcklein raged behind him.

But just as Grumbach was about to fire, an endless cry of triumph rose from the ranks of Spaniards. The Duke's men had bound Guatimotzin and brought him out from his house, and now were dragging him towards the Spanish quarters, to where the gallows stood.

The jubilation among the Spaniards was so loud that the Indians on the rooftops also broke out in applause, pointing in their doltishness at the Spaniards who were their deadly enemy, as if what they watched was nothing but a play put on by their own jugglers and actors.

Grumbach climbed silently to his feet, filled with grief. He saw that all had been useless and in vain, and that now not even the death of Cortez could save Guatimotzin from the gallows. Distraught and in deepest despair, he lowered the arquebus without firing the shot.

Now madness and rage commandeered Jäcklein's brain. He clutched Grumbach by the throat and raged with feverish hatred and anger: "Bought and paid for by the Spaniards! Villain! Shoot now, or the French pox on you!"

Grumbach stood in the oriel breathing heavily. His gaze swept over the enemy quarters, and he saw Cortez standing on the wall lit by the evening sun, arrogant and cruel, and his officers beside him, Diaz, Tapia and Alvarado, and not far off was King Montezuma with his courtiers and servants, sad and grave in his royal finery, his blue cloak and golden sandals, royal diadem about his brow. The dark of night was now intent on falling over it all, and at once an idea seized Grumbach that was no less dreadful than the deed of Judas Iscariot, so

ghastly it was as if engendered in a mad dog's brain, so bloodthirsty it shocked even him – but boundlessly ingenious.

Trembling with impatience he turned to Melchior Jäcklein: "Melchior! Quick! Take the arquebus, and hand me the slow-match."

With his finger he described a circle in the air over the Spanish quarters, and muttered: "The Spaniards destroyed with a single bullet!" His voice hoarse, he added: "All of them, Melchior! All!"

Sense slid back into Jäcklein's brain. He knelt, and raised the arquebus. Holding his breath he watched Grumbach's lips.

"Take aim!" Grumbach said softly. "The target is Montezuma's breast!"

"Squire!" Jäcklein cried in shock. "What are you doing? He's been good to us all along!"

"Aim for his breast!" ordered Grumbach.

"Squire, have pity! Don't make me the good king's murderer! We swore loyalty to him, both of us, you and I!"

"Aim for his breast!" cried Grumbach, angry and menacing.

"Squire," Jäcklein wailed, "look, he's seen you, he's waving to you ..."

"Aim for his breast!" Grumbach roared in a terrible voice.

Now Jäcklein obeyed, and Grumbach set the slow-match to the touch hole.

Garcia Novarro's arquebus spat out its first bullet. Grumbach shut his eyes and covered his face with an arm.

On the wall, King Montezuma sank silently into the arms of his courtiers.

At the same moment, the uproar from the Indians and Spaniards in the street ceased. A dreadful silence suddenly lay upon the city of Tenochtitlan. Through the silence, the dreadful sound of Cortez' voice rang out: "Back to quarters!"

At once the Duke of Mendoza turned his horse around and raced back along the thoroughfare. Reaching the Spanish quarters he turned and shouted: "Back to quarters!"

But too late. The Spaniards following behind him with Guatimotzin were no longer among the living. They lay on the ground crushed, trampled, stomped to a mash.

All the Indians who had filled the streets in idle passivity now approached, mute and silent, in their hundreds of thousands.

Many carried no weapon. Whatever they happened to have at hand, or pick up from the ground, they now hurled at the Spaniards. A hunk of building timber here, a cobblestone there, and now a hollow gourd. They pressed on remorselessly, no one giving orders, no one in command, and when twenty were felled by Spanish cannonshot, a hundred took their place. Where a watercourse crossed their path, they swam, and where a ditch appeared, they filled it with their bodies; and they forced their way into the Spanish quarters silent, terrible,

invincible, their only thought that their king lay slain up there on the wall, and they must now all perish along with the Spaniards.

Overhead came a roaring and booming, louder than the Spanish guns. It was the great holy drum, made with human skin, that had lain a hundred years silent.

Of all this, Grumbach saw and heard nothing. He stood head bowed, face covered by an arm, seeing even now Montezuma smile at him, and die.

Melchior Jäcklein shook him by the arm and shouted hoarsely in his ear: "Squire, come with me!" Grumbach lifted his head, took a step, and stumbled. The streets and buildings of Tenochtitlan whirled about him in a circle. He was stunned by the force of the storm he had unleashed and summoned with his bullet.

But Melchior Jäcklein grabbed his arm and pulled him down the steps. They quickly reached the Spanish quarters amid the huge silent storm. In the dark of the night that had now fallen they followed the crowd, at this moment merely two more bodies among the multitude hurling themselves blind and mute into the fire of Spanish cannon.

Neither had time to think of dead Garcia Novarro, and how the curse he had laid on the first bullet was so dreadfully fulfilled.

PEDRO ALVARADO

On this Night of Sorrows, when Indians from all across the realm hurled themselves at Cortez' army and a hundred kinds of ruin, misery and destruction broke over them, it happened that as the Spaniards, pursued and harassed by Indians, fled to the bridge on the eastern causeway, Cortez' best captain, Juan de Leone, was pierced in the chest by a lance, and fell to the ground.

De Leone, a bold man unafraid of death, at once called to his men that they should not worry about him, but think only to save themselves. He crawled to the side of the thoroughfare and ordered a young lad of his personal retinue who had stayed with him to fire a bullet through his head, so that the Indians would not take him alive.

But all at once, there by the wounded man stood Cortez, bleeding, panting, pricked all over with arrows and lances. Gazing around to see how best to aid de Leone in his dire situation, he saw two other Spaniards lying nearby, so seriously wounded it seemed impossible to carry them away.

It happened that, not far from the Great Lord's own palace, there stood another palace of stone, which several days earlier Cortez had caused to be fortified and made defensible. He ordered the wounded men to take refuge there, and admonished them to defend themselves against the Indians as Christians, as brave men, as loyal servants of their King, until he could come back and fetch them away. He gripped de Leone's hand, telling him to hope for the best, and that he, Cortez, would never forget him. He beckoned de Leone's lad to follow him, and they both stormed back down the thoroughfare, forming an active front against the Indians who, seeing Cortez, at once fell on him in such numbers that he was quickly surrounded and hemmed in.

The palace lay behind a large garden. It was built entirely of stone, and flanked on three sides by the waters of the freshwater lake, so that a small force of defenders would be able to hold out for several hours against a hostile army.

The two wounded Spaniards hauled de Leone up to the door, which they found barred. After they had knocked and called out for some time, a Spaniard, wounded like them, came to open it.

All three carried de Leone laboriously up a narrow winding staircase. They arrived at a hall, big and spacious as the olive market at Valencia, lit by numerous wax candles and hanging lamps of wood.

A fire was burning vigorously in the middle of the hall, where two figures sat warming themselves. One stood up, stared at de Leone, and exclaimed: "For God's sake, have more arrived? Who's this crawling on the floor, are you man, or beast, or worm? The devil with Cortez, sending me all his lame and crippled, as if this is a hospital of those Beguines of yore!"

The newcomers spied two more wounded Spaniards in a corner, brought in earlier at Cortez' command. They were kneeling, and digging a hole in the floor with their knives.

One of the two figures by the fire they recognised by his voice: it was Pedro Alvarado who gave them such a grudging welcome. The other continued to sit in silence, not stirring at all.

"What, Seignior Alvarado? Still here?" cried one of the wounded. "Cortez and the whole army have fled away down the street. There's not a Christian left in the entire quarter, apart from you and us, who can't go on."

"Indeed!" came Alvarado's angry retort. "I know all too well, Cortez has turned tail on naked Indio dolts that have neither horses nor armour, and forsaken all the gold in this place!"

The Spaniards looked around, and saw that the floor was covered in countless baubles of gold, silver, precious stones shaped into flowers, shells, little bells, and animals of every kind, rare and wondrous things from Montezuma's treasure-house. Even the Great King's tableware lay scattered on the floor, bowls, cups, beakers of gold, as well as precious fabrics in many colours and patterns. And now the Spaniards recognised Alvarado's silent partner: the dead Great King Montezuma himself, sitting naked by the fire amid all his treasures. Alvarado had dragged him here as soon as he saw him collapse to the ground, so that the body could be stripped at leisure of its garments, chains, clasps and rings.

A spiral staircase in a corner led up to a doorway, from which loud knocks and hammering could be heard. Alvarado had stepped to a window overlooking the garden, to keep an eye out for Cortez. Now he came back, and shouted up the stair: "Patience, youngster behind the door! Or else I'll come and teach you proper manners."

The knocking stopped. Alvarado glanced at de Leone, who lay groaning on the floor, and said: "It's Delilah, the one-eyed German's heathen slut. She's taken Mendoza for her sweetheart now. Truly, he knows every trick for turning a woman into a whore." He paced up and down several times, came to a halt and said: "On such a body, you'd hunt a long time before you found a wart."

“Why have you locked her in there?” someone asked.

Alvarado shook an angry fist at the upper door, and shouted: “Ha, she can’t wait to grab anything she sees. She’s already stolen a hair-band from me, a piece of lace, a pin and two silver bells for her stupid carnival costume.”

He turned to the new arrivals and ordered: “Take your knives and help dig the hole. We’ll hide the gold so well, the Indios will take forever to find it.”

Full of zeal the Spaniards began to dig and delve, while Alvarado filled empty chests and sacks with the gold and jewels that lay scattered about.

After digging away for an hour, one of the wounded men laid down his knife, limped crookedly to the window, and looked out on the garden.

“Spotted Cortez already?” Alvarado sneered. “Or is Saint James himself galloping to the rescue on his milk-white steed?”

“All I see is Indios, hundreds of them,” the Spaniard wailed. “They’re swarming all about the building, like bumblebees around a honey-cake.”

“You should have demanded Cortez’ shirt, as an earnest of his return,” Alvarado mocked.

De Leone started groaning, turned over where he lay, and tried to speak.

“Ha!” Alvarado laughed. “Seignior de Leone! Can’t sleep well, I guess, with a flayed hide?”

“Cortez,” de Leone groaned, “he’ll come by water.” He pointed to a window and murmured: “Across the lake.”

Alvarado’s sluggish brain had given little thought to how he and all the gold could be brought to safety. But now he cocked an ear and crossed to an adjacent room, where the window offered a fine view over the lake. He scurried back in great excitement, having discerned in the distance the silhouette of a sailing boat. But he said nothing to the Spaniards, thinking only how to be swiftly rid of them all by pushing them out through the door, so they would not know of the help Cortez was sending their way.

Then he noticed that one of the Spaniards had laid his knife down, and was applying a new dressing to his leg, which had been pierced by a lance. But instead of a scrap of cloth, he was pressing to the wound a piece of sumptuous fabric from the Great King’s treasure-house. Alvarado lost his temper, snatched the fabric from the shocked Spaniard’s hands, and roared: “See what a mess your blood has made of this, enough for a sow’s twelve mouthfuls. Out with you lot! Stay out there by the door!”

The Spaniards began to bawl and cry woe, but Alvarado took no notice, and shoved them ruthlessly through the doorway, slamming the door on their backsides. Once they were safely out, he bolted the door and shouted through it: “Easier to dig a hole out there! The ground is nice loose loam!”

He went back to the fire, warmed his hands, and looked about the hall where now he stood alone. Only the Great King still crouched by the fire, and de Leone lay face down on the floor, uttering low groans.

“Ha!” Alvarado scoffed. “Seignior de Leone! Don’t you still have your two hands? Why do you lie with your nose to the ground? Looking for truffles, eh?”

De Leone was feverish, and shivering with cold. He took Alvarado for one of his servants, groaned, and whispered: “Go, go, quick, fetch herbs and spices for a sweat bath, I’m freezing.”

“Why do you need a sweat bath?” Alvarado asked. “I always thought you an old Christian, Seignior de Leone. Now I see that your father was a Moorish heathen, they all wallow the whole day in the bath, and sweat.”

Just then he noticed sounds of a boat approaching the lake shore. At once he left de Leone, ran outside, and helped the Duke of Mendoza and Pedro d’Olio, sent by Cortez to fetch de Leone, to climb ashore and enter the palace. Alvarado was delighted to see the boat. If he had had his fife with him, he would have danced and trilled his delight. “Kyrie eleison!” he tittered, pointing to the gold. “Praise God and bless Him, that you’ve come at last. I almost thought Cortez had forgotten about the gold. Is there enough room in your boat?”

“Hardly enough for you men,” was d’Olio’s reply. “But we might be able to load a bundle or two of gold as well.”

“A bundle?” Alvarado whispered urgently. “All the gold lying here must be taken away, not enough must be left behind for these dirty heathen to exchange even for a jug of wine.”

“What can we do, we must load our poor wounded comrades first, then we’ll see how much room is left for your gold,” said Pedro d’Olio, turning his back on Alvarado.

Alvarado’s face turned puce with fury, like millet porridge when you add a pinch of saffron. “You idiot!” he hissed. “I’ll not let any of them aboard. For a handful of silver, Cortez can buy himself men a lot more use than these cripples. They’re good only to feed the worms.”

“I do as Cortez instructed, he said nothing about gold,” said d’Olio brusquely. He clapped his hands and called: “Hey there! Everyone, gather round!”

But before he even finished the call, Alvarado knocked him to the ground, knelt on his chest, and locked his jaws together. “Quiet!” he spat. “I don’t know what stops me sheathing my sword in your guts, you dolt!”

Pedro d’Olio, gasping for air, tried to resist. But the Duke of Mendoza, in his clever cruel heart, had sided with Alvarado the moment he saw the treasure. He thought to himself how much more sensible it would be to bring the trove to safety, rather than load the wounded aboard the boat, for in their plight they would only hamper the fleeing Spaniards as a useless and troublesome burden. He quickly crept close to d’Olio, and whispered: “Don’t vex him further, when he’s in a rage he has no more sense than a wild beast. He’ll kill both of us. We must do as he says, so go along with it.”

“So I’m to betray our poor comrades, just because of his tyrannical arrogance? Are we to let so many Christians fall into the hands of rabid Indios?”

“Oh, they can bargain with the Indios, they’ll all find a trade among them, chimney sweep, say, or pork butcher, for all I care,” Alvarado sneered, as Pedro d’Olio slowly picked himself up.

Meanwhile Mendoza had recognised de Leone, unconscious in a pool of blood. "There's de Leone, we'll make enough room just for him in our boat, Seignior Alvarado," he whispered.

"Rotten meat, nothing but rotten meat, too far gone for the surgeon's sponge and knife," said Alvarado contemptuously, giving de Leone a kick. But there was no reaction, and Alvarado turned away. "Not a spark of fire left in that stove. Leave him there where he lies." As he spoke he lifted a chest filled with gold onto Pedro d'Olio's shoulders.

"What are you up to, loading me like a pack-mule or sumpter?" d'Olio yelled. "Shouldn't a member of the nobility be shown more respect? Find whoever you want to carry your sacks, just not a Castilian nobleman!"

"Nobleman or not, go and whine to the Devil!" Alvarado snapped. Mendoza whispered in his ear: "Do as he wants, that's best, don't you see what a raging bull he is?"

Pedro d'Olio, cowed by Alvarado's violent nature and in great terror, hauled the heavy chest of gold, wheezing and groaning, down to the shore, while Mendoza settled by the fire and warmed his hands, confident Alvarado would make no such demands on him. He regarded Montezuma's corpse, prodded it in the ribs, and laughed: "Hey, great heathen, why so sour and aloof! If you'd been baptised, you could console yourself with resurrection and eternal life, and not have to face such gloomy prospects."

Alvarado stood before him with a hostile mien full of malice, and asked in a mocking tone: "Would your Grace not lend a little hand here? Or would your Magnificence rather go up the stairs to your Grace's sweetheart or whore, that I shut away up there? She's besotted, maybe she won't reject a quick round or two."

At this, Mendoza was seized by fear of Alvarado's menacing expression. Obediently he stood, and without a word heaved a sack of gold onto his back.

The three wheezing officers hauled load after load of Montezuma's treasures down to the lake shore. Meanwhile, in the vestibule to the palace, the five wounded Spaniards were still zealously excavating a hole as Alvarado had commanded, in blissful ignorance of their shameful betrayal by Mendoza and Alvarado, all for the sake of gold.

Pedro d'Olio stood in the boat, taking the loads that Alvarado handed up to him, but when there seemed no end to the chests, bundles, boxes and sewn pigskins, he cried: "Is there no Amen to your Our Father? Enough, or we'll drown, all three of us."

But on the shore were still three heavy chests filled with treasure, and Alvarado, unwilling in his avarice to lose these three last items, cried: "Take these aboard, they're no great weight."

"There's room for not more than one, or else the boat will overturn when you and Mendoza climb in," was d'Olio's reply. He shouted up to Mendoza: "Come now, climb aboard!"

"Give me a few more minutes," Mendoza called from the palace. "I still have some little business with the Indios."

The Duke of Mendoza took hold of King Montezuma's corpse. Cruel to his very marrow, and eager to see the Indians in sorrow and despair, he dragged his burden to a window on the other side of the palace, showed the Indians their dead king, and dropped the body down into

their midst. He watched grinning as Indians swarmed about the naked corpse, and how, filled with grief and anger, they hurled themselves at the palace with a violence that shook the very walls and floor of the hall.

Suddenly one of the Spaniards behind the door began to wail and scream. The rage of the Indians terrified them, and at the same time they became aware they were being cheated of the help Cortez had sent. They cried out in despair that they should not be left to fall into the hands of furious natives.

But Mendoza felt only contempt for their abject pleading. He strolled at a leisurely pace through the palace and down to the shore, where he expected to find his boat.

Pedro Alvarado had meanwhile opened the first of the three chests, two of which he would have to leave behind. And when he saw that it contained ingeniously worked mechanical marvels of gold and silver – birds that could lift and lower their wings; turtles that nodded and spat water; bees that hummed – he at once heaved this chest into the boat, for such ingenious marvels could on no account be left behind.

And having stowed these treasures, he was driven by curiosity to open and inspect the second chest. He wept tears of anguish to see that this held the most sumptuous items of all: heavy gold-threaded fabrics set with countless jewels. The thought went through his head that he could bear this treasure away too, if Mendoza alone were to come along in the boat without that simpleton Pedro d'Olio, and he wondered how to be rid somehow of d'Olio.

Suddenly Alvarado grabbed his spear and roared: "What! Eating meat on a Friday? You'll have the Devil's blessing!"

Pedro d'Olio stared wide-eyed, chewing all the while, and laughed, for today was no Friday, but a Monday. Alvarado, however, delivered such a blow to his head with the spear-shaft that d'Olio tumbled overboard, and was at once dragged by his armour down into the depths.

Alvarado called after him: "You're the author of your own ruin, you enemy of God and all the saints!" His obsession with gold had made him so pig-headed and deranged that his conscience never once pricked him, but he believed all he said to be the truth: *viz.* that he had delivered condign punishment to Pedro d'Olio, as a sinner against the commandments of the Holy Church.

Without further ado he loaded the second chest into the boat, and once again was driven to open the third and inspect its contents. It held monstrosities, crucifixes and figurines of saints, crafted all in gold and silver for Cortez by the Great King's goldsmiths, according to Spanish exemplars. And the very fact that the third chest was filled with such holy objects and images revealed to Alvarado with great clarity that God Himself desired that no gold be left behind in heathen hands. And so he took charge of the last chest, and determined to leave the Duke of Mendoza behind in the palace.

So when the Duke reached the shore, he saw the boat drifting a stone's throw out on the lake. "Hey, Seignior Alvarado! What are you playing at?" he cried in bewilderment.

"The wind took the boat and drove her on!" cried Alvarado, fiddling with sail and rudder.

“Bring her back, and take me aboard!”

“I can’t! I don’t know how to turn the sails and rudder! Otherwise your Grace would be my honoured guest!”

“Seignior Alvarado! Pray come to your senses!” the Duke called, deeply perturbed.

Alvarado made no reply, but waved a hand indignantly through the air, as if to ward off the Duke’s words as one brushes away annoying flies that buzz around one’s head.

Now Mendoza realised in a flash that he too had been betrayed by Alvarado on account of the gold, just as he had betrayed the poor wounded men. In a dreadful panic he screamed after Alvarado: “Have a heart! Indios are storming the palace!”

“Strike down as many as you can, to show your reverence for Christ!” Alvarado shouted back, and the breeze carried him so swiftly on that he could hardly make out the Duke’s fervent pleadings.

Thus did Alvarado sail across to his destination, imagining, eyes half closed as was his wont, Cortez and the Spaniards and their jingling horses all waiting impatiently for the gold. And he saw himself welcomed by the army with endless jubilation, heaped with grateful thanks and glory, because by guile and lies and steely cruelty he had succeeded in bringing away from the city all the gold down to the least little grain, leaving not a penny’s worth behind, and he rejoiced in his fortune, and chuckled to himself.

In the Great King’s palace, a portable folding bridge had been discovered, a veritable marvel of the builder’s art, and most remarkable to examine. The Great King had had it made so that on his hunting expeditions and travels through his kingdom he could cross any river at whatever point he wished.

Cortez had employed this bridge to render the eastern causeway from Tenochtitlan across the lake to the mainland passable again by horses and soldiers at the spot where the Indians had torn it up. Possession of this bridge had been violently disputed throughout the night.

At the entrance to the causeway, Cortez had dug a trench and thrown up a redoubt of clay and unburnt bricks, where he had posted Captain Gonzalvo de Sandoval with fifteen musketeers, and several other Spaniards who had not yet completely lost their nerve. With sword and gun, this squad held off until morning endless deluges of Indians all roaring fit to bring the heavens crashing down, determined in their impetuosity to gain control of the causeway and the bridge. But the wretched tatters of Cortez’ great army managed to retreat over the causeway to the mainland.

A dense panicked mass pressed on towards the bridge: crossbowmen, arquebusiers, carters, cavaliers, women, stable-lads, all mingled together, most of them wounded, on crutches, bloody rags around head and hands, clothing torn and dripping wet. All had lost heart, and were so terrified that all wanted to be first across the bridge to save themselves from the raging Indians. No one was willing to wait, for fear of being left all alone on the wrong side.

Cortez sat on an overturned cart at the edge of the causeway, his back to the water. In deep dejection he regarded the wretched despondent mob that his once so prideful army had

become overnight. It came to his mind that he was here in a strange land with these screaming wailing people, surrounded by enemies, with no supplies of food for the days to come, no powder and no cannon, for all had been lost in the lamentable retreat. He hid his face in his hands, unmanned by grief and rage, and behind the protective screen of his hands, a tear rolled from his eye down his cheek.

But abruptly he stood up. From the rearguard where Sandoval was fighting, he heard his name called. Someone in full armour came running along the causeway, dagger in hand, calling out to Cortez while still far off. He recognised Cortez by the light of torches, came to a stop and reported panting that Sandoval needed help quickly, he couldn't hold the Indians off much longer, half his people had already fallen, and Sandoval himself was severely wounded in the head.

So now Cortez had no time for grief and worry. Eager to bring help swiftly to Sandoval, he called for Diaz and Tapia, but both lay dead. He tried to block a troop of fleeing crossbowmen pouring in terror across the bridge; they ignored him and ran on. But he noticed his captain de Neyra among them, and grabbed his arm. De Neyra came to a stop and stared at Cortez, deathly pale and utterly distraught.

"Seignior de Neyra!" cried Cortez in anger. "Don't leave your hose behind in your fright! Come with me back to the redoubt, there's still a few blows to be struck!"

But de Neyra tore free and fled, as if to show he was the undisputed champion at running away. As Cortez looked about, at his wits' end how to bring the headlong flight to a stop, he suddenly had an idea: he stood in the middle of the causeway and shouted at the mob: "Back! Back! The Indios are looting our gold!"

A fearsome daredevil called Francisco Montjoraz came to a halt, and Cortez shouted to him: "God have mercy on us! The Indios have located our baggage, and looted the gold!"

"God have mercy!" Montjoraz exclaimed in shock. Another stopped, and another, and two more, and all looked to Cortez, who cried: "We must retrieve it! Anyone who leaves gold to the Indios is a blackguard!" And indeed, seven or eight men ran after him calling out: "We must take back the gold!"

Cortez ran with them to Sandoval's aid at the redoubt, but as luck would have it, at that very moment Pedro Alvarado came along in his boat. As he sailed along, Alvarado had thought of nothing but the moment when he arrived with the gold. He leapt ashore, and whooped: "Here! Here! I have the gold!"

He lifted a bundle high in the air and threw it down so that it jangled and clinked. The men at once came to a stop and headed for the boat, cheering as they lifted out the chests, crates and bundles of retrieved treasure. Cortez saw that his trick had misfired, and he had to hasten all by himself to Sandoval's aid, with no one behind him.

Now Sandoval's men came running with loud cries along the causeway, for Sandoval was dead, and Indians had possession of the redoubt.

"Quickly now!" Alvarado commanded. "Shoulder the gold, and bring it away!"

Turning to Cortez he cried: "Gold enough to buy an empire or three. I risked my life for it."

But Cortez, alarmed that the Indians would now be able to reach the bridge and take possession of it, turned on him in fury: "The Devil told you to do it, go to him for your thanks."

Meanwhile Montjoraz and his companions had loaded themselves up with bundles and chests, and were eager to be away over the bridge before the Indians arrived. But Cortez had other ideas. He glared at Alvarado and ordered: "Put down the gold!"

This vexed Montjorez, who cried: "But sire, you needn't worry. Each of us can easily shoulder a bundle, it's really no trouble!"

"You'll have enough to carry!" Cortez yelled. "Put down the gold, I said!"

"By all the flames of Hell!" Alvarado swore. "Seignior Cortez, do you mean me to carry away all this on my own back?"

At once Cortez had a notion how he could block the Indian pursuit, and gain enough time to dismantle the bridge. If he could scatter gold all across the causeway, he thought the Indians would all throw themselves at it and spend considerable time gathering it up. And as soon as the idea came to him, he picked up a bundle and swung it through the air, so that gold objects rolled everywhere across the causeway. As he did so he cried: "The gold stays here!"

Alvarado screamed, and glared at Cortez deathly pale and filled with outrage, but now Cortez had hold of a chest and was emptying it out. Gold rings went skipping and dancing all across the way. Then he kicked over a barrel, from which plates of gold and silver rolled jingling into the water.

Alvarado felt faint, and passed a hand over his brow. But Cortez already had his hands in another chest and was scattering its contents, so that figurines of saints rolled across the sand.

Alvarado could no longer bear to look on. He leapt at Cortez, intent on putting an end to his monstrous actions. He could only think that Cortez had suddenly been driven raving mad by the night's terrible disasters.

But Cortez dropped the chest, drew his sword, and sprang to meet Alvarado. Alvarado now lost courage, raised his hands in horror, cringed, and stepped back. He hid from Cortez behind an empty chest, as if from a madman.

From this vantage point he kept an eye on what Cortez in his madness might embark on next. He watched in horror and anguish as Cortez emptied out one bundle after another, neglecting not one until all the treasures were scattered and lost.

Meanwhile the Spanish rabble had all passed over the bridge and reached the other side. So Cortez left the chests and boxes lying, and was the last to pass over. As soon as he reached the other side, he signalled to his carpenters to dismantle the bridge, for Indians, who had already filled in the trench by the redoubt with earth and stones, were already approaching down the causeway at a rapid pace.

One of the carpenters saw Alvarado crouching among empty chests, and called to him to come across quickly. Alvarado made no reply, but held his head in his hands despairing, and

meant to stay where the gold lay. The Spaniard called to him again to save his life, Indios are coming. But Alvarado remained stubbornly defiant, unwilling to move from the spot where the treasures lay scattered, having retrieved them from the city with such trouble and at risk to his life. He had no wish to die, but it seemed to make no sense to move on with Cortez and the Spaniards and leave the gold behind.

He peeped out from behind the chest that concealed him, peered all around, and as soon as he saw he was on his own now, he crept about on all fours gathering up scattered pieces, placing gold necklaces in one chest, rings in another, golden bowls and plates in a third, and in yet another little crucifixes and figurines of saints. And so intent was he on this task he failed to notice what was happening behind his back.

Indians came at him with loud whoops. Reluctantly Alvarado clambered to his feet, and with a lance turned to face them. He was deeply vexed that they wouldn't leave him enough time to sort out the scattered objects, and stow them tidily. And so he set about slashing and slaying among the Indians, and his rage lent him such strength that the Indians took fright and retreated, for they were not many, and they thought to return in larger numbers.

Now Alvarado made good use of his lance, hooking a piece of gold-threaded fabric set with carbuncles that lay half in water. He twisted and turned it this way and that, smoothed it and folded it carefully before placing it in a chest. Then he lifted a silver shoe from the mud, and sought its companion. And all at once Indians were back again, this time as a big crowd.

At first Alvarado defended himself, holding the lance out from his body, with frequent furious jabs at the Indians, killing several who approached too close. But two Indians managed to creep undetected behind his back. They threw themselves at him screaming, and tried to tie his legs with ropes, for they wanted him in their clutches alive. Others now flung themselves forward, two hung on his lance, and Alvarado abruptly found himself in the dirt.

Realising that the Indians had overpowered him, he turned his head to look for Cortez and his army. There was no sign of the bridge that had led over the breach in the causeway, but afar off in the day's dawning light he saw the Spanish army fleeing hotfoot, defending itself continually against the host of Indians arriving from the water on both sides.

But all at once Alvarado was seized by great amazement, he thought he must be dreaming, and cried out in astonishment; for he saw that each of the Spaniards bore a heavy load, they went bent over beneath the burden, as if carrying the Great King's treasures away from the city. But there it lay, scattered across the causeway! And at once he realised what those burdens were. Skirmishing and fleeing, pressed on every side by Indians, they were nevertheless bearing the bridge away on their shoulders, the bridge they had dismantled: beams, struts, boards, posts, ropes, clamps, nails – all this they carried on their backs, and the horses too carried the same burden, as did the sick, the crippled, all equally laden, and even Cortez in the van held his sword in one hand, and in the other a heavy copper clamp. And in a flash Alvarado realised that Cortez was not fleeing, was not mad, not rabid or desperate, no, in his misfortune he was as sure of final victory as he had ever been. The gold was not lost, Cortez would return to retrieve it all, and that was why he had so blithely abandoned it, gold, baggage, weaponry, even the morrow's bread, just so he could take away the bridge and with its help

attack and storm the city once again. And when Alvarado saw this so clearly, he was filled with sorrow and chagrin, because he alone remained behind with the useless golden loot, the plates, the animal figurines, little golden bells, while the others carried away the bridge.

His sorrow lent him such mighty strength that he was able to jump up and shake off the Indians who clung to him. And as soon as he was back on his feet he retrieved his lance, freed his feet from the ropes, and jabbed and thrust furiously all around him like a stallion in heat, forcing the Indians back. Having created breathing space for himself, he let out a mighty roar, grabbed his lance in both hands, and jabbed it into the ground. And before the Indians could throw themselves at him again, he vaulted in one great leap across the breach.

Suddenly he found himself up to his neck in water. He located ground beneath his feet, reached the bank, and hauled himself up. He could hear howls and cries of Indians from the other bank. He shook water from his clothes, and had no more thoughts of gold, no, only of how he might swiftly catch up with Cortez. But he didn't want to arrive empty-handed, so he looked about him.

On the ground he saw a beam lying, worm-eaten and half-rotted by damp. So Alvarado, recently possessor and guardian of all Montezuma's treasures, now bent joyfully down to this pathetic beam, and lifted it onto his shoulder. He stumbled panting along the causeway after Cortez' army, burdened by the rotten beam that robbed him of breath and pressed down on his shoulder, quite useless and good for nothing, dirty, stinking, eaten away by worms, and yet he would defend it with his life as a component of that bridge over which, in his mind's eye, he already saw himself riding at Cortez' side back into the golden city of Tenochtitlan.

OUR FATHER

While these events were in progress, Lord Montezuma's body had been washed, cleansed of blood, and wrapped in sumptuous garments. The Indians planned to bury him in the palace garden, and for a whole day made haste in their thousands to set up and complete all the arrangements necessary for a royal funeral.

By evening they had erected a stone chapel in the middle of the garden, and within it, beneath a sky of flowered cloths, a grave had been prepared. It was decked out with large quantities of gold and jewels, and looked like a throne. Around the stone chapel, three lines of fences had been placed, two of silver and the innermost of gold.

Meanwhile other artisans had restored to order the palace where the wounded Spaniards had been overpowered and tied up the previous night. Beautiful carpets had been laid, and all things arranged to perfection, for the princes Cuitlahuac and Guatimotzin, along with their courtiers and dignitaries, would observe the obsequies for King Montezuma from its windows.

Only one of the Spaniards betrayed by Alvarado had evaded the rage and vengeance of the Indians. This was the Duke of Mendoza, who as soon as Indians burst into the palace fled to the chamber where Delilah was confined. Delilah hid him in a little antechamber where Montezuma's cooks kept their supplies of honey, juices, and preserved fruits. There the Duke lay in great anguish and distress, for he saw no way to escape and find his way back to Cortez'

army. Hearing Indians tramp back and forth through the palace all day long, he was certain he would be discovered at any moment.

Two hours before midnight, more than four hundred Indian priests, dressed in white cloaks and hats, entered the palace garden. They carried silver lanterns, and censers in which all kinds of smoking fragrances smouldered, and began to chant loud choruses and antiphons; some sang, others raised their voices in response, but all suddenly fell silent and flung themselves down on their faces, for Prince Guatimotzin had appeared, with his nobles and courtiers, at the windows of the palace.

The prince gestured to the priests, who at once climbed to their feet and began again to sing, so that the solemn ceremony could proceed.

Now, among the prince's dignitaries in the great hall of the palace stood Grumbach and his page Melchior. Both were seized by profound grief when they saw the monks bear Montezuma's body in, and Melchior Jäcklein commented in a low lamenting voice to his master: "Squire, really he deserved better thanks from us two. Look at him, there's a hole in his chest from your bullet that a horse could drink from."

Grumbach stared at the ground, his face bleak, and said: "Be quiet! It had to be. The gold must not come into the Emperor's hands."

"He gave us bread back then, the dead Great Heathen, land to plough, and tools, when our ship sank on his coast. He bestowed great honours on you, squire! He'll denounce us on account of his bitter death, if the angel Uriel should once blow his horn."

"It had to be!" Grumbach turned on Jäcklein. "Let the charge be laid before God in His higher heaven!"

"Garcia Novarro," Jäcklein whispered timidly, "he really did predict this would happen. Don't you recall, squire?"

"Silence, fool!" cried Grumbach. "Pray a Paternoster for the heathen king's repose."

At that moment Jäcklein heard his name called. In a flash he turned round, and saw Delilah standing on the spiral staircase at the other end of the hall. "Delilah!" he cried in astonishment. "Are you a ghost? Poor soul, how did you come here?"

Delilah came hesitantly down the stair, approached Grumbach slowly, laid an arm about his neck, and buried her head beneath his cloak. But all the while her only thought was how to spirit her new sweetheart, the Duke of Mendoza, out of the city.

"Delilah!" said Grumbach, attempting a smile. "I searched for you all day, in every house and nook in our quarter! You were a heavy sorrow on my heart, but now it's lifted."

"Look there, how the Indios dance and play their antics!" cried Jäcklein. "Truly they'd do better to chase after the Spaniards, and destroy them utterly!"

Said Grumbach: "This is a people of priests, dancers and children. They find more joy in dancing and blowing their shawms, than in fighting and making war. But I've made their cause my own, and hope to bring it to a conclusion."

The Indian priests had now ended their great lamentation, and begun to dance a curious round-dance in which they bowed low to the ground and then leapt high in the air. They held before their faces wooden masks of animals and demons, and imitated the voices of all kinds of creature: some shrieked like vultures, others croaked like frogs, others again uttered wolf-howls. Now through the lines of priests came six children, on their shoulders the body of the dead king, and approached the grave at a slow march.

When Grumbach and Jäcklein saw dead Montezuma vanish into the funeral chapel, they were overcome once again by grief and regret. Jäcklein passed a hand over his eyes and said: "Squire, let's say an Our Father for the heathen king there in his grave, or else an Angelus."

They folded their hands, though neither wanted to begin. Each watched the other's lips. "Melchior, pray out loud!" Grumbach said at last.

"Squire," Jäcklein whispered in alarm, "I don't know why, but I can't find the words. My head is filled with muddle. You pray!"

"Melchior, I've forgot it suddenly, not two words can I join together," cried Grumbach.

Melchior wiped sweat from his brow. "God grant me mercy, it won't come to me, yet I've prayed it a thousand times."

"Our Father," Grumbach stuttered, despair in his voice. But he knew no more, and only stared at Jäcklein. He began again, and again could bring out no more than "Our Father."

"Squire, it's because we murdered the good king, that's why God doesn't want to hear our prayer," Jäcklein whispered, distraught.

"Delilah!" Grumbach called. "Pray an Our Father, or the Angelus."

Delilah had never in her life heard the Lord's Prayer. But she was afraid to anger Grumbach, and so thought for a moment, and began to recite a little poem:

*Rapunzel, Rapunzel, by the moon's gentle light,
It's good for a fever, and for the blight.*

"What sort of gobbledegook is that for a prayer?" Jäcklein demanded angrily. "Don't you know the Our Father?"

Delilah was very frightened to see Jäcklein so angry. She thought of another ditty she had often heard Grumbach's men singing, perhaps that was the Our Father, and began to sing out at a rapid tempo:

*Joseph the saint tramped over the land,
Carried a knapsack in his hand.
In it were sausage, wine and bread
to keep his throat wet and his belly fed.

Pancakes and bacon and gingerbread sweet
And preserved in jelly a pair of calves' feet.
Saint Joseph, oh please may I come along
And journey with you as we sing this song?*

Jäcklein had to laugh, despite his great unease. “Delilah, that’s not the Our Father. It’s what Schellbock used to sing all the time, he found his *daily bread* too dry, and had to put the things he most desired in his Our Father: pancakes and bacon and calves’ feet in jelly. Oh lord, Squire, now I must slip away, it’s that fellow with the siskin.”

Prince Cuitlahuac had just that moment stepped into the hall, surrounded by his courtiers and with the pretty little bird on his hand. Jäcklein swiftly vanished through a doorway, for he feared the prince’s revenge for the smack he’d given him in the mouth the day before. But the prince cast nary a look his way, and stepped over to Guatimotzin’s side at the window.

As soon as the Indians outside the palace caught sight of Cuitlahuac, they dropped silently to the ground in deep reverence, for they expected this prince to be made king in Montezuma’s place.

Cuitlahuac gestured with his hand, and the people all climbed to their feet, while at the same time shrill screams sounded from below. They came from the captured Spaniards being led past with bound hands. They were to be killed at this spot in honour of King Montezuma, so their spirits could be obedient servants to the King’s departed soul,

At the sound Delilah began to tremble violently, for she could not help thinking of Mendoza, and the same miserable end that would be his, if the Indians should find him in the little antechamber.

Grumbach was still wracking his brains for the lost words to the Lord’s Prayer. Hearing the Spaniards’ pitiful cry, he looked up, saw Delilah trembling, and tried to console her: “They’re murderers and pillagers, the lot of them. You mustn’t weep, they deserve death. Raping, murdering, stealing – that was all in their day’s work.”

Now the executioners came, holding pointed blades of stone, and strode up to the captive Spaniards, who wailed and screamed even louder than before.

Delilah trembled in her whole body, and slipped sobbing from Grumbach’s arms. “All right then,” said Grumbach. “I’ll plead for them before Cuitlahuac, he’s a powerful man among the Indians. If I can help those Spaniards out of their plight, perhaps God will forgive me one great sin I may have committed.”

He headed straight for Cuitlahuac, embraced him in the Indian manner reverently under the arms, and spoke his plea directly in the prince’s ear. But Cuitlahuac became angry, pulled in his arms, and turned his back on Grumbach.

Grumbach made his way slowly back to Delilah. “They all must die,” he said mournfully, “God would not grant me this release from one of my sins.”

Delilah quickly wiped the tears from her cheeks, gazed at Grumbach and whispered: “Squire, one of them is still in this building, a boy, the executioners haven’t found him. Help him, squire, help him!”

Grumbach raised his eyes: “A Spaniard, still in the building? Truly, better for him if his mother had drowned him in his first bath.”

“Squire, help him,” Delilah wailed in despair. “I’ll be your sweetheart like before, I’ll sleep every night at your side.”

“How am I to help him, Delilah, when there are so many looking to kill him, and there’s only one of me?” Grumbach grabbed Delilah’s hand, pulled her to the window, and pointed to the dense crowd of Indians in the garden. At that very moment the executioners were plying their trade on the prisoners, jabbing with their knives so that blood spurted over their hands. Delilah drew back in a faint, and uttered a scream that sounded louder and more shrill than the screams of the dying Spaniards, for it seemed to her she had seen the heart’s blood of her beloved Mendoza spraying.

“Delilah!” Grumbach announced. “I shall help your lad get away, for the sake of your plea, and for the sake of a murder that would oppress my heart, and for the sake of the Our Father I’m suddenly unable to pray. Where is he hidden?”

“There in the little room,” was Delilah’s reply, “where the cooks keep their honey and their preserved fruits. Oh squire, help him get away, and I shall be your sweetheart forever.”

Grumbach considered a little while. “He’ll have to climb out of the window. Then he’ll come to several rooms and corridors, and encounter many Indios. So he must wear my cloak and pull my hat low over his brow, then the Indio sentries will think he’s me, and let him pass.”

Hearing this filled Delilah with elation and hope, but she stood gazing at Grumbach.

“My boat’s lying on the shore by the palace, let him climb boldly aboard and sail across the lake. Maybe he’ll be lucky, and catch up with Cortez and the Spaniards. Have you understood all that, Delilah?”

Delilah nodded.

“So go now! Off with you!”

Delilah stood staring at Grumbach, and reminded him: “Your cloak, squire!”

Grumbach took the cloak from his shoulders and handed it to her.

“Squire, your hat!” she whispered timidly. Grumbach gave a start, for only now did he think of his empty eye socket, and his ruined face. Reluctantly he lifted a hand to his hat, and let it fall back again.

“Squire, I’ll be your sweetheart for ever more, squire!” said Delilah quickly. She recalled sweet nothings Mendoza had cajoled her with, and repeated them all to Grumbach: “My beloved, my own heart, my treasure.”

Grumbach slowly lifted the hat from his head and handed it to her. For the second time she glimpsed his missing eye and his lacerated brow, and as before was seized with horror. She had to think of Mendoza’s pale pretty face. She grabbed the hat and cloak and swiftly made off.

“Delilah!” Grumbach called. Delilah jumped, came to a halt, and turned round. She would not look at Grumbach, but stared at the ground, and asked in a voice filled with grief, with anguish and dismay: “*What do you want with me?*”

“You must wait in the room until he is away. I shall come and find you there.”

Delilah clutched the hat and cloak, and fled to the antechamber where Mendoza awaited her. In her fright she slammed the door behind her.

Grumbach had noticed nothing of Delilah’s anguish and horror. He crept into a dark corner, his face concealed behind an arm. He stood there while the Indians in the garden and inside the palace rendered homage to Cuitlahuac as their new king. Prince Guatimotzin and the other Indians in the hall dropped to the floor and kissed the hem of Cuitlahuac’s robes. Sounds of jubilation swelled from the crowds in the garden and the street, mingled with the boom of conches and the pounding of drums and tabors.

Grumbach leaned into his corner, and the loud tumult suddenly brought gladness to his heart. It seemed to him God had lifted clear the guilt that oppressed his soul. He could still hear Delilah’s words ringing in his ear, calling him her beloved and her treasure, and promising to be his sweetheart for ever. All of a sudden the words of the Our Father came back to him, the words he had been unable to find; they came one after the other, and lined up in their proper rows. He was astonished to find he could suddenly pray once again, and was overcome with gladness. He took a step out from the corner, and into the tumult of trumpets, conches and drums his joyful voice shrilled the words of the Lord’s Prayer, and again, and yet again, as Melchior Jäcklein came creeping into the hall, timidly keeping close to the wall in case Cuitlahuac might spot him. He glanced around and saw Grumbach in his corner.

“Moonlight is the Devil’s invention – it always shows things falsely!” he cried amid the din. “I could have sworn and wagered my empty hose-purse that I just saw you and Delilah climb into a boat and row away!”

Grumbach let his arms drop to his side, and his one eye stared at Melchior Jäcklein.

“Squire!” exclaimed Melchior. “What’s happened to your hat? What do you look like?”

Grumbach made no reply, but raised both arms and pushed Jäcklein aside. He strode towards the door behind which Delilah was supposed to await him, stopped, took a deep breath, and bellowed in a terrible voice: “Delilah!”

No answer came.

Grumbach grasped the copper door-ring with both hands, began to shake the oaken door in anger and impatience, and bellowed again: “Delilah! Delilah!”

“Squire,” cried Jäcklein, “what’s got into you? You’re like a man just escaped from the madhouse.” But Grumbach whipped his sword from the scabbard and went for the door in a raging fury, causing splinters to fly everywhere.

“Squire!” Jäcklein exclaimed in despair. “What did that door ever do to you, that you must attack it so foolishly?”

Meanwhile Cuitlahuac and Guatimotzin had noticed Grumbach’s strange behaviour, and the Indians in the hall broke off the solemn ceremony being conducted in Cuitlahuac’s honour. They stared in amazement at Grumbach, whispered to one another and shook their heads. Some came nearer, and one of them laughed.

Now Grumbach had shattered the door to pieces, and stormed into the antechamber. "Melchior! The arquebus! We must be off!" Jäcklein heard him shout. At once he emerged from the room, and pushed his way out through the shattered door.

He was terrible to see, with his empty eye socket and ruined lacerated face, twisted now in savage anger. "I have been deceived!" he wheezed. "Both are gone!" He glared at Jäcklein, and screamed in utmost fury: "Rogue! You're still standing there?"

"Squire!" Jäcklein wailed. "This is how Garcia Navarro's curse was fulfilled! You're over-excited, and filled with woe! Where are we going, squire?"

"To Cortez' camp!" Grumbach howled.

CATALINA

Comrades, you who are listening this rainy night to the tale of Grumbach and his three bullets, which took place many years ago far across the World Ocean – comrades, my tale is now drawing to a close.

For now we come to Grumbach's second bullet, which according to Garcia Navarro's curse should hit Delilah, instead of the Spanish booby on whom Grumbach desired to take revenge.

Hernando Cortez had dug in at a village called Tacuba, which lay across the great causeway and not far from the eastern shore of the freshwater lake. He thought to spend several days in this fortified base, while his rabble gathered new courage after all the exertions and hardships of the Night of Sorrows, and restored their former strength.

For three whole days, Grumbach and Melchior scouted around the village, but saw no way to slip undetected past the Spanish sentries into the camp. But on the fourth day a dozen or so Spaniards were seen to leave the village and enter dense woodland, to fell and trim some trees.

Grumbach observed from a distance, and realised this was a good opportunity to gain entry to the Spanish camp. Towards evening, as the Spaniards hauled their felled and trimmed tree trunks back to camp, Grumbach and his man each shouldered a load of dry branches, and attached themselves to the line of Spaniards.

They passed unrecognised through the checkpoint, and followed the others to an open place, where an elderly Spanish corporal was waiting to inspect the logs. But when Grumbach and Jäcklein threw down their loads, the old man grew very angry and began to scream abuse: "What swinish trick are you trying to play on me? What am I meant to do with that rubbish?"

"Please, sergeant sir, they told me to fetch wood from the forest," was Jäcklein's startled reply.

"You were told to fetch tree trunks to build a gallows!" the infuriated Spaniard shrieked. "Just look at him! Stands there with his tongue hanging out like a great Flemish ox! Get lost, you stupid dolt! Your head is filled with mouse nests."

"Better take it up with God, He made me that way," Melchior Jäcklein replied. He and Grumbach picked up their loads and hastened away, content to have got off so lightly.

The Spaniards had put up over a hundred tents made of poles, staves and cotton cloth, of which they had found large quantities in the Indian huts. For the Indians hung the walls of their houses with rugs and arrases.

As Grumbach and his man wandered about among the tents, he saw a torchbearer approaching in the distance, lighting the way for two officers following behind him. Grumbach at once came to a halt, and pulled Jäcklein with him into the shadow of a mud hut, where they crouched down keeping their faces hidden, pretending to attend to their bundles of wood.

It was Alvarado and de Neyra who came limping along. They halted close by Grumbach and Jäcklein, conversed a while, then each offered the other a hand, and went off to their respective quarters.

Grumbach and Jäcklein climbed slowly to their feet. "Squire," said Melchior, "we must find somewhere to hide you away, until the Spaniards are all asleep in their tents. You're six and a half feet tall, so the next officer who comes along will surely recognise you."

A gleam of light was shining through a gap in the wall of the mud hut. Grumbach peered in. The room was big, and dimly lit. Several Spaniards lay in a corner – musketeers and grooms, indulging the Indian habit of blowing from their throats great clouds of smoke from burning Santa Croce herb. With it they drank Indian spirits from earthen jugs. Several of the Spaniards were dallying with the nicely adorned and made-up whores who lay beside them.

Grumbach turned, and spoke to Jäcklein: "Melchior, we can stay here. These fellows have set up a secret tavern, in defiance of their officers. They've drunk themselves into such a stupor they're throwing up all over the place, and will surely never recognise me."

They stepped into the tavern and settled into a dark corner. No one paid any attention, only the one who played the host's part placed a jug of wine on the ground beside them. Grumbach fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a piece of Indian jewellery, a little silver fish, which he gave to the host.

The hut was filled with dense smoke that settled in the throat and chest. "Squire," Jäcklein groaned, "I have to go out, I can't bear this Indian smoke, it makes my throat raw. You stay here by yourself, no one will notice me outside. I'll come and fetch you in an hour or two, when they're all asleep."

Jäcklein pushed his way out of the door. Grumbach remained in his corner, emptied the jug, and then a second, and made no move.

The drunken Spaniards discoursed with all kinds of foolishness among themselves and with the girls, arguing whether Herod's beard was red or black, and if at the Resurrection they'd all have to speak Hebrew. When the wine was all gone, they got up one by one and left for their own quarters, taking a girl with them. Towards midnight only two whores and Grumbach were left, along with the host and a stable-lad, who were also ready to leave.

But now the two whores went for each other hammer and tongs over the stable-lad, screaming and seeming ready to tear each other's throat out, calling names like "monkey" and "bastard slut".

The stable-lad meanwhile slipped alone out of the door, unwilling to go with either girl, but they continued their fighting and yelling.

"She's always taking the young fellows away, yet she's old and dried up as a broomstick, not a pound of flesh on her body," cried one.

"And you," shrieked the other, "you stick a wig on your head because your skin's as mangy as a sick fox!"

Her adversary bridled like a bubble in bathwater: "Shut up, or I'll sort you out so you'll have to be carried away in a dung cart!"

"Ha, you featherless hen!" the other screamed. "Think you can threaten me, when I've never in my life been scared of anything?"

The one in the red wig laughed out loud and hissed: "Just five weeks ago she was my maid, and ate my bread. But she wasn't allowed to comb my hair or tie my veil, because of her big clumsy fingers, the stupid peasant creature. Sweeping the floor and emptying chamber-pots, that was her daily work."

"What?" Grumbach asked, amazed. "You brought a maid with you into the camp?"

"I've had plenty of maids and pages. I used to be a fine gentleman's sweetheart. But he'd had enough of me," she said tragically.

"What did you do then?" asked Grumbach.

"I took another, a captain of musketeers. But he stank horribly, like a sulphur rushlight. So I got together with another man, Seignior Antonio Quinones, but I only spent one night with him because he was old, and his axe had no handle."

The whore stared at Grumbach and said: "If you want to come with me, come. If not, then go your way, with a blessing from the Mother of God, the sweet Virgin."

Hearing these parting words, Grumbach gave a start, and stared at the whore. For he had often heard these words, which once were the favourite farewell of his dearest friend, the Castilian slain by the Duke of Mendoza in a duel by the town of Ghent. And now he knew this whore, and in shock called her by name: "Catalina! Catalina Juarez!"

"Oh, do you know me?" Catalina replied airily. "Did I once sleep with you? So come with me tonight!"

Grumbach saw the ring on her finger. He knew it: once it had belonged to the Castilian.

"Give me your ring!" he said. "I'll give you other jewels for it, rings and chains."

Catalina pulled the ring from her finger. "Why do I need a ring," she said. "You can have it, if you spend this night with me. All I care about is that slut, she'll turn black with rage when she sees me go off with you." She stood up and shouted mockingly to the other whore: "Hey, you old witch, how's your darling, the Devil?"

Then she turned to Grumbach, pressed her body to his, and urged him: "Come along! Don't keep me waiting. Or don't you want to?"

But Grumbach let the ring fall to the ground and made no reply. He closed his eyes, and in his mind he was again on that meadow by Ghent, kneeling beside his dying friend. He saw the lips open, and heard the sad tender voice. From a far distance the words came flying, to sound soft and hesitant in his ear:

*April showers,
maiden's love and lark's sweet song,
and rose's bloom ...*

Suddenly the door burst open, and Melchior Jäcklein stumbled in. He took a couple of steps towards Calatina, grabbed her shoulder, shook her and said: "Squire, squire!"

"I'm here, Melchior, here!" cried Grumbach. "What mischief have you got yourself into, that you stand there goggling like a boiled fish in a Polish soup?"

Now Jäcklein saw where Grumbach was standing. "Squire," he groaned, "make yourself ready for the Day of Judgement! God can wait no longer to put an end to this world."

"Melchior, what's happened?"

"Come with me, squire. You must see it all. Come. But don't forget your arquebus, for I think I've found the tent of that lad who absconded with Delilah."

Grumbach at once grabbed his arquebus. "Who is he, Melchior?"

"I don't know. I just saw your hat and cloak lying in the tent."

Grumbach followed Jäcklein out. At the door he turned round. "Farewell, Catalina," he said, "with a blessing from the Mother of God, the sweet Virgin."

MELCHIOR JÄCKLEIN'S OATH

They slipped quietly through the camp, which lay in silence as if deserted. Jäcklein led Grumbach down several narrow lanes, when Grumbach suddenly grabbed his hand and dropped to the ground, pulling Jäcklein after him.

Ahead lay a wide dark open space, where six or seven figures lay in a circle, apparently whispering, or shooting dice.

"Over here!" Grumbach hissed, as he hid behind a wooden cistern, used by the Indians of the village to collect rainwater.

"Don't worry, squire!" said Jäcklein, giving a shrill little laugh. "I know this lot. You'll never wake them. Cortez' hangman himself put these fellows to bed tonight."

Only now did Grumbach realise that they were the corpses of Indians, each lacking head and right hand. "What was their crime, Melchior?" he asked.

"Only that there wasn't enough bread in their ovens for Cortez' army. Oh, squire, this is only a start, only a prelude to the great horror I had to gaze on while you lay back at the tavern." Jäcklein shuddered as if from a fever, then went on: "Squire, there was a time when the massacre of the little infants at Bethlehem prevented me for ages from sleeping. Yet it was

only a painted picture that hung in the church at Pfinsingen. Squire, how will I ever forget what I witnessed this night.”

He stepped over the Indian corpses and led Grumbach to a broad alley between tents, lit at the far end by two pitch torches. “Several Spaniards are posted there to keep watch. We’ll have to detour around them,” Melchior whispered.

“Listen!” Grumbach hissed. “Can you hear it?”

“I hear it very well, squire,” said Jäcklein, his voice tight. “I hear them dancing their lofty dance with the wind – sarabands, and the corranto. Do you see the gallows looming, that we were supposed to haul logs out of the forest to build?”

For they had arrived at the ground where the gallows had been erected.

“Look at them, squire. Such strange gallows-brethren. Not one lets the tongue loll from his mouth, like hanged men usually do. Squire, tonight I heard him again utter his hellish raging cry: *Rip the tongue from their mouths!* Do you recall, back then on that meadow by Ghent, when I shouted that he’d stabbed my master using false practices, how he called out: *Someone rip the tongue from his mouth!* He still enjoys that game.”

“Was it Mendoza?” Grumbach asked.

“Yes, squire. He has a pretty face, does that lad, no one could be angry with him for long. Yet hidden deep within his body he carries as much cruelty as a goat carries its best fat.”

“Where the Spaniards come marching,” exclaimed Grumbach in anger, “from then on no wheat grows, nor corn, only gallows-weed springs up in every field. But have no fear: with my two bullets I shall soon cause the Spaniards to forget all about hanging and murdering. What crimes had those poor fellows committed?”

“They’re peasants, who stayed behind in the villages hereabouts. Their only crime was not to run fast enough from Cortez’ army. Come, squire! We must get on,” Jäcklein urged.

Grumbach followed his lead, but was deeply perturbed, for Germany was in his thoughts. “Melchior,” he said, “I wish I was back in Germany. How they must be rampaging there, committing rapine, ruining fields, and sending houses up in smoke that rises to the heavens. Oh woe, that the peasantry lost the great game with priestlings and princes and the Emperor’s Spanish privy counsellors. Once upon a time there were no Spanish baggage-train louts in Germany to ruffle peasant beards with their two fists. But now – For God’s sake, what’s this?”

Something tumbled whimpering across the alley right past their feet, trying to escape into the dark. It was an Indian, smeared over and over with blood. A spear-point stuck out from his body, while the broken shaft dragged behind in the dirt.

Jäcklein shone a light on the figure’s face, from a glowing ember taken in passing from a dying campfire. “Don’t you know him, squire? I know him. I can’t recall his Indio name, but in German he’s called ‘Course of the Moon’. You really can’t remember? He was the dead king’s physician, a good and friendly man. Cortez captured him and took him along.” He bent down to the whimpering Indian, but suddenly dropped the glowing ember and cried: “Don’t look,

squire! For God's sake don't look! His jaw is agape, blood's streaming out ..." He stood shuddering in horror, hands pressed to his eyes.

The Indian crawled off into the dark. Melchior let his hands fall, and drew his dagger. "The cat's run up my back," he said. "I must go after the poor man, and put him out of his misery."

Grumbach was left alone for a while, but Jäcklein soon returned out of the darkness, his distraught face turned to the ground. "I couldn't do it, squire. He whined like a puppy-dog, and begged for his wretched life with both hands. He didn't know me, he thought I was one of those Spanish murderers and hangmen, when all I wanted was to let him quit early."

He picked up the glowing ember, and wiped sweat from his eyes. "They cut out his tongue, did you see?" he whispered. "God knows, I'm shaking in my whole body as if I could feel the knife hacking away. I'd rather lose six pounds of blood than have a knife come at my tongue!"

Grumbach stood in silent contemplation. Then he became brisk again. "Melchior," he said, "sometimes I hear a voice inside me, whispering that I'm altogether too unruly, that I should not quarrel and wrangle with all and sundry. 'You could get by handsomely,' the voice says. 'You wouldn't be so beggarly poor, exiled from your own land, if only you made up your mind to stomach the bigwigs. Goes against your honour? You honour is a phantom!' says the voice. Melchior, it's possible the voice will at some point gain the upper hand in me, once old age and weariness have made me witless enough to think of tolerating Spaniards and priestlings. When that time comes, you must remind me of this night, Melchior, so that my hatred never dies, and now you must swear this to me."

Melchior replied. "Have no fear on that score, squire. My tongue will sing this night's horrors in your ear for all eternity. You may grow old and tired and one day forget it all, but my tongue will never weary, my tongue will never forget, this I swear to you on this night of Hell, I, Melchior Jäcklein – and now come along, I'll show you your hat and cloak."

Melchior led his squire down narrow lanes between tents to the very end of the village, where gardens and fields began. Several tents had been pitched among plantains and acacia trees, and Jäcklein halted outside one. "Peep in through here," he said softly, pushing a finger through a small rip in the canvas, "then you'll see your hat."

Grumbach bent down and put his eye to the hole. He saw a spacious chamber seemingly lit by a wax candle. The cloak he had given Delilah lay on the carpet, and beside it was a sumptuous garment of black atlas-silk, edged in lace, and decorated with silver leaves and flowers. In the middle of the chamber was a table, covered in all sorts of objects including written papers, and on it lay Grumbach's hat as well.

"Don't you know whose quarters these are?" Grumbach asked.

"No, squire. But the place is grand enough for the emperor himself to feel at home."

"I seem to recall who it is I've seen prancing in that shirt of atlas-silk and lace," said Grumbach softly.

"Squire, that look on your face, it's as if your wine's gone frozen! Here, take the arquebus."

“Melchior, I fear I shan’t be able to take this shot, may God stand by me. It may be that once someone spoke to me the words that God called down to Cain from the clouds.”

Jäcklein stared in astonishment, and took back the arquebus. “Well then, if you don’t want to do it, I can do it for you, even if it rains halberds.”

“How will you pick out the guilty party, for there must be more than one other sleeping in this tent?”

“It won’t be hard, I’ve drilled into thicker boards than this. I stick the arquebus through the hole. You go in and wake the fellow up. And when his shadow shows up on the tent cloth, when he reaches for the hat or puts the cloak over his shoulder, he’s the one, and I’ll greet him with such a ‘God help you’ he’ll forget to say thank you. And what will you do then, squire?”

“Spaniards will come running from every side to see what’s happening, and Cortez will be among them. And then I’ll fell Cortez with my third bullet, and when that one man is dead, all of Spain’s power in this land will be broken. All that’s left is a rabble, a scattered desperate mob, not worth an honest bullet.”

“Splendid plan, squire! So, farewell!” And Jäcklein loaded the second bullet into the gun.

THE SECOND BULLET

The vestibule to the tent was bare, and after pushing aside a green curtain, Grumbach found himself at once in the main chamber, on the floor of which, through the rip in the tent wall, he had spied his cloak lying. A prie-dieu stood by the wall, with two wax candles burning, but on the other wall, opposite the entrance, there hung a map showing the whole world: cities, castles, kingdoms, seas, mountains and rivers. Below this, his back turned to Grumbach, sat the Duke of Mendoza, contemplative, his attitude proud, and his brown hair fell in tender ringlets over his white ruff.

On the world map the land of Spain could be seen, looming bigger than all other countries and islands and coloured a purple-red, and alongside it, small and insignificant, all other kingdoms and principalities of the world. Most were painted the same red as the land of Spain, and Grumbach began to search for Germany. After his eye had wandered back and forth a long while, he found it: small, fragmented, well concealed among the other realms, and it too was coloured through and through with Spanish red.

Germany rose before his eyes: forests and meadows, peasants dancing at evening on the village green to the music of viols and bagpipes, a drover came down the street cracking his whip, and behind the village lay woods and a broad river; but everything was daubed in drab Spanish red – grass in the meadows, leaves of the forest, the billowing Rhine. Grumbach felt suddenly heartsick, and a sigh rose in his breast, for he was thinking of Germany.

But the sigh, quiet as it was, reached Mendoza’s ears.

He whirled round, and stared in alarm to find Grumbach’s menacing face so close to his own. A half-choked curse rose in his throat, and wrestled inside him with a forgotten frightened prayer from childhood. The tent began to spin, the candlelight danced like fireflies.

But his expression remained smooth and calm, his face was no paler than usual, and he enquired, in a voice betraying no shock, but merely a slight surprise: "Wildgrave! Here in the Spanish camp? You've lost your way!"

Grumbach answer was brusque and curt: "I'm not lost. I'm in the right place."

"Then you must know," the Duke said after a pause, "that your life is in my hands. Cortez is still awake, and not twenty paces from here, writing a communiqué to our august King about the retreat from the capital. In this report he has harsh words to say about you, calls you the most troublesome adversary of the holy Church, and our august King."

"Let Cortez write what he will. He will never finish the report," Grumbach snapped.

The Duke kept his horror and his fear of death on a close rein. His brain sought busily for a way out, and he seemed to feel the barrel of the arquebus poking through the tent wall and aiming at his forehead. As a sailor overtaken by a sudden storm throws all his worldly belongings into the sea in order to save the ship – valuable cargo first, then essential supplies, water-barrels, dried meat, and finally the mast – so the Duke threw everything away to save his skin – and first of all: Hernando Cortez.

"Wildgrave," he said, "God forefend that Cortez should suffer any mishap. Without him, this dispirited and desperate rabble would have scattered long ago. Only he can keep the war going, so that we can regain the Indio capital and its abandoned gold. If he dies, the war is at an end, and our good fortune lies sprawled in deepest mud!"

This the Duke said in the hope that Grumbach would spare him and go to assail Cortez in his tent. But Grumbach remained firmly where he was, gave a menacing laugh, and cried: "Then we may be certain that this war will be at an end before morning comes!"

This laugh plunged the Duke into deepest despair. But his agile brain thought up new wiles, and counselled him to propose a second way to save his life – drawing on his Spanish pride and his arrogant nature.

"Believe me," he said, "Cortez is the greatest war hero of our day, and Spain's glory depends on his head alone." Then his voice abruptly took on a tragic tone, a shadow passed over his face, and he began to complain like a child whining to its mother of some wrong it has suffered.

"Ah, and what am I? It was prophesied at the hour of my birth that I should put the martial deeds of Caesar and Alexander in the shade. '*Resonabit fama per orbem*,' the astrologers said: 'the world will echo to his fame.' Well, I've chased about endlessly from land to land and war to war, but the great martial deeds have been done by others, and my youth has flown like smoke from a chimney."

The Duke stepped closer to Grumbach and with a woeful face begged for his sympathy: "Tell me, is it my fault that my hands were tied with the hair of women? Is it my fault that my eyes were dazzled by the lips of women?"

The Duke placed his slender pale hands behind his back, as if they were bound with locks of female hair, threw back his head and closed his eyes as if he felt a woman's kisses on his

eyelids. Never had Grumbach seen him so comely as at that moment when the Duke stood sadly before him, his fine boyish face bent back, his lips dreaming of a forgotten woman's kiss.

But Grumbach felt not the least sympathy as he waited impatiently for the shot from the arquebus. All his thoughts were on the judgement that his third bullet would pronounce over the great murderer Cortez.

But the Duke spoke on: "Ah, they all envy my luck in having women all too easily fall in love with me, but not one of them knows what I shall now reveal to you."

He came close to Grumbach, as if about to whisper a secret in his ear, but then quickly broke away and cried: "No! I have never possessed any woman who was not a slut! Slut after slut have I possessed, I, the Duke of Mendoza, as if I were nothing more than a bow-legged, watery-eyed peddler, assuaging his lust in a whorehouse for half a Castilianer."

He took a step back and said in a low voice: "And when I spent weeks courting the love of a proud woman whose lips had never been touched by a man, who had never been caressed, then as soon as I kissed her, she was at once a slut like all the rest. She would giggle at me with a slut's slack lips, and beg for my kisses with a slut's greedy eyes, her sluttish croaking grated in my ears, and at night she slipped away from my arms to dance in taverns with her skirts held high in front of my servants, or else lay on her back and called a passing stable-lad to her – she, the one whose maidenly chasteness I had kissed from her lips just a few days before."

As the Duke spoke, an image of Delilah rose up in Grumbach's mind. He saw her as he had seen Catalina, on the ground fighting with other sluts over some stable-lad. A deep melancholy stole over him, and never in his life had he felt so forlorn as at that moment.

But he had sworn in his heart never to think more of Delilah, so he dismissed the childish phantom from his mind. It crumpled into itself, like the collapse of a dying fire's last sparks. Only hatred remained, and contempt for this Spanish youth who, while still so young, bewailed his misspent life in such clever phrases.

He was seized with impatience, and waited with every fibre of his being for the shot from the arquebus. When the shot failed to come, he addressed the Duke with hard words: "Enough! Take your sword and cloak, and come with me!"

In mortal fear, though his face was still expressionless, the Duke reached for the cloak, but then flinched back. For this was the cloak by which Grumbach had rescued him from Montezuma's palace. The hesitation preserved him from Melchior Jäcklein's bullet. For outside the tent Jäcklein had pressed the arquebus to his cheek as soon as he saw the hand reach for the cloak, and then with a disappointed oath had laid it down again, when the cloak remained where it was.

Now the Duke thought up a third and final ploy, to surrender Delilah in exchange for his own life. "Let me first say goodbye to Delilah!" he murmured. "See, there she lies, sleeping. I made a fool of myself when I brought her with me, to my regret. For she thinks day and night of nothing but how to make her way back to you."

He pulled back a concealed hanging, and there Delilah lay on a bed splendidly decked out with curtains and bits of gold.

She woke up and stretched her slender limbs, which looked as if they had been turned by a craftsman of genius from a piece of rare, dark-coloured timber.

But when she saw Grumbach in the tent, she was horribly shocked. She sat up in silence, and slid soundlessly off the bed.

Grumbach had not seen her. He kept both eyes tight shut, the living one and the empty. He wanted to hear no more of Mendoza's prating. All he thought of at this moment was confronting Cortez with his arquebus, and with his third bullet pronouncing sentence on the great murderer, on whose head all Spain's bloodsoaked glory rested. It seemed to him that news of his deed would surely fly far across the ocean and back to Germany. And all at once he saw in his mind's eye a great German cathedral filled with worshippers, all singing his praises and honouring him because he alone had done battle with the Spanish World Dragon. A chorus rose roaring from a thousand throats up to Heaven in a mighty surge, the blare of trumpets was in it, and horns, and one voice soared in jubilation over all the others: "*Resonabit fama per orbem!*"

But the enormous Te Deum from many thousand voices fell abruptly silent, and one lone voice sounded gently in his ear, asking: "*What do you want with me?*"

When Grumbach heard these words, he had to open his one eye, and was suddenly back in Mendoza's tent, weary and filled with great melancholy. The echoing cathedral vanished, and there was Delilah right in front of him.

Her head was leaning against Mendoza's breast, and she had flung an arm about his neck. "What do you want with me?" she asked again, but the words revealed no fear, no trepidation, unlike when she had glimpsed Grumbach's ruined eye and face. For her words were addressed to her sweetheart, to Mendoza, and that is why her voice sounded so tender and meek.

The Duke loosened her arm from his neck. "Delilah," he said, "your squire has come, and he wants to take you back to his lovely wintry homeland, to Germany." And his eyes shone and roamed about, as if in the far distance he could see Germany behind the mountains.

Grumbach stood still and made no move, and could not take his eye from the trembling figure of Delilah. But now Mendoza began to speak again, of the New World, and of Germany.

"This New World is of a sultriness that makes a person lose all gaiety. The hot wind brings with it a plague-breath that confuses the senses, so people hate one another for no reason, and no one properly understands any other. In a frenzy of heated blood we stumble about, and the air of this country is of a kind that causes rage and contempt for every creature to rise without cause into our brain. Wildgrave, you must take Delilah away from here, and bring her to your own land. When you reach the River Rhine it will be winter, with snow, a cold clear winter's day such as I long for in vain in this land that chokes and devours me with its pestilential heat."

With this Mendoza had at last caught and commandeered Grumbach's thoughts. Of Cortez, in his tent writing his communiqué on the lost battle; of his man Melchior kneeling by

the tent with his arquebus; of the fateful cloak lying on the ground: over all this, there slowly descended over Grumbach's mind a misty veil of forgetting.

But Germany emerged. Again he saw peasants dancing in the meadow. He saw pine forests and the broad river, but this time the land was not daubed the blood-red of Spain, but was all snow-white wherever he looked. Snow lay on the meadows. The river was frozen, and crows flew over the icy shroud. He saw himself riding through a forest between firs and pines, their ice-bearded branches reached out and stretched. A gust of wind broke big lumps of snow from treetops, and Grumbach seemed to hear his horse groan for cold in the voice of an old man.

So powerful was the charm and spell of the wintry mirage conjured up before his eyes by the Duke's words, that Grumbach believed he felt the frost and the snow-laden wind. He saw Delilah stand shivering before him, and he leant down to pick the cloak up from the ground and place it around her shoulders, as if to protect her from the chill and the flurries of snow.

As he held the cloak in his hands, a distant memory suddenly twitched within him, half sorrow, half terror; but he could not hold onto it, but shook his head and had forgotten all about Melchior Jäcklein and the arquebus, about Cortez and the great judgement, had forgotten why he was here in the Duke of Mendoza's tent. He was in Germany, caressing Delilah with his gaze.

And then Melchior Jäcklein's arquebus dissolved the spell that the Duke of Mendoza had weaved to catch and bind the Wildgrave.

As in a shadow-play, the tent wall showed the hand as it went to pick up the cloak, and a figure suddenly became visible to Jäcklein on the canvas, with Grumbach's cloak draped over its shoulders.

The second bullet thundered from the barrel of the arquebus, and pierced Delilah's breast, so that she sank silently to the ground.

CORTEZ FLEES

The roar of the arquebus jolted Grumbach out of his reverie. Before his very eyes the winter's day, the snow flurries and the German forest were torn apart and scattered. All at once he was back again in Mendoza's tent, and remembered that he meant to take revenge on the Duke. Hearing the thunder of the arquebus, he assumed the Duke lay dead, and in his thoughts he flew at once to Cortez' tent, to carry out without delay the sentence he had pronounced.

Then the cloud of powder-smoke that filled the tent dispersed, and Mendoza came into view. He stood unharmed in the middle of the floor, stretching his limbs like a lissome deer that with a bold leap has evaded the hunter.

In the same instant, Grumbach's eye fell on Delilah, lying dead on the floor. But he felt neither pain nor grief, only enormous astonishment at Melchior Jäcklein's curious action in killing Delilah instead of the Duke. He sought for a word of grief, but he knew none, and muttered to Mendoza, shaking his head in amazement: "It was that nitwit Melchior, you know his head is filled with crickets and doves, and a thousand fancies lie hidden there."

The Duke of Mendoza had gone down on his knees, and was cradling Delilah's dark little head in his hands.

"Whyever did you spare me, and kill this child," he wailed. "You should have shown mercy to the child. Pray, Wildgrave, pray for your soul, for Herod's sin is the hardest of all for Our Saviour to forgive."

Grumbach took a step towards the body, then stopped and turned his head as if he had to look for something. Slowly and lost in thought, he retrieved his hat from the floor and pulled it low over his brow, as if worried that Delilah might take fright at his empty socket.

"She was a lost shy little bird," said Mendoza mournfully, "fluttering eternally between you and me, never knowing who she belonged to. But we two must have some trifling quality in common that she recognised and loved. An inclination of the head, perhaps, or a play of the lips, or that when we laugh or when we rage or when we sleep, for a brief moment we look the same. I don't know. But this child knew what to everyone else is a secret: that we two are one blood from one father – brothers! And that's why she flitted from you to me, brother, and that is why she had to die."

The Duke let his head droop, and took dead Delilah's hand in his.

Grumbach stood mute and ungrieving as he gazed at Delilah, and it seemed to him he had never seen her before, and never known her.

The Duke climbed to his feet and went over to the couch where Delilah had been sleeping. He came back holding two little silver bells, one shaped like a butterfly, the other with a scaly snake body. He let them tinkle a little, and placed them in Delilah's stiffened fingers. "They belonged to her," he said. "She kept a hundred little bells in her room, silly girl, they tinkled and jingled all the time. But she took these two with her when we fled, and listened to them constantly. She loved all kinds of sounds, she'd listen for hours to the crackle of pitch torches, she'd wake up to hear the music of the rain, she'd start to dance when the blacksmith outside shod a horse. Only the neighing of horses she couldn't abide, it pained her."

The Duke's head drooped and he gazed at the ground, like a child whining for a lost toy.

Then he sprang to life, threw back his head, and declared with an arrogant air: "I could kill you now, for your life is ten times forfeit. But I've thought the matter over, and will let you slip away from here. Some days ago you saved my life, and so I grant you yours. Go now."

Then he was seized again with melancholy, and said softly: "It may be our paths shall cross again after many years, back in Germany or in Flanders. At that time the world will show a different, older face. And we shall look one another in the eye, and in silence and with troubled minds recall this marvellous child, who loved us both and now lies between us, pale and still, with two little bells in her hand, a butterfly and a snake."

But even now, grief found no way to Grumbach's heart. Suddenly he heard loud noises outside of many men running, all torn from sleep by the thunder of the arquebus. But Melchior Jäcklein's voice shouted over their cries. He stood at the entrance to the tent vowing to plant a bullet in the brain of anyone who crossed the threshold.

When Grumbach heard his man ready to expend the third bullet so frivolously, he uttered a curse, shoved Mendoza aside, and stormed out to where Melchior Jäcklein with his arquebus was threatening the Spaniards trying to force their way into the tent.

Grumbach shoved two or three of them back and swiftly grabbed the arquebus, already loaded with the third bullet. He turned to Jäcklein and said: "Melchior, that was a fine trick you taught your bullet, to kill Delilah instead of the Duke. You won't earn much praise for it."

As he taunted Jäcklein with these mocking words, there came over him all at once the great sadness his heart had not found. It seemed that Mendoza's words had come true, that many years had passed and he was an old man recalling a vanished day from his youth, letting dead Delilah's faded image float before his eyes. His head drooped, he heard not a word that his servant stammered in response to his taunts, and was only an ancient dreaming man.

Suddenly loud noises came from a tent not far off, where a banner with the image of the holy Virgin flapped outside. Two musketeers stepped out and took up position to left and right of the entrance, holding themselves to attention. A torchbearer hurried after them.

"Flee!" Grumbach heard Mendoza hiss behind him. "Cortez is coming. Come with me before he sees you, I'll help you get away."

But Grumbach shook his head, and curled his fingers around the barrel of the arquebus. "Let him come," he said. "I'm waiting for him." He stepped forward to meet Cortez, who had just now left his tent, and in his heart swore an oath that this bullet should find its path according to his own will, and not that of the late Garcia Novarro.

Cortez walked slowly, like a somnambulist tracking the moon. A black and white plume nodded over his head with every step. At his breast he wore a cuirass of shining steel, which glinted with a red glow in the torchlight. The tent and men and Grumbach too were reflected in the cuirass, and it seemed to Grumbach he could see the whole camp and the whole wide world and what was happening at this moment in the most distant lands, all reflected in Cortez' enchanted armour. And in his hand Cortez held a naked sword, etched with fiery letters: *Rubet ensis sanguine hostium*.

But Grumbach's nerves held steady, even though a shudder ran through him when he stood so close to Cortez. But low murmurs of astonishment started up among us, for we all knew that Grumbach had forfeited his life, that his head had belonged to the executioner from the moment he fired his second shot against the Spanish army. None of us dared say a word out loud, for we knew well Cortez' dreadful passionate rages, but we all awaited his signal for us to fall on Grumbach.

But Cortez kept silent. His face was pale and seemed paralysed, only in his cuirass was there pulsating life. In a hundred fiery colours all kinds of images and events could be seen, and first and foremost we watched, as in a mirror, the image of Grumbach, standing there grim and wroth, holding the menacing arquebus in both hands.

For a short while silence reigned, but then we watched, amazed and horrified, as Cortez slowly lifted a hand and doffed his hat to Grumbach.

Cortez had spent the whole night alone in his tent. In front of him lay the letter in which he reported and described to his king the retreat of the army from the capital. "And so," he had written, "on that night, victory lay with the enemy. In weighing the peril in which we found ourselves, and the great damage the Indios had inflicted on us; and concerned that they could still destroy the last causeway as they had all the others, which would ensure the death of all of us; and since all my comrades, or at least most of them, had been wounded, I determined to effect a retreat that same night. I quit the fortress in the greatest haste. But as we approached the causeway, a countless horde of hostile people attacked us anew, assailing us on every side, from both water and land. In great distress we reached the mainland, but more than half of us fell in this battle, and all that I had gathered of gold, jewels and fabrics for Your Majesty's use remained in the hands of the Indios, and God knows the exertions and perils they had put us to."

"I have informed Your Majesty of the plain truth of all that befell us during this Night of Sorrows. I devoted all my strength to the increase of Christian glory. God preserve the life and most regal person of Your Majesty, and promote for long ages the enlargement of all the kingdoms and duchies that Your royal heart may desire."

This was as far as Cortez had reached in his report, before weariness overcame him. His head sank to his breast. Sleep had become his master, and now conducted before his gaze a curious dream-vision.

It seemed to Cortez that he saw his King on the steps of a marble staircase, which led from a high terrace down to the sea strand. Many princes and lords, both clerical and secular, were gathered about him. Closest to him was Seignior Guillaume de Croy, his Lord Chamberlain, and then the King's Father Confessor, the priest Adrian Floriszoon of Utrecht. Cortez recognised as well the King's two field marshals, Signor di Leva and Signor Battista Lodron, together with sundry other Spanish grandees and German princes.

But he himself, Cortez, was kneeling in profoundest humility on the lowest step of the marble staircase, and reporting with a rueful heart on the great calamity the army had met with on that Night of Sorrows. And he heard himself stammer in a hoarse voice: "...and God knows the exertions and perils they put us to."

Signor Lodron then spoke up, his words brutally curt: "Where wisdom is lacking in a war, one finds neither fortune nor advancement."

But Signor di Leva planted his fists on his hips, making his silken sleeves rustle and swish, and measured Cortez with a cool and contemptuous eye: "You have expended many men and a large quantity of weaponry to no profit," he said. "And yet you are but the lowliest of all His Majesty's servants."

"And brutal quantities of innocent blood have flowed among the peaceful Indios," said Seignior Guillaume de Croy. "You murdered whole heaps of men, women and children, all quite senselessly."

"And yet they are humans like us, and like us redeemed through Christ's dear blood," whispered the priest Adrian Floriszoon.

Cortez knelt on the marble step, tried to speak and could not. Into his heart an enormous dread had crept, such as he had never felt in the worst tumult of battle. But he summoned up all his defiance, and said to himself: "What a ninny, that Leva! He's watched more ballets in his life than battles! What can he have to say to me!"

He rose from his knees and said: "I told Your Majesty the whole truth of what befell us."

In a flash all those who had been standing around the King vanished. A damp wind came up from the sea. His Majesty stood alone on the terrace. Cortez could feel the King's eye resting silently upon him, and heard himself stammer in a whispering voice: "I devoted all my strength to the increase of Christian glory."

But he fell silent, seeing such anger in the King's face that he had to close his eyes. He could no longer endure the King's gaze, took a step back and felt for the next step. He could not find it, and fell into an endless void.

Now he awoke, and sat distraught in his tent. Outside he could hear shouts and uproar. Slowly he stood up, called for light, and had his cuirass strapped on.

He stepped out and walked slowly towards Mendoza's tent, where a noisy crowd was jostling and shouting. His mind and thoughts were still deep in the night's dream. He went on with downcast eyes, unable to forget the anger in his King's visage.

All at once there was Grumbach, and he saw the man's face, which at this moment with its long narrow chin and outthrust lip bore an uncanny resemblance to the King's visage he had seen in his dream. He shuddered, and such dread slid once more into his heart that in trepidation he took a step back, and with great reverence swept his hat down to the ground before Grumbach. No one suspected that with this gesture he was greeting his invincible King and master, the Holy Roman Emperor Carolus Quintus.

Grumbach called out to him: "Now that you have come, I shall pronounce judgement on you, Seignior Hernando Cortez!"

"Told Your Majesty the whole truth," Cortez stammered in his reverie.

"This country," Grumbach roared, "was prosperous and blooming before you came. Now there is no field you have not manured with blood, and no tree in the entire land you have not converted to a gallows."

"I devoted all my strength to the increase of Christian glory," Cortez whispered.

"Stealing, looting, acquiring gold – that was your Christian glory!" Grumbach shouted. "Hanging, burning, murdering – that's what you devoted your strength to! Your reward shall be this bullet."

He raised the arquebus and stepped towards Cortez.

The frantic horror of the dream now seized Cortez entirely. He hid his face behind crossed arms, took a step back, then another, then another, slowly at first, and then faster and faster as he fled from Grumbach, for he thought it was the King himself who yelled at him so angrily.

The Spaniards for the first time witnessed Cortez running away. He turned his back and scurried off, and all at once a great despondency entered into them, and they suddenly saw they were all alone in a strange land, few in number, surrounded on all sides by enemies, with the great World Ocean between them and their homeland. And such trepidation and despair came over them when they saw Cortez flee, that not one had any thought of standing by him.

Only one faced up to Grumbach. This was Alvarado.

From childhood on, day and night Pedro Alvarado had dreamed only of handfuls of gold. Wherever he was he saw doubloons and rose-nobles dancing in the air, and when he closed his eyes he heard in his ear the chink and jingle of gold ducats. His dreams of gold had led him to the New World, and taught him to cock a snook at exertions and perils, and to scorn death. Even during the Night of Sorrows, he had never lost his certainty that in Cortez' army he would one day gain all the gold and jewels his heart desired.

But now, when he saw Cortez flee from one lone man, his golden dream evaporated in an instant. No longer was he dazzled by the glitter of gold doubloons, no gold ducats jingled in his ear, before his eyes the handfuls of gold turned all to dust and blew away. He stood by his tent a poor deceived man, looking out on an empty joyless world.

In his misery, blood suddenly rose to his head. He grabbed his lance and aimed it at Grumbach's breast. Grumbach failed to see him. With his gaze focused on Cortez, he paid no attention to his surroundings. But Melchior Jäcklein detected Alvarado's assault, and cried out in a strong clear voice: "Squire, look out! Duck!"

Grumbach turned his head and saw the lance aimed at his chest. He stood there looking for a weapon, and found a jagged lump of rock at his feet, which he hurled at Alvarado's head.

When he turned his gaze back to Cortez, he saw that he had reached a spot where three or four horses were tethered. And before Grumbach realised what was happening, Cortez leapt onto one of these horses and galloped up the hill. But he gained little advantage, for Grumbach at once came chasing after him.

Meanwhile the Duke of Mendoza walked up to Melchior Jäcklein with a smile and clapped him amiably on the shoulder: "Well now, German bird, yet again you've sung a new song. But it was your last. You've such a lovely, bright, sweet-sounding voice, it's almost a shame what will become of it. How did it go, that song about Master Chill-wind, that you sang back there in Ghent at the sign of the Golden Stove, when I sat at dice with your master?"

The Duke sought in his memory, and began to sing in his own tender affecting voice:

Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar!
Once in a year, once in a year
My mother danced with gay delight
On Three Kings of Orient night.

"Mother, who's that tapping at the door?
Who's that creeping up the stair?"

*“A princely youth, his heart so proud.
A golden crown upon his head.”*

*Caspar, Melchior, Balthasar!
Once in a year, once in a year,
His wife and child he comes to find,
And his name is Master Chill-wind.*

But Jäcklein had no memory at all of this song, he had never sung it, and never heard it. It seemed to him the Duke had made up this song and its lugubrious melody, and in this song was remembering the secret of his origin and his august father, the lovely Philipp of Spain, who was known in Spain as Master Chill-wind.

As the Duke with his dreaming youthful eyes sang this song, Melchior Jäcklein stepped closer and watched in deep sympathy as the Duke’s quivering lips seemed to recall his father and mother and his lonely childhood. But Mendoza abruptly broke off, pointed with his arm at Melchior Jäcklein, and barked gruffly to his men: *“Someone rip the tongue from his mouth!”*

Melchior turned pale, and began to faint. But he pulled himself together, and tried to grab the Duke by the throat with both hands.

But he was too late. Spaniards came at him from every side, and dragged him to the ground. Suddenly Pedro Carbonaro loomed over him, laughing his snarling laugh: “Ha, my laddie! Did I not promise you that one day I would have your tongue?”

Meanwhile Grumbach chased through the dawn light after Cortez, who desperately beat his horse with both fists to goad it to greater speed. It was of little use, for Grumbach gradually closed nearer and nearer. Down in the camp the Spaniards had at last gathered their courage, and began to fire their muskets at Grumbach, who paid no attention to the bullets that flew past left and right. He was consumed with the fever of the chase, as if he were back home in his Rhineland hills, hunting a wolf through the forest with a Huzzah! and a Tally-ho!

Yet at this moment he knew he held the fate of the whole country in his hands. “They’re a nation of dancers, monks and children,” he mused. “They’ve no idea how to defend themselves from their enemies. Would much rather hold silver bells in their hands, than swords. Marvellous children, the lot of them, that’s why I’ve taken up their cause, all by myself.”

And in him there arose a vision of the country before the coming of the Spaniards. He saw gardeners, how they carried great heaps of roses in their rowing boats along the canals, and sang. He saw other boats filled with human waste, required by craftsmen for the tanning of leather. In his mind he saw swift messengers, how they made haste to deliver lake fish from the water’s edge alive to the Great King’s table. He saw how, after rain, menials swarmed the streets with sponges and balls of cloth, to mop dry every puddle. And he had to smile at the earnestness and busy zeal with which everyone attended to his particular daily work, while he alone, for this land’s sake, stood against the entire Spanish army.

While these thoughts occupied his mind, he had reached so close to Cortez he could almost touch him. Garcia Novarro’s curse – that the third bullet should hit Grumbach himself – passed through his head. But he laughed it off, and in his heart mocked dead Garcia Novarro

for not predicting the third bullet's course more accurately. For the great judgement's moment had arrived. It seemed to Grumbach the whole world must know of this third bullet, as if humanity's gaze was on his own hand. The trees and bushes he sped past seemed to have human faces, staring after him. Clouds in the sky gazed down with human eyes. The dull roar from the camp formed itself to his ear into words, and to a summons that said: "*Resonabit fama per orbem!*"

And the whistling of the wind and the drumming of hooves he perceived as voices singing now in the bass register and now in the treble: "*Resonabit fama per orbem!*"

And he heard the trees and the bushes and the clouds and the earth all joining in to roar: "*Resonabit fama per orbem! Resonabit fama per orbem!*"

He raised the arquebus, ready to fire.

At that very moment, down at the camp, Melchior Jäcklein uttered his last human cry. Many years have passed since that hour, but even today I see his expression of horror and rage as with one hand he sought to defend himself while holding the other tight against his lips, and yet had to ...

Jesus and Mary! There he stands! For the dear Lord's sake, there stands Melchior Jäcklein! Yes, it is he, Melchior Jäcklein, how is it you are back to Germany? I thought you dead and buried these twenty years. Ah, don't cry, don't rage, don't flail your arms, it was all over long ago, leave me be to tell the tale of Grumbach and the three bullets!

Sweet Jesus, do you mean to shoot me? The arquebus! Take the arquebus from his hands! Help!

FINALE:

THE THIRD BULLET

What's happening? I'm lying on the ground. Did a bullet knock me from my horse? Just now I was riding after Cortez, our horses were foaming, trees, bushes, boulders rushing past, Cortez was so close ...

All of a sudden I'm in Germany. Tents all around, a river down there, and in the distance walls, towers, and a town gate ... Yes! I remember! I was lying outside Halle in the Emperor's military encampment, by the ashes of a campfire, I was tired and wanted to sleep, but the whole night long a Spanish cavalier was singing out my own life, how over in the New World I fought the Spanish army with my three bullets, how I chased Cortez over the hill, how I ... I don't know what came next! Why has he fallen silent? Let him tell it to the end!

Hark! A shot from an arquebus! Someone fired it. A scream, shrill, long and horrible. Confusion over there where my Spanish cavalier stands, with shouts and screaming. Spaniards and Germans come running from all sides. My equerry Melchior is there among them. His face is twisted, awful cries come sobbing from his mute lips, and he dangles a smoking arquebus in his hands.

Ah, now I know. I've been lying here the whole night! Yesterday it was, yesterday evening, when they led past this spot the wretched Lutheran councillors of the Saxon Prince Elector. I remember the old man with the bloody bandage among them, the one I smote across the face with my sabre by Mühlberg. Merciful God, what have I done! Was I out of my senses? I let myself be used by Spaniards and Papists against pious Lutheran princes! Fought at Mühlberg against the Protestant cause! Served the Spanish drive for domination, and priestling zealotry! Built gallows for the Emperor, so my Lutheran brethren could be hanged! Jesus, what madness entered my brain? Why did Melchior not keep his oath to me, but allowed me to forget my hatred and my vengeance?

But it's not Melchior Jäcklein's fault. He didn't forget his oath. But they ripped the tongue from his mouth, over in the New World, his tongue, which was to sing into my ears for all eternity my hatred for Spaniards and Papists. I have often seen him clench his fists and bare his teeth, and make foolish and desperate faces whenever I bowed down before a Spaniard or a priestling, and yet I never understood what it was he desired of me.

But it's not yet too late. The Protestant cause does not yet lie prostrate. Wittenberg is holding out against the Papists, and Erfurt and Gotha! I shall gather around me all the Protestant troops in the Emperor's army, and with them make rebellion. I shan't let it happen, that in the morning they chop off the heads of my Lutheran brethren down by the bridge. It won't be the first time I've rebelled. The Emperor banished me. The Pope excommunicated me. With my peasants I stormed princely castles and destroyed Papist monasteries. With three bullets I defied the Spanish world empire, and even chased Cortez as he fled from me. That Spanish cavalier knows all about it! How did they ride on? What happened with Cortez and the third bullet? I have no idea how it ended, but the Spanish cavalier over there, he knows.

Uproar and turmoil all about. Spanish and German troops are quarrelling. They rush past shouting, cursing, shooting and stabbing at one another, I don't know why. More crowds come pouring from the tent-lanes, and fling themselves into the riotous throng as it tumbles down the hill.

Someone's lying there cold and stiff on the ground, quite still, not moving. A pool of blood trickles from his side. Oh Heavens! It's my Spanish cavalier!

My Spanish cavalier is dead. Never again will he speak. Never shall I learn how my business with Cortez and the Spanish army ended! I had thought the tale of the three bullets was long since dead and forgotten. But it remained alive, dwelled all these years in the night times of an old grey-haired cavalier. An image of me as I then was rode at his side, lay with him by a fire, and every night stormed through his dreams cursing, raging and rebelling against the powerful of the earth, while I myself became a tired old man.

And now Melchior Jäcklein, the fool, has shot the cavalier dead, senselessly and to no purpose, just as once he shot dead little Delilah in Mendoza's tent. And with that he shot my past life and destroyed the image of my youth, and in truth, Garcia Novarro's curse has this day at last been fulfilled. Yes, the third bullet hit *me*.

Now here I lie, tired and good for nothing, like a nag that has run away from the knacker's yard. Again I see my past life behind me. But already it is fading. It lies there like a wide landscape at dusk. Figures are in it, I know them, Cortez and young Mendoza, Schellbock, hung by Cortez on my account, lovely Delilah, dead in the Duke's tent, and what was he called, the poor devil who lost his arquebus to my equerry? Ah, their features are dissolving already, I can't hold them steady, they want to vanish into the dusk of time, and will have flown away before an Our Father is said to the end.

The riotous mob has rolled in a confusion of limbs to the bottom of the hill, down to the river which is here the Saale. Spaniards and Germans are still stabbing and shooting one another down there, no idea why, the poor fools!

But who am I to laugh? Once I too was no less foolish! What business of mine were the deeds of Spain in the New World? That Cortez embarked on a campaign against the Indios of those lands – what in the blazes could I do about it? It is true that times and fates were in such strange confusion that I too was ensnared in the business. As I rode so swiftly in pursuit of Cortez, what folly had seized hold of me so that I meant to plant my bullet in his head? Was it really me? For I no longer understand my curious behaviour that night, and can only marvel that I could be possessed by such an evil cruel desire. And that noble king, what ill had he ever done me that I should lay him low with my bullet as he stood up there on the city wall? Alas, our mortal flesh is always with Satan, and truly it served me right that I returned home from my dealings with the world with nothing more than tired bones, bruises, scars, and a glass eye.

The night is fading, but sleep won't come. The noise of battle down below has stilled. The Emperor, they're saying, has woken up, and ridden forth from the town to bring peace between Spaniards and Germans. What coarse oxen the Germans are, they never want to get along with Spaniards. It's been a horrible, terrifying affair, down there. The Emperor's brother,

Ferdinand of Austria, is said to be wounded; a Spanish cousin or relative of the Emperor has even been slain. And it all happened because my equerry Melchior Jäcklein shot an old garrulous Spanish cavalier, as he told a moronic tale about someone who had three bullets, and with the first killed a king and with the second a young girl ... It's there dimly in my head, I don't know where from, read it perhaps in some stupid book, in *Amadis* or *Ritter Löw*.

Now all is calm again in the camp. Dawn is breaking. Captain Glasspeeper, you're tired! Won't you stretch out and try again to forget, see if you can sleep an hour or two?

Where am I? Nobody about. Must be almost noon, the sun is high in the sky. I've had a long sleep, dreamt confused dreams, but they've all vanished and flown away, leaving nothing in my head but a distant rustling and roaring, as if I held a seashell to my ear.

The ground all about is churned and trampled. A torn drum and a broken drumstick lie side by side, as if someone has drummed a song out all night long, until the calfskin tore and the wood split.

Germany! What a desolate unhappy land. Forests and meadows and pastures, all covered in hoarfrost. My heart is almost sad, I know not why.

Where has my Melchior got to? Why hasn't he brought my morning soup, or wrapped my cloak about my shoulders, or bridled my horse? There's no loyalty any more among men, if Melchior Jäcklein can forget about me.

*April showers,
maiden's love and lark's sweet song,
and rose's bloom,
all sweet, and ...*

Hell's bells! How did that lovesick little ditty come to my ear just now? Where on earth did I hear it, not so long ago?

Over by the town wall, crowds of people are going down to the river. Jesus! I almost forgot! Today at noon the Lutheran rebels are to be executed down there by the bridge, the ones I helped capture by Mühlberg and brought along. Better get down there sharpish, I want to be present when the executioner chops off their heads. Ha, you rascals, always so defiant and obstinate! Just had to rebel? Now you'll receive payment, and really you earned no better.

I hear three horsemen galloping behind me. Quick, Captain Glasspeeper, draw aside! It's a great lord, I know him, the Spanish Duke with his people, Seignior Juan de Mendoza. He's been in camp three days, the Emperor plans to make him his Chancellor, so I've heard said. Now he's riding past. Bow, Captain Glasspeeper, bow low! Make your reverence, sweep your hat to the ground! Maybe you'll be blessed with a gracious glance at your shoulders!

"Your Grace, my humble respects! Your Lordship, most cordially your most obedient servant!"

THE END

¹ Georg von **Frundsberg** (1473-1528): leading military tactician in Habsburg service. Pierre de **Rohan** (1451-1513): Marshal of France. Niklas von **Salm** (1459-1530): defended Vienna against the Turks.

² 'May enemy blood redden my blade.'

³ Crude boot: symbol of the the Bundschuh movement, a series of local peasant rebellions in southwest Germany from 1493 to 1517.

⁴ i.e. tobacco. See Wikisource, 'History of Tobacco'.

⁵ 'An antiquated French cannon 8 feet long, firing 16-pound iron shot'. (Krünitz: *Oekonomische Enzyклопädie*)