

Charlott a bit *loopy*

A novel by
Wilhelm Speyer (1927)

Translated and introduced © by
C. D. Godwin (2025)

<https://beyond-alexanderplatz.com>

Charlott swept through the southern entrance to the AVUS track, heading towards Berlin. By the time the gatekeeper came running from his guardhouse, Charlott had already sped past at 70 kph. Holk leaned out to show his face. He waved his enormous gloves: It's us! The gatekeeper stared after them: "What a pair," he thought.

Holk pulled his felt hat tighter over his leonine skull. "You should have hooted, Charlott!"

"I'm not from Magdeburg."

Air blasts from the compressor howled their ghostly warnings: "Watch out! Now people! Watch out!" They were doing a hundred.

If I say something stupid, she'll hold one hand to her head. I'll keep quiet.

Dapolin – Stellin – Stellin – Dapolin. They roared past the advertisement hoardings along this Domain of the Steel Ox, the letters stabbed the brain like lightning. Every tree along the edge soughed and cried out, but in no particular tone, for one collided with the next and the third and the fourth.

"I'm ecstatic!" said Charlott.

"No conversation, sweetheart! Hundred and ten! It's been raining!"

Charlott showed a three-quarter profile of a smiling boy's face under the cowboy hat. Admittedly it was a face such as no boy on this earth ever had, only a woman of our time.

"Justus is bankrupt! You really should see what that means!"

"It doesn't affect you, does it?"

"I'm going to marry him again."

"Gosh," said Holk. He accepted it. In a room he would have wept. But they were doing a hundred and twenty. It wasn't concern for himself alone that made the back of his knees seem filled with carbon dioxide.

If she capsizes us I'll fly six somersaults through the air and stand up thirty seconds later, I know my strengths. But Charlott, what'll happen to Charlott? He whimpered: "So marry him! I mean, you've been divorced a whole eight months already!"

"You think I'd leave him in an attic room smoking Marylands? I shall marry him."

"That won't make him any more solvent. You're no better off than him!"

"We'll see about that," Charlott growled triumphantly. "I'm fed up being broke. In the morning they'll try to repossess this lovely car, when I've already paid one-sixth."

She lowered her forehead tenderly to the steering wheel. "I won't hand it over voluntarily! I shall put my foot down!"

Holk cried: "What nonsense is this, sweetheart? You're fed up being poor, so you marry a bankrupt?"

Charlott sang a few wild sounds out over the machinery. "You're going to be surprised, all of you!"

Holk heard this with horror. It sounded like a swansong.

"I've got hold of his new address. We shall fetch him away! Breakfast at Horcher's! Do we have cash?"

"Slow down, sweetheart! We'll put it on the slate."

"Faster!"

They were doing a hundred and thirty.

"When we come to the exit you *really must* hoot, darling!"

"I was born in 1906 in Matthäikirche Strasse."

"That's good. Nearer my God to Thee!"

They exited the north gate at ninety, without signalling. Holk was one of the bravest men of his age, a combatant in the greatest battles of the century; now his hair stood like a mountain range. The felt hat almost flew off, so powerful was his fright.

Fifteen minutes later the three of them were sitting together at Horcher's: Charlott, Holk (her friend from nursery times and preferred companion these last eight months), and Justus, the man from whom she had been divorced for just as long as her current liaison with Holk.

"We did a hundred and thirty. I can make the car do whatever I want!"

She held knife and fork in her hands. She drummed with them on the tabletop. "Food! Food! But something zany!"

Young Horcher leaned enraptured over the table.

"I want crayfish mayonnaise with pineapple slices. No meat. Nice thick asparagus. Manhattan cocktail, garden potatoes, gorgonzola, and done."

She whipped the hat from her head. She puffed air up over her forehead, her eyes squinted high. Her movements were those of an overheated person about to leap into a swimming pool.

Suddenly she directed a stern look at Justus, who was waiting in devoted, amicable, nonchalant silence for her magnificent display of graceful agitation to finish.

"You've no money left, Justus?"

"None."

"You've sold Petersdorf?"

"Let, for the time being, Charlott."

"Who to?"

"Some director of a dyestuff trust. My only condition was that I must be buried in the park. The official permit has already been issued."

"How much does he pay?"

“For my funeral? Nothing.”

“No jokes please! How much does he pay?” Charlott was insistent.

“Twenty thousand.”

“A year? With furniture?”

“Yes.”

“Well then! You do have something!”

“It’s all spoken for, Charlott,” Justus countered, as courteously as if he were smoothing over a little faux pas in the conversation.

“Spoken for? And you have more debts on top?”

“Seven times a hundred thousand, Charlott,” Justus replied, submissive and meek. He gathered all his amiability, making ready to share with his ex-wife further revelations of his financial situation.

He was a tall, stout, elegant gentleman, a miracle of corpulent grace, loose in every limb, better dressed than any sporty Adonis of our age, an excellent albeit lazy dancer, golfer and polo rider – a man with a high round brow and bright coolly ironic brown eyes that gazed meditatively upon the world. The contours of his body and his face presented a blazing protest against the current ideal of the straight line, for he was everywhere a contented three-dimensional shape, all muscles and fat.

Charlott pulled out a mirror. Head on one side, she regarded her chin. She had some reason at this very moment to inspect the state of her chin. Then she drew a ring finger along her black mascara’d eyebrows. It was a miracle of a finger, an entire religion of human beauty.

Charlott cast a glance at Holk over the mirror. “Do you think he’s taking us for a ride, sweetheart?”

“No, sweetheart.”

Justus lowered his face over his plate. Secure and comfortably bedded as his opulent body was in the fragrance of his delicate underwear, he now brought into view a mild confusion.

Charlott snapped the mirror determinedly shut.

“Something doesn’t add up, young man! When we agreed to divorce, you offered me a hundred thousand a year. I thought it wasn’t fair to accept more than twelve. Because in the end it was I who ran away for no reason. Well then. Today, by chance at the golf club I heard that you’re living furnished in Kant Strasse, in a room with no running water and without your dreadful valet Teppich. That’s the kind of poverty you find in Reinhardt’s *Everyman*.¹ Nobody loses all his money one day to the next.”

Justus kept his hands folded over his plate. “There are said to be examples in our own time, Charlott.” He added, as if merely showing Charlott a simple courtesy: “Anyway, you

¹ Max Reinhardt’s production of Hofmannsthal’s play about the death of a rich man premiered in Berlin in 1911, and from 1920 was staged annually at the Salzburger Festspielen.

know none of that matters to me in the slightest since you went away. I'm only sorry now for your own situation. Because starting next quarter I can't provide more than half of my income, meaning two hundred and fifty Mark a month."

"So I'm to blame for your misfortune?"

Justus was shocked. "For God's sake, darling! I don't blame you at all! You were free to leave or to stay! You do as you please – I mean, you – a woman like you! In these times!"

Any other woman, hearing this confirmation that we men are now citizens of Aphrodite's slave state, would have been content. But Charlott had lost none of her interrogator's zeal: "Well now! You had a stake in Rhodes in New York, ships at Bremen, Canadian lumber with Wells Brothers, in Argentina, in Holland, I don't know – and it's all melted away? Suddenly all these businesses have collapsed?"

"I cashed in most of them when you left, my dear," Justus murmured. "I bought French francs. I was in bad odour with my banks. I had to hand the rest of my goods and chattels over to them as security."

"Including the fish in your aquarium?"

"Of course! Every one of my seahorses carries in its pouch the seal of the court receiver along with its eggs. The entire progeny is mortgaged while still in the father's body. They developed a whole new process for the insoluble glue that fixes the seal. Only the electric rays were a bit too much for the receiver."

Holk was using Charlott's mascara pencil to sketch on the tablecloth. He was sketching Charlott's head with the cowboy hat. The hat lay on his plate, he squinted at it, sketched Charlott wearing it. Meanwhile he whistled his little Negro Charleston song: "Yes sir, that's my baby! No sir, don't mean maybe!" But he was not satisfied with his Baby! He was furious! But he was far too polite, far too much the scion of good old Berlin, to show his friend and rival in love just how angry he was at him. The rotten scoundrel speculates in francs, he thought. He laid a hand on Justus' arm.

"I feel so sorry for you, my good Justus, to see you now as poor as us. Chin up!"

Holk had a father who was a little more than well off, and so he believed life would never throw at him anything too daunting. Whenever a shop assistant asked: "Herr Holk, when might we finally see a settlement of your outstanding account?" Holk would counter with his dazzling smile: "I really have no idea, honey! Chin up! Be brave!" And go away.

Charlott was wolfing her crayfish mayonnaise with pineapple slices like a predator. Then, sated, she turned her blue eyes, now grown quite tender, to Justus: "Good, Justibus! We shall get married again! Make the arrangements!"

Justus at once glanced up anxiously and almost shocked from his breakfast. "But darling! You really must not inconvenience yourself on my account! Please, you really need to think it over very carefully! ... Jumping in like this! ... But I really am ... Anyway," he gulped down his cocktail. "Charmed!"

Charlott removed the mascara pencil from Holk's hand, and stroked the hand. With the other hand she laid Justus' fork aside, and stroked Justus' hand.

“I shan’t leave you in the lurch, Justus! We shall starve together. And anyway, over the last eight months I’ve had enough aggravation with him.”

She indicated Holk. She clapped her hands, as if summoning a bevy of Negro waiters. “And now we shall eat something r-e-a-lly good! Sweetheart, this evening we shall go dancing at Ollivier’s! We shall order the whole menu. But get tickets for Bergner first, I have to see Chaney’s end again.”²

She gave Justus a beguiling smile: “I have to see *everything* again.”

.2.

Dr Justus Verloh held to ideals of life that protested against this slimness-obsessed age, which turns the necessity of indigence into a virtue of style. He once heard of a President of China who never moved from his palace and weighed two hundred and fifty pounds. He intended to emulate this oriental sage. He seldom walked, played hardly any sports. During his marriage to Charlott he was forced to dance. He danced lightly and with enthusiasm. As soon as he returned to the table he uttered imprecations against dancing. He showered with scorn the heated dripping slender men around him; his own sallow East Asiatic skin was always cool and dry.

When they were in London, Charlott demanded that he accept the invitation from a club, and ride a polo pony. He rode a friend’s six ponies to sweaty ruin, and achieved the greatest success as Back, to the juvenile applause of his British clubmates, who stood in their stirrups bent over with laughter like Grand Viziers bowing to the Sultan.

Now and then he drove out to the new golf club at Wannsee. He did not drive himself. His chauffeur had strict instructions never to burden him with technical details. Ever since he heard of a film where Jackie Coogan drove from one green to the next in his car, he fervently desired to do likewise.

He hardly ever stayed in the big city; it repelled him. He had a country estate in Brandenburg, with extensive lawns, gardens, woods and a lake, but no farmland. He had heard at some point about farmers who in spring rise every day at five. Ever since then he would tolerate no one of that profession anywhere near. He believed they were marked out by Fate to bring him misfortune. Not that he was a late riser; mostly he could be found in his library by six a.m., and felt nothing but intellectual sympathy for all those condemned to early-morning physical activity.

In the basement of his mansion he had installed one of the loveliest private aquariums in Europe. These were creatures he adored for their noble lack of busyness and their silence: anthozoos, medusas and seahorses constantly drifting along in convoy, or pampering themselves in a fizzing stream. He spent most of his day within these walls formed of bubbling water, sitting in one of the many club chairs, issuing instructions and conferring with his valet Teppich.

Teppich – Justus’ dreadful valet as Charlott called him – was one of the stupidest people of the age, for sure the most incompetent servant of his epoch. He hadn’t a clue

² Probably the 1927 film *The Unknown*, in which Lon Chaney suffers a ghastly death.

how to perform the obligations of his profession; his laziness, negligence and arrogance sent everything askew. But he loved animals, and cared for them wonderfully, including the underwater kind. In terms of practical knowledge he could take on any expert oceanographer. He felt a kinship with these creatures that goggled into vacancy, silent and at ease with themselves, that never reproached themselves for idleness, and never on any account let themselves be bossed about. Justus frequently flew into a rage over Teppich. He felt like pummelling him whenever he saw that smug, puritanically severe servant-face with the ridiculous dirty brown outmoded mutton-chop whiskers. But he would never willingly be parted from the fellow.

As a bachelor before the War, Justus had used some of his assets to fit out an oceanic expedition to the Pacific. Life on board had suited him admirably. Despite bouts of mildly pathetic seasickness, on board a yacht you never have a polo pony to ride, or any reason to practice the standard physical activities of the age. Plenty of sleep, excellent food, even better drink, you can smoke, work and dream, and you're pursuing the topic you most love. He meant to return home like a pirate, with a rich haul of booty that he would sell off to aquariums and biological institutes in Europe and America.

The outbreak of war found him off the coast of Java. He lived on the island with good friends, a Dutch couple. He had no objection to spending the war years in Java engaged in scientific research. But one day he ventured too far out to sea. The Britishers took great pleasure in hauling such a lovely prominent German onto their warship. He spent rather more than a year as a prisoner in India. The war had interrupted his correspondence with scientific friends and colleagues in London, New York and Paris, but he had cultivated relations in neutral countries good enough to ensure that his assets were well looked after, and came through the critical years with no significant damage. So he returned to Berlin. But he had no fondness for Berlin. In Petersdorf he barricaded himself against the spirit of the times.

All said he was old-fashioned, except in his clothing. He sang Lieder by Schumann, Loewe, Franz, his favourite writers were Storm, Fontane and Keller. He drank more than one was supposed to in this incipient Age of Sport, but was never drunk. His only friends were a pack of German mastiffs, which were already no longer in fashion. When he took a stroll in his lonely woods and gardens, on the shores of the lake – his figure tall, gigantic even, surrounded by mastiffs young and old, cherrywood cane in his hand, his face spirited and cantankerous – he looked like a Frondeur who has retired to his estate in order to rail against the ruling spirit of the towns, to mock and deny.

Then he came to know Charlott. Within three weeks, he who had never made a big deal of women was married to Charlott and – aagh! – sixteen months later divorced already.

His marriage was destroyed – by Berlin! From there the enticements came that pulled Charlott away from him: Holk and the numerous companions of her youth, men and women both. Separating from him was a flight back to girlhood.

He remained in Petersdorf. Tormented hours he now spent within the walls of his aquarium. In eight months he never visited the city once. He hated Berlin! There Charlott was surrounded by all the usual amusements society could offer her – the older sort to which she was well used, as well as the newer sort now emerging. He heard by telephone

from Camilla what Charlott was up to now. Camilla was Charlott's cousin, and the only one of the whole bunch who enjoyed Justus' trust. No grand ball, no premiere, no six-day race, no revue, no party of any kind without Charlott! In late summer with friendly families at the beach, in autumn back again in heavenly Berlin, the city she literally worshipped. There in her two-room apartment on canalside Cornelius Strasse she received her daily telegrams, long-distance calls, couriered messages, the flowers and little fripperies with rococo mottos. Oh how he knew them! Painted cups with their inscriptions ("*Quand ce coq chantera, mon amour finira!*"³), the exotic dolls, animals made of offcut fabrics, with a flower or slip of paper in the mouth.

He lived alone, he was no longer happy, the radiance had left him. The mastiffs of his bachelor days had long been disposed of; only one bitch was left. He coddled her. He made up a club chair for her, which no one was allowed to use, for like every predator the mastiff loved anything soft, sentimental, cosy. They gazed at one another, both had acquired eyes that glistened with grief. They spoke of Charlott like old people in a rest home, of her splendid youthfulness, and both bragged a little about Charlott's erstwhile presence and grace. The mastiff harkened to snow sliding from the roof, lifted her head, sighed, and slept.

Intolerable the thought of Charlott's affairs falling into disarray, that she was amassing debts, and for all the glamour in her life must now and then be suffering want. Justus heard about it. When he heard it he couldn't breathe! He was becoming asthmatic over Charlott's debts! He lay every night on his back struggling for air. Air!

Of course, at some point in the future Charlott was due to enter into a great inheritance. She would become a rich woman. But wasn't she thoughtless and ill-advised enough to manage those future assets badly, squander them all on the companions of her youth?

Those heavy winter evenings, divorced from Charlott – so many cares, so many misgivings, so much despondency!

Then a bright light burst through the darkness! Look, look: bankruptcy!

.3.

Justus – the bankrupt man with seven hundred thousand of debts, whose seahorses carried in their pouches the seal of the court receiver – Justus allowed himself on this mild early-spring evening to be conveyed by Hispano-Suiza thirty houses down Kant Strasse, to Ollivier's. He had turned up late, and had only just fended off with morose courtesy the boisterous greetings of all kinds of acquaintances when Charlott and Holk arrived, Charlott in daring décolleté in a dress of white satin silk with a long chain of fake pearls down her front.

As she held out her hand to Justus she said: "Wasn't that your car I saw just now? Or am I mistaken?"

³ "My love will end when this cock crows!"

As Justus pulled up random chairs for Charlott and Holk, he stammered: "Whatever are you thinking, Charlott! My car! ... of course I had to sell it – to my aniline chap. He was so kind as to pump the tires and lend it me this evening ..."

Justus began to natter away splendidly:

"Good evening, my dear good Holk ... D'you know, Charlott, those chaps from the Badische Soda⁴, they're almost princes among men ... So touching ... I'm simply lost if I have to go on foot – and Kant Strasse, for goodness sake! I can't manage a droshky these days, and can't fit into a sidecar. A student with duelling scars who acts as taxi driver in the evenings tried to entice me into that hell. Thanks a lot. But the soda chap has helped me out again with my old Hispano."

Charlott wasn't listening, she was too busy greeting and being greeted. She was made up like a great wild goddess of antiquity. An ivory tone was the base colouring of her face, at least the chin, nose, brow and lower part of the cheeks; then rising up to her cheekbones a pink that shaded to ochre at the smudged edges, while in contrast the big rather too wide mouth was daubed in a very bright, hard, merry and rather cheeky red; and then again the eyebrows drawn dead straight across the forehead, and the long black eyelashes with their oily gleam. The hair on her head too, oiled hair flashing black, the rippling waves pressed tight to the very narrow skull, trimmed on the slant so as not quite to reveal the shapely ears. This artistic concoction of a young female face was homage to a bizarre and amusing fashion: nowhere any planful improvement of some defect in natural beauty, instead, any sign of Nature's negligence was emphasized rather than suppressed. One almost had the impression that the deep blue eyes and big healthy teeth were no product of Nature's workshop, but invented by some genius of the palette.

This then was Charlott's evening and night face, in contrast to her day face, both no more alike than the faces of twin sisters, one of whom, in a spirit of satirical whimsy, plays the other on stage.

Suddenly the National Anthems of the age struck up: blaring Negro dance numbers. The gentlemen of the orchestra who were just now gazing so benignly and relaxed out over the salon seemed to have been struck by a religious frenzy that began at the tips of their lacquered shoes and ended at the top of the skull. Their bodies, the contortions of their legs, their shouts and the instruments called to mind the militant rhythms that accompany circumcision ceremonies in equatorial Africa. Charlott was at once dancing with somebody.

As she stood up she said, nodding to Justus as if greeting him for the first time this evening: "Bergner's was wonderful, as always. I've sent her two hundred roses from Rothe's."

"Would have been cheaper by the two thousand," said Holk as he went. Justus was again by himself. Holk was not the man to spend the evening chatting, or even sitting quietly somewhere, if no female was present. Males bored him dreadfully. He never knew what he was supposed to say. And then he always had an urgent phone call to make. A Berliner at this time never says around noon: "I'll be with you in an hour," but instead:

⁴ Badische Anilin- und Soda-Fabrik: BASF.

"I'll call you again shortly before one." It was a benign weakness in Holk that he could never refuse an invitation. So it happened that he committed to three different parties in three different theatres and had to rush off in the middle of the play, eyes moist behind the horn-rimmed spectacles because of some marvellous bit of acting or an especially fine play. If he had caused enough confusion to freeze the blood in his own veins, he would telephone directly from the theatre lobby.

Charlott spent not much time at her table. "You will dance now, Justibus," she said, fixing Justus with an eye at once stony and mild. Now and then she had the not at all cold but thoroughly clear and precise gaze of a twentieth century city girl. In this respect, Berlin girls – and not only in the expression of their eyes – greatly resembled Parisiennes.

"Mercy, darling! Don't we – shouldn't we – have a little talk? Or – of course! Whatever you say, Charlott."

To this Charlott made no reply. She danced with Justus because it pleased her to dance with Justus, and as they danced, her painted lips with their slightly turpentine aroma glided fleetingly and seemingly by accident over Justus' eyelids.

"It's going very well," she said, with a smile of acknowledgement to the ecstatic gentlemen of the orchestra, who for their part rolled their eyes and flashed their teeth in Justus' direction: he's the right man and dancer for you, hoho! Fat, rich, intelligent – you have to take him back!

"The thing is this," Charlott's lips hardly moved. "I want to marry you again, but we can't possibly live in poverty. We must do something to ensure sixty thousand a year. At least."

The orchestra sang, in the nasal twang of New York's Jewish quarter, "No sir, don't mean maybe!" Justus froze.

He groaned. "Sixty thousand." He met Charlott's stony gaze. "Fine, darling. I shall look for work."

"Selling cat sharks?" Once again Charlott's mouth wandered mockingly over his eyes. Justus began to shiver. He raised the kissed eyebrows as if every hair was eager to receive once again that beloved touch.

Charlott whispered: "I've so often longed for you!"

At the same time she nodded to someone: "Good evening, Thankmar. How's Sonia?"

They returned to their table. Charlott's hand received numerous squeezes, greetings were exchanged, while Justus on his side muttered bitterly about physical activities.

Then they were alone again.

"So, now I really do have to talk to you about a really serious matter!"

Justus knew what a really serious talk with Charlott meant. Conversations in Negro rhythm, conversations in a Charleston tone, you touch the knees together and the soles of the feet begin to twitch.

"I thought it all out very carefully and from every side, driving along the AVUS this morning."

“At a hundred and thirty?”

“Yes. Now I’d like some of those little pork sausages. Ask if they have them, please.”

“Gosh!” Jusus reacted not at all to the sausages.

“Darling, you already know: when I reach twenty-five I come into an inheritance from Mummy’s only brother, my late tea-uncle in Colombo. My big one-and-a-half!” She meant one and a half million dollars. On the tablecloth Charlott wrote with her lipstick a great big 1½. “But then there’s this Cornelia Fisher in Colombo. I don’t know if you remember who Cornelia Fisher is?”

“I know everything that concerns you!”

“Well!” Charlott swiftly interjected, “really?” clearly intent on laying out the whole situation once again regardless. “Cornelia, the daughter of some earl or knight or Sir So-and-so, is the widow of Uncle Jacob’s business partner, Sir Herbert H. Fisher, and on top of that she was Uncle Jacob’s great love in his bachelor days! She’s a slick operator, that lady! Not only did she have her own husband, but she inherited the tea company’s entire shareholding from Uncle Jacob, so that today she’s so to speak the sole owner of this grand enterprise. Thank God she only inherited the business, and not Uncle Jacob’s other assets! They come to me in any case!”

Charlott gazed proudly into Justus’ eyes. “Now this Cordelia, in line with the stipulations of the will, administers my big one-and-a-half until I reach twenty-five. And she insists there’s nothing in the will to say I have a right to a single cent from the interest before I reach twenty-five! Until I attain my twenty-fifth year, the interest is assigned by Uncle Jacob – I mean Uncle James, sorry – to her, to Cornelia!”

“Yes, alas, it is, sweetheart. I know the will by heart!”

“Good! But could Uncle James have foreseen that we’d lose all our money in the inflation? If he’d known, he would surely have assigned a benefit in the interest to me! And so it would have been his intention that the interest should be paid over to me annually!”

“You’ll never convince an English court with that argument, my poor girl!”

“So? Well then! I’ve had it *up to here* with whole affair! In her last letter, this English lady writes that I should be ashamed of myself and thank God that dear Uncle James died just a few months after the Versailles peace, otherwise there would never have been a penny coming to me! This Englishwoman has long ago forgotten that her late *ami de coeur* was once a German and that her own husband, the late Sir Herbert H., was also descended from a German family called Fischer – the little c fell out of the crown a bit later on, with the tea-fishing! Of course both the partners, Herbert H. and Uncle James, became British thirty years before the War and felt they were equals of the Dukes of Rutland and Devonshire. Cornelia most of all! To forget all about the Fischer side of it she’s become a total Germanophobe, and she beats herself black and blue because she can’t devour my one-and-a-half!”

Justus asked eagerly: “Have you tried cadging, Charlott?”

“Cadging?” Charlott was most indignant. “I wrote to her that I was fed up to the teeth with waiting and will she kindly remit my one-and-a-half forthwith by post!”

Justus was amused. “And how did she respond, sweetheart?”

“The manager of their business, a certain Cecil Dell – I believe he’s now Uncle James’ successor *in every respect* – this Cecil replied that at Lady Cornelia Fisher’s suggestion, the tea company is prepared to advance over a five-year period a monthly sum of one hundred and fifty Mark at four percent! He calls it ‘an up-front payment of one thousand eight hundred Mark annually’! I’d like you to give him a good kicking anywhere but up front!” Suddenly Charlott emitted a loud peal of laughter. What she had just said she thought quite wonderful.

“So now we’re both totally broke, you and I. I’m already economising on makeup; none of this is the genuine article, Justibus. And I have debts. I’ll be right back.”

Charlott danced with a young, very pretty and elegant Thankmar.

Justus folded his hands. He regarded his stomach like a Buddha, a long while. Charlott did not come right back at all, because they were playing ‘Valencia’⁵ with six encores to imperative applause from the dancers. Valencia, again and again Valencia, with the three drum-rattles at the end.

Charlott, escorted back by this Thankmar, dropped into her chair. She took five little sips of champagne.

“Darling, can you ask if my little pork sausages will be here soon.”

Now she embarked on one of the age’s most riveting performances: the restoration of her melting beauty as she peered into her little golden mirror.

“Justibus! Pay attention. I am absolutely determined to acquire my big one-and-a-half right away! I will not leave it another five years with that awful Cornelia Fisher with the sh when both of us, you and I, will be ruined the whole time and grow old in poverty with rheumatism in the paws. Starting tomorrow we shall be in a state of war! Yes indeed! I hereby declare war on my enemy in Colombo. I shall wrest my one-and-a-half from her very teeth, using cunning and guile.”

“But how will you manage that, Charlott? Your chances of success are practically nil! Because Cornelia Fisher, who from what you say must be a very clever and energetic lady, actually has use of the interest from your big one-and-a-half until you attain your twenty-fifth birthday. She must be earning at least six percent on it from the business! Over five years that brings it to two million Mark! She’ll never hand that over to you!”

“Justibus, why, do you think, do I have three miniatures of Napoleon on my desk? My campaign plan came together today! I conceived it on the AVUS! As soon as I do a hundred and thirty, I start getting the finest ideas! I shall conquer Cornelia! Hardly will she have seen my declaration of war when I’ll already be standing outside her Indian Ulm, her Austerlitz and Jena. And in the end this angel will have to negotiate with me, like Queen Luise with Napoleon. Can you guess how I shall set it all up?”

⁵ Jose Padilla’s 1926 pasadoble composition.

“No, really I cannot!” Justus assured her.

Charlott stroked his cheek with the back of her hand. “Then you’re not much of a guesser! Naturally! You only mix with giltheads and cat sharks ... Here’s Holk! Now, Holkeman, where have you been all this time?”

“I do beg your pardon, sweetheart. I’ve just been fetching Camilla from a talk at Police Headquarters, then I had to show the Ginzburghs from Brussels around Luna Park and then phone Aunt Henrietta in Wannsee and now I just have to dash back to Camilla. I’ll be right back.”

“Don’t you dare! You will not move from your seat!”

Behind the glasses Holk’s grey eyes turned sulky, like a scolded middle-school boy. He did not move from his seat.

But Charlott stood up, to dance with yet another Thankmar.

“Didn’t you understand me then, Justibus, just a little bit?” she asked slightly over her shoulder. Justibus half-rose.

“Hardly, dear Charlott ... that is actually ... actually not the least little bit ...”

He sank back, rather perplexed.

Now even Holk was dancing. But during the dance he led his partner towards the cloakroom, and then suddenly disappeared.

This time Charlott was soon back at Justus’ side. “I have an enormous plan, Justibus! Something gigantic! And patriotic as well! I’m going to bring a good chunk of Anglo-Saxon capital into Germany ... Holk’s not reliable enough. You’re the one I shall accomplish it with!”

Justus put his hands into his jacket pocket. Uneasily he raised his mighty shoulders.

“With me, darling? War against a woman – with me? Actually I had every intention of never going to war again.” Politely he added: “What I mean is, whatever you say!”

Charlott whispered passionately: “You’re my husband again! ... You were always my husband! ... I shall teach you how to steal horses! Tonight I shall come to you ... But now, let’s dance!”

They danced.

The untamable gentlemen of the orchestra played: “Aaaah-ha!”