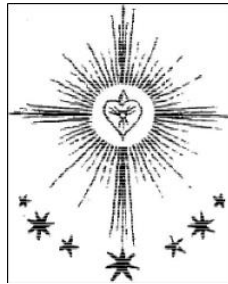


*Walter Lutz*

# *Victorious Love*

Guidance in the spirit world



1931

I have written down this narrative without any preliminary work according to the voice of the spirit. I have not searched, planned and thought out anything myself, but everything was given to me in an irresistible, living flow of inner words in the shortest possible time. In my heart I give thanks for this gift to the Giver of all good gifts.

Walter Lutz

## Love

Love that sits enthroned on stars,

Love that dwells with angels,  
that forgets nothing but itself,

Love, that is entirely love

- plunge into my soul

Your warm reflection,

that I be a light

in the dark multitude,

that I have warm hands,

overfull of Your grace:

Love that forgets itself,

Love that is entirely love!

M. L.-W.

## Chapter 1

It is hard to believe how evil old Sauerbrot was all his life. When you saw him shuffling along - gaunt, weak, with drooping shoulders and a pale greenish complexion, you could almost imagine that not much good could come from this man.

Sauerbrot worked in a machine factory. Earlier, in his younger years, he had been a master as a quite intelligent, useful person. But his wickedness had caused him to quickly lose one good job after another, and finally he had to be glad to be placed in a very simple job as an ordinary milling cutter.

In a corner of the large, rattling workroom was his machine. There he stood day after day, year after year, letting the sharp, greedy steel eat the desired shapes out of the metal of the raw workpieces - and this relentless work, so to speak, seemed to be Sauerbrot's only lust for life. Just like the steel into the metal, so he loved to tear holes and furrows into the souls of his fellow men.

Besides, the hard, self-righteous egoist, who never sought any blame or fault in himself, was very embittered by the descending course of his life circumstances and professional fortunes. He had clearly become all bile because of this, especially against all those people whom he saw in happier, upward circumstances and who were content with their lot.

The "poisonous spider" was the name given to this unpleasant fellow by his colleagues at work. No-one wanted to have anything to do with him. One left him as untouched and unchallenged as possible in his corner and was happy if he did not come out. Because whenever he showed himself and stepped among the other workers, there were always only quarrels, anger and a spiteful nature, which he scattered through all kinds of poisonous remarks.

He found pleasure in inciting people against each other by criticizing the work of others, through accusations and suspicions, through lying, distorting intermediary stories, also to stir foremen and workers up against each other or against the factory management. When then the tempers were quite upset and it went haywire in the workroom with secret tensions and discharges, then the poisonous spider retreated again into his corner and let the hard, sharp steel run into the softer material with true lust. He had taken revenge on humanity again and watched gleefully as the "stupid pack," as he called the whole world in his heart, tore themselves apart mentally and often physically and inflicted wounds.

Therefore, the motto of the entire company was to leave Sauerbrot in peace and, if at all possible, to avoid him as if he were an evil spirit. And the dreaded man had no connection, let alone a friend, among his fellow workers for the entire ten years he spent in the job he last took up.

But even at home, in the bosom of his numerous family, there was no place of love and pure joy for him. There, too, Sauerbrot's evil, sinister spirit burdened by tyrannizing his wife and children in the most despicable way.

Martha, Sauerbrot's wife, after fifteen years of marriage, was so brought down by her husband's never-ending bickering and bossiness and arbitrary, imperious demands, as well as from the numerous births that followed each other year after year, that she died of emaciation one winter when the two oldest children, a son and a daughter, were barely out of school.

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The son, filled with hatred and contempt for the father, immediately eloped to America as the mother lay in the cool earth.

The daughter Lydia, a delicate, pale, lily-like child, in whom, however, a great love-soul glowed, resembling the mother and practiced early in suffering, took over the housekeeping as well as the care and education of the four younger siblings. Under the pressure of her father and the hardship caused by the large family, she soon became a resilient, mature woman.

And when the younger siblings were finally all out of school and, except for the youngest, had left the nest as soon as possible - then she offered her hand in marriage to a good man, a young teacher, and moved with him from the gloomy, roaring big city into the quiet of a mountain village where her husband had his employment.

On this occasion, Sauerbrot, who is now almost sixty years old, was offered the opportunity to move with Lydia to her new home. But the old loner spurned this offer, even though work could have been found for him in a workshop not far away. He preferred to continue to live in solitude in his previous place and to let the youngest daughter, who was admittedly not an acquiescent Lydia, continue to run the household.

Little Sibylle, however, when she realized that her father was now more or less dependent on her good will, care and diligence, soon began pulling different strings than the old man had thought. In the less favorably disposed child, the evil tyranny of the father had developed quite different powers and counter-forces than in Lydia. Sibylle had adopted her father's laziness, cunning, bossiness and concealed violence. And when Sauerbrot's liver, spleen and kidneys began to ail with increasing age, she unhesitatingly took over control by outdoing the old man in bickering, scolding and being right and threatening him at every opportunity to leave him in the lurch and go away if he would not yield.

Sauerbrot, who knew well that if this daughter would also leave him, no-one would care for him, the poisonous spider, had to submit to this evil. But this fate, this having to bow to his own flesh and blood, denatured and devastated him completely inside. The ailment originating from the spleen and liver made rapid progress. It was as if a black infernal power, which had always existed as a germ, seized him more and more and finally filled his whole person. An unspeakable, boundless rage, an almost infernal fury, seized the soon to be permanently bedridden man, when he considered his situation - his useless, unsuccessful life, his painful illness, his helplessness, and now, on top of all that, the impudent child who taunted him, the impotent father - and on whose attention and mercy he depended for every cup of milk, every bit of bread, every breath of fresh air!

One night, around midnight, when the young Sibylle was at the cinema with friends and girlfriends and made him wait in vain for the necessary maintenance and handouts for the night's rest, the power to which Sauerbrot had surrendered more and more in his life, took complete possession of him.

He saw it coming toward him in the parlor like a black ghostly shadow. He lowered himself over his bed, sat down on his chest so that his breath was almost gone. The tormented one, bathed in fear sweat, screamed for help. But there was no-one who heard him or wanted to hear him.

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From the powerful shadow, two fiery, coal-black eyes seemed to look at him. Two clawed hands seemed to form. And this horrible figure said, "You are mine! I am your demon! - and began to tear his soul out of his body.

Sauerbrot could no longer clearly distinguish what happened next. His senses were dwindling with shock and horror. Quickly, like a streak of lightning, his whole life flew past him in a flash. Then night fell around him, and he had the feeling of sinking into a deep swoon as into a dark, bottomless abyss.

This was Sauerbrot's last hour on earth and at the same time in the nameless horror of the infernal experience - his Last Judgment. When his soul, shattered into its atoms by the shock, gathered itself again and returned to consciousness, it was no longer in its earthly, fleshly body. The angel of death had done his duty and the release had been carried out.

Now Sauerbrot was in the spiritual realm - as a spirit man, admittedly not of a pure, heavenly and blissful kind, but as a being with exactly the same thoughts, feelings, desires, passions and aspirations that had filled and quivered through his soul in the bodily life. "As the tree falls, so it lies," an enlightened messenger of God had once spoken. (Ecc 11:3) And so it was with Sauerbrot.

The same evil man, ruled by a willingly received evil spirit, as which he had stood in the bodily life, he was now also in that other kingdom of life invisible to the carnal eye. According to God's will and command, the eternal, immortal soul had only taken off her temporal cover, the fleshly garment, in order to go towards her further development on a new level of being. The earthly-bodily life had been an unhappy, a bad one. - And - what now?

## Chapter 2

When Sauerbrot regained consciousness after the terrible event of his death, he did not know at first what had actually happened to him. He had no idea that he had passed through the gate of death, which he always feared with a cold shudder. He saw himself still in bed in his bedchamber, from where he had a view into the living room through the open door. The only thing that seemed strange and oppressive to him was that everything, although the lamp was on, could only be seen in a blackish twilight as if through a veil.

Sibylle also did not return home for an endlessly long time. And when she finally came home with her friends, the company was strangely cheerful and exuberant under the strangely thick red glow of the electric light. Without caring about him, Sauerbrot, in the least, they prepared a punch bowl, toasted merrily and celebrated his, Sauerbrot's passing and Sibylle's happy inheritance!

That was all kinds of heartless impudence after all! Sauerbrot wanted to shout and scold. But strange - he did not bring a loud word from his throat! He could not move a limb either. He was nailed down as if in bed. The strange veil of darkness would not go away either.

And what also struck him was that he heard the boisterous voices of the party, which cut him as if in the heart - but otherwise he heard no sound, no clinking of glasses, no chair backs, no footsteps and the wall clock just opposite his bed was swinging, but the hands stood motionless still at midnight and no hour struck any more. Was he no longer right in the head? Or he was dreaming? - Sauerbrot thought with fearful anxiety.

Then a young man rose from the company in the living room, struck the glass and held a little speech. Sauerbrot clearly heard him clearly say the following:

"Since the old nuisance and tyrant, the treacherous "poisonous spider", is finally gone and my dear Sibylle has gained her longed for freedom - we, dear friends, as heirs to a heap of lucky shards, take the liberty of humbly announcing our engagement to you. We intend to rebuild in these rooms the family life shattered into a thousand atoms by the old intriguer and hope for this purpose favorable aspects and stars under further faithful and cheerful assistance from the side of the old friends! - A toast to the new, rosy future! - And cheers - a fetch-it-the-devil to the dreary spirit of the past, which we - the sooner, the better - want to sink into the pit of oblivion! The old Sauerbrot was a botch-up and a curse! - We want to bake new rolls from a blossom-pure, light, sweet wheat! - Sibylle, my dear bride, cheers!" With joyful enthusiasm, the whole company joined in with the lively death- and engagement speech.

'That really is the limit' - thought Sauerbrot - 'They are celebrating a feast of joy, as if I had died and was lying in the coffin and the greatest inheritance had fallen to them! And these judgments he had to hear about himself!' - He could not put up with that! He wanted to rise up, step out, chase the whole clan out the door. But his limbs completely failed him the service. He could not move a finger and he could not utter a sound. It drives one to despair, to rage - this powerlessness, this humiliation! Such a rage seized the helplessly bound man, that the fire of anger so to say spurted out of his eyes and pores. And it seemed to Sauerbrot as if suddenly his bed was on fire. Almost out of his mind, he screamed for help, but could not utter a sound. And the company out in the living room only seemed to get merrier and merrier, not taking the slightest notice of his appalling distress.

There, when Sauerbrot already thought to burn and suffocate, suddenly, as if they had come through the wall, two men of impressive stature and serious, piercing expressions, stood before him. They muffled with a wave of the hand the chastening sea of flames of his bed. And while the company in the living room disappeared as if by magic, spoke the one, slightly older of the men:

"Friend and brother! We are messengers of that supreme power of life, which in your earthly existence you well suspected and feared, but which you have always denied with your intellect, and which you have always deeply disregarded and severely offended in your actions. This basic power of all life is the Eternal Love, which made everything that is to become and also created you out of the holy fullness of it's original thoughts and primordial powers. He has given you soul-forces of good and evil, of pure divine love and dishonest self-love in a wise, well-balanced mixture on your life path.

And with good will, it would have been possible for you to overcome the evil sparks of selfishness, envy and malice in your soul through the good sparks of pure humility and love, which were also given to you, and to bring your being back to the heavenly Father as a purified, matured and perfected one. But your laziness and self-love did not want that, you did not listen to the warning, instructing, propelling voice of the Divine Spirit in your heart and you gave yourself over to the tempting whispers of infernal beings, who strengthened in you the envy, violence, the lie, malice and pulled you more and more into their spell. In this way, however, you distanced yourself more and more from the blessed, elevating life-order of God and fell into the precincts of destructive, disintegrating, annihilating powers.

You yourself became a destroyer, annihilator and feared violent man full of poison and bile. And since you yourself loved no-one more than yourself and instead of love, you only spread anger and hatred, you yourself were also loved by no-one, but only hated and shunned by everyone.

At your workplace, as in your family, you have become lonely and created around you a field of debris and a wasteland. So you died these days, and your body is already given to the earth as food for worms!"

"What!?" - cried Sauerbrot - "what are you babbling about, you damned jugglers!? Are you taking me for a fool? Will you two disguised city missionaries or Salvation Army men get out of my room and apartment at once! Here lives a free thinker, a person who has long since gone beyond your old wives' tales!"

"You are mistaken, dear friend" - replied the older of the two men calmly and firmly - "we are not of that earthly world of which you still dream. We are, as we have told you, messengers of the new spiritual world you have now entered, sent by your God, Creator and most loving heavenly Father, to admonish and warn you once again. For the sake of your eternal salvation, let us awaken you to the true spiritual being and (pointing to the younger companion) lead you up from this one to the steps of a higher, better life!"

"I want to know nothing of your higher life!" - cried Sauerbrot fiercely, in the sharpest, most biting tone. "If I have already died, let me have died and remain! I have lost nothing up there with a supposed God and Father, who, if anything, has given me only the most miserable, damned life with nothing but trouble, toil and sorrow! I want to stay where I am, on this earth! And I want to see what this human race, this wretched breed, still does.

And if you want to give me a grace from your God and heavenly Father, then ask and give me that I may stay down here and continue to chastise and torment the human pack - yes, even much more than before. For the wretched chorus has made me so disgracefully disgruntled and angry and poison-green that I must burn with a righteous thirst for vengeance, if I can't even sate myself completely to the bottom and drink my fill of the anger and hellish fury of Satan's brood!"

"Pitiful one" - replied the older of the men, while the younger covered his face - "you'll never get your fill of this ember. Only more and more terrible hellflames you will ignite in you through this. But unfortunately, there will probably be no other way to express to you the hopelessness and misfortune of your direction through experience. And so then be done according to your free will which is untouchable for us.

The eyes of the soul shall open to you again for the earthly world! You shall be free to roam wherever you please in their realms. And also your will to act should be given the freedom and possibility of working to a certain degree determined by God! The endless grace and mercy of Eternal Love accompany you, unfortunate, pitiful brother!"

With that, the two men disappeared. Sauerbrot found himself in pitch darkness and in complete, icy loneliness.

### Chapter 3

As the now nevertheless quite fearfully dismayed one lay so in the darkness, there he suddenly heard as if from within himself again the voice of that uncanny infernal being which had taken possession of him with brazen claws in the hour of death.

The voice said: "Do not be afraid! I am with you and will guide, lead and protect you in your ways. What you have seen, heard and experienced after the death of your body until now, were images and figments of your own imagination and only a dull, confused and distorted reflection of reality. Now, through me and my help, you will again be able to hear, see, smell, taste and grasp the earthly world properly, and you will be able to go wherever you want. And the dwellings, houses and hearts of men will be open to you, and you can work among them and in them according to your free desire, as you always want and desire. Just wait in patience! The night will soon disappear, the day will dawn and you will see and experience the truth of what I told you!"

Indeed, as the voice had proclaimed, so it was!

After his death, due to the loss of his bodily senses, Sauerbrot had at first had a dreamlike inner life only in the realm of his own self-creating imagination, which had been filled by the angels of God through spiritual influence and guidance with those instructive visions and experiences and had given him a reflection of higher truths and realities.

Now, in response to his persistent, unhappy desire for the great, in the entire kingdom of God valid basic law of spiritual freedom from the Lord of all life - not from that lying, infernal demon, which had taken possession of the soul as a tyrant - the sight for the earthly world was opened again to the new, world-addicted citizen of the hereafter, and he was allowed to move about looking, hearing and acting, wherever the evil desire and love of his heart drew him.

At first, of course, curiosity, anger and rage drove the wretch back to the home he had inhabited while alive. He wanted to see if Sibylle had really gotten engaged and made such a heinously short work of his, Sauerbrot's memory.

When the night had passed, as the black demon had predicted, and the day dawned in his familiar rooms, Sauerbrot realized to his horror and annoyance that the true reality was possibly even worse than what he had seen in his inner fantasy images. Sibylle and her boyfriend already lay as spouses in the former marital bed of her parents. When they woke up, they were merry and in good spirits.



Only the large picture of her father, which hung next to the one of the mother in a gilded frame in the living room and looked in at them through the bedroom door, still disturbed them, and they decided to take it out of the frame soon and burn it.

"Just wait" - said Sauerbrot - "I want to give you rag choir a lesson that I, even if invisible, am still here!" Noticing that he could rise into the air by the mere urge and pull of his will and move wherever he wanted, he climbed up, positioned himself behind the picture, loosened with the strength of his will a damaged knot of the cord on which the frame hung, and the next moment the picture fell to the ground with a loud crash, bursting the glass into many pieces and shattering the frame.

Startled, Sibylle's husband jumped out of the bed, rushed to the picture, picked it up, and looked at the frame and string all around. "This is strange" - said Sibylle - "that at the very moment when we are talking about removing the picture, the string loosens by itself, the picture falls down and crashes into a thousand pieces! - Quite surely it is thus Heaven's will that the picture be removed and disappears as the last memento of the sad past." "Heaven's will or not - that may be as it will" - the man replied - "I don't believe in higher powers as long as I do not hear and see thereof! - A moth has eaten away at the cord, I can see that very clearly at the breaking point. And what the eye sees, the heart believes!"

Sibylle then swept up the glass fragments, tore the photograph and burned it. Her husband put the frame together again, glued it and stored it in the back of the wardrobe for a better use.

Thus have happened Sauerbrot's first manifestation from the hereafter in this world and - frazzled out. And with renewed great anger, the unfortunate man had to see how contemptuously his memory was treated and how impotent was his will to plant other, more respectful thoughts and feelings in the hearts of the people whom he had mistreated in physical life and made enemies of. Sauerbrot decided to leave this place of disappointment and anger. - But where to? - Where was it better for him? Where could he find light and joy?

Nowhere, he knew that well! - Everywhere the world was a hell for him! Then he remembered again his daughter Lydia - the only person on earth whom he had been a little fond of at times, to whom he had felt now and then impulses of gratitude and love. For Lydia had indeed been an angel. No-one like her, had borne so patiently, so quietly, so devotedly all his whims and violence.

He wanted to visit this daughter, see how she lived, possibly make himself known to her, lament his anger, his rage and his sorrow to her, in order to possibly pull her completely into his power and to chain her to himself forever.

## Chapter 4

No sooner had Sauerbrot let these thoughts and wishes mature into full clarity and power, there he also already felt, as it were, lifted into the air by invisible wings. He floated, without ceiling, walls and roof to stop him, out of the house, over the confused sea of the big city away into the green and always away and away over plains, hills, valleys, rivers and lakes - until he arrived over that mountainous area, which was called "On the forest".

There he was set down, again as if by spiritual hands, and soon found himself in the little garden near the schoolhouse, where his daughter Lydia just was fetching kitchen vegetables to cook for lunch. She was somewhat pale and, it seemed to him, more aged than the ten years that had passed since her marriage would have suggested. Did she have unhappiness in the marriage? Worries?

But she still had the short, brownish curls on her delicate forehead, temples and neck that he always liked so much. Sauerbrot would have liked to talk to her. But as much as he made an effort and approached her, she clearly could not hear him. Only when he came very close to her and, while she was thoughtfully arranging the parsley picked from the garden bed into a bunch, put his arm around her shoulders, she suddenly shuddered as if from a cold breeze, shook herself, heaved a deep sigh and then hurried quickly into the house to the warm hearth.

Until lunch time, Sauerbrot looked at the little garden and the whole schoolhouse from the outside and inside, and then listened for a while to the teacher, Lydia's husband, teaching his numerous children. As just now a Biblical history was being recited, prayed and sung, he did not remain here for long and went floating out into the surroundings of the schoolhouse, took a cursory look at the neighboring vicarage, the church, the town hall, the rurally sedate inn "Zur Traube" and gradually all the large and small houses of the farmers and few craftsmen of the village.

He spent a little longer at the locksmith's and the blacksmith's, because this craft with steel and iron was in his earthly field.

At lunchtime, Sauerbrot returned to the schoolhouse and just joined in when the whole teacher's family was sitting at the table and the father was ladling out the soup after saying grace. There were four children at the table with their parents, two girls and two boys. It was quiet and orderly. The father, a medium-sized, healthy, full-blooded man of about 35, with smart, energetic features and boldly wavy brown hair, seemed to run a strict but fair regiment.

But opposite him, at the other end of the table, sat still someone else, an old, somewhat hunched little man, a good seventy years old, with a sideways leaning, always friendly-serious smiling face. Who was this then? His water-blue eyes shone and flashed across the table company and were rimmed with many sunlike wrinkles at the corners of his temples. This must be the teacher's father, because the children called him grandfather. This old, crooked male, by the way, seemed to be the only one of the whole family who noticed something specific about his, Sauerbrot's presence.

Suddenly, as Sauerbrot sat down in one corner of the room on the bench by the big green-tiled stove, he cast a quick, fixed glance at this place, flinched very slightly, then put away his spoon, wiped his mouth, and said after a while, leaning back in his chair: "If well grandfather Sauerbrot has now found his eternal rest!?"

"It is strange that you are thinking of father now, too" - said, as if out of deep thought, Lydia, who in the meantime had brought in the vegetable course. "I was thinking about him all the time. And this morning in the garden, I felt very strange. It felt like a cool breeze passed over me. - But it was also bad of Sibylle to inform us so late of his death that I could not even come to the funeral! This will now" - she added gloomily - "haunt me all my life!"

„It does not depend on whether and what we do in honor of the dead" - replied the teacher Liebhardt, seizing the bowl with eagerness - "but on what we have done good to them in life. And there you indeed can be calm. You have served the grievous man like a Ruth, yes, as he never deserved it in you, children, and in your mother - and as he will never find it again in all eternity, if he does not still change from the ground up in the beyond."

"We want to hope to God" - sighed Lydia - "that in the great mercy of God, also he will find mercy!" "Amen, yes, yes! God rule it!" - said the little old grandfather, while he secretly looked again and again at the stove bench, where he saw the unfortunate spirit of old Sauerbrot sitting personified.

Grandfather Liebhardt, once a master carpenter by trade, had the so-called second sight. He could see the strangest things that other people had no idea of. And his experiences in the spiritual field were so strange and unusual and sounded so unbelievable to the social world, that he had long since gotten into the habit of keeping silent about them to everyone and keeping everything to himself. Not even to his son, who, by the way, was a rather enlightened man in spiritual matters, did he like to reveal himself. For what man does not see himself, he still also always likes to regard and explain as a fantasy and at the very least, as something unhealthy.

And so also the son did not like to talk about these phenomena and experiences and questions, especially since he feared to come thereby into disrepute with his whole house, with the people in the village and finally also with the Pastor and his authority.

Spirits and ghostly apparitions were not supposed to exist according to the common opinion of the educated people and above all, of course, not in the schoolhouse, from where an orderly, definite knowledge and a sober, clear view of life should be transmitted to the people and mystical beings and rumours was not allowed to have a seat and breeding ground.

" And if it is also a hundred times so, father" - the son had said to the old man - "even if the world are full of devils and spirits, as Paul says - we must not admit it and trumpet it. The science, the scholarly world and the natural, worldly-sensual man does not see and believe it. And we cannot and must not resist the general view and make ourselves ridiculous with such things. I, in my profession and status, least of all! For it would be a welcome feast for many envious people and opponents to bring you down in this field, where there is no strict evidence on the basis of general views. I am therefore bound to caution and restraint because of my position, my wife and children.

Father Liebhardt thought that there is, of course, nothing to object to this view and opinion. And so he kept everything that he experienced through the soul-spiritual vision strictly to himself. He knew it in all silence if someone in the village was to die soon. There he always saw a gray shadow, which detached itself from the chest pit of the person in question and, connected to the death-candidate by a thin band, took on more and more human form as the hour of death approached. In the death he saw the violently vibrating bond tear up and the shadowy figure, as it were fed and built up from the soul-content of life of the dying human being, rise, in order to then float away completely in the forms of the once living human being, only certainly as a tender, etheric body.

With some people, of course, he also saw other, more imperfect - yes ugly and repulsive figures develop, which not infrequently took on almost animal forms. Unfortunately, to his horror, he also saw the old Sauerbrot in such a pitiful, unfortunate deformity. He was completely black in his core, skeleton-like lean in the soul-body formations and resembled with the bald skull, the glaring eyes, the protruding ears and the spider-thin arms and hands more a big bat - a vampire - than a human being, especially since around his shoulders, a kind of black cloak laid itself like a pair of wings. Thus the spirit of the father, for whose salvation the heart of the daughter feared and sighed, sat on the stove bench in the same room with the unsuspecting family.

This time, Father Liebhardt's heart almost wanted to burst. He cast angry glances towards the uninvited guest, scolded him in a silent, fierce heart-dialogue as an intruder, demanded of him in Jesus' name to leave the house immediately and sought to instruct him about the true ways of salvation, which are shown to the people and souls of this world and the hereafter through the consolatory good news of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Everyone, even the worst sinner, is indeed promised the merciful grace of eternal love in God.

This sermon of the old man, still presented at the table quietly in the innermost part of the heart, which Sauerbrot strangely understood word for word quite brightly and clearly in his mind, was already again a great annoyance to the easily excitable choleric guest. He would have liked to hit the big vegetable spoon upon the head of the talkative, impudent "prayer brother". But to lift heavy, material objects like such a metal spoon, he unfortunately could not do, no matter how hard he tried. So Sauerbrot had to be content with shooting angry, scorching glances at the old man and wishing him plague and death under the most horrible swearwords and curses.

Of course, father Liebhardt saw and heard everything and felt the infernal influence - but all this could not harm him, as Sauerbrot noticed to his increased annoyance. For this good-hearted old man, matured in the spirit of pious, pure love, was truly sheltered in God as in an inaccessible light and sat unassailably under the umbrella of the Most High. He smiled knowingly and did not stop praying silently in his heart throughout the meal for Sauerbrot, for Lydia, and for the whole house.

After the meal, however, he drew Lydia - his to him very dear daughter-in-law - into the friendly little room that he had been given after giving up his carpenter's shop for a peaceful retirement on the upper floor, and urged the still worried woman not to slacken in her eager, childlike, loving remembrance of the deceased.

„Have you seen anything?" the daughter asked quickly.

"It's all right!" answered the old man evasively. "He, too, will still come to rest with God's help! - But now it is still serious for him and we must all be strong on the prayer vigil!"

## Chapter 5

This reception and beginning in the schoolhouse with the teacher's people did not suit the poisonous Sauerbrot at all. There he has clearly come from the frying pan into the fire. This sanctimonious spirit! This praying! And this preaching! To him it was as a foul wind. A furious rage seized him because of this wretched [Bible study]hour-brother who had taken up residence in his daughter's house and wanted to forbid him to enter and stay. What was even more beautiful, is that he is such a crooked little bony man, who carries his head as if the fate had gave him a slap on the neck.

Yes, indeed, the fate had hit this tender person in the frail body already quite often and heavily. One would not think that our God and Heavenly Father could lay his hand so bitterly on a righteous man who was always kind and helpful to all his fellow creatures, both human and animal, and who always sincerely strove to follow God's ways. Was then this man's heart in it's innermost being still not as God wanted it to be according to His counsel? Were there still secret, hidden imperfections that had to be purified out in the fire of suffering? Or was it finally only a test, a completion in faithful bearing, in devoted, unshakable trust, in the highest, heavenly mature patience?

After a short, happy marriage, father Liebhardt's beloved, irreplaceable wife had been snatched away by death almost forty years ago. Of the three children left behind, two died soon after, a boy and a girl, and only Karl Gotthilf, the current teacher, remained. His house, built with his own hands and much bitter sweat, was consumed by a fire one night, along with all his earthly possessions. And what was left of financial assets in a bank, was later devoured by unfavorable economic conditions. At that time, however, father Liebhardt had already become so old that he, weakened by gout disease, no longer had the entrepreneurial spirit and strength to rebuild his carpentry business to it's former extent, especially since expensive machinery would be needed.

Therefore, in the small rural town where he was born and where he had worked until his old age, he finally ran only a small business without assistants. It fed him quite well. All families in the town wanted for their departed loved ones only a coffin from the good master Liebhardt, the last little hut of this earth. But when even this work became too difficult for the old man due to the worsening gout in his legs and shoulders, and the lonely widower also needed better care, there father Liebhardt had to completely give up all earthly property and, following the invitation of his son and daughter-in-law, move to the village in the forest into the little room in the attic.

There he indeed had it now certainly splendidly-beautiful in his old age. A view of a peaceful meadow with fertile fruit trees, a wreath of waving fields, framed in the near distance by the evergreen fir forest, lay before him when he looked out from above through the eastern window. His physical well-being was excellently provided for in every respect. His daughter-in-law and also his son left nothing to be desired. He also took great pleasure in the children. And so the now over seventy-year-old earthly pilgrim could easily have gotten over the loss of all earthly possessions.

"My heavenly Father" - he was able to say - "has undressed me completely like a mother her child whom she wants to put to bed. I think and hope He will also soon put me to sleep."

And yet there was a dark, painful spot in the peaceful picture of this life, which caused the grandfather Liebhardt as well as the daughter-in-law much sorrow and worry, and which also made this final station of his earthly existence a school of suffering and of unshakable, faithful trust. It was this the sad thing with his son! This otherwise good, hard-working, righteous man, who as a teacher was respected and loved by young and old in the whole village, had a great fault, a pernicious weakness that at times severely disrupted the whole family life. From quarter to quarter, this full-blooded man, sparkling with life, entered into a peculiar state of tension and excitement, in which he got drunk with irresistible power - and despite all good intentions could not get rid of the alcohol-intoxication for days, even weeks.

He was prompted to do so by his outstanding social and musical gifts, which nature had lavishly poured out on him. Everyone wanted to have teacher Liebhardt in the village and far around in all localities on their association boards, as a singing and music leader, as a festival guest. And at every event Liebhardt had to be there and in the middle of it with his joyful, infectious temperament, his spirit and wit.

And there was no lack of celebrations and festivals with cheerful activity in this area. Not far from Liebhardt's residence were villages where, in good, heavy hot basalt soil, wine grew on the southern slopes of the mountains. That was dangerous ground, and especially the autumn with the winegrowers' festivals and parish fairs, a difficult time for Liebhardt! When these days of new wine approached, it was as if also in the full-blooded, lively man, fermenting nature-spirits rose from the carnal regions and roared into the nerves, into the heart and head and now absolutely had to have their bacchanalian tribute.

Soon after Fall came the Christmas season with its many musical and social celebrations, at which Liebhardt was also indispensable as a leader and was called upon almost night after night. And no sooner have the Christmas- and New Year's celebrations faded away, there surged mankind in the pagan spirit of our time, greedy for pleasure, already again into the hustle and bustle of the carnival.

So the whole winter really went by without teacher Liebhardt being able to really come to his senses. And as soon as the cuckoo called in the May woods, the club excursions and the singing trips started, which again brought hot days, much thirst and a glowing, unrestrained wine mood and were celebrated with the old vintages until the autumn gave the „new" again.

Yes, it was a multicolored, for teacher Liebhardt, disastrous annual cycle! Again and again, from time to time, his friends brought him home heavily drunk - mostly at night, so that no-one saw it. The man, who had entertained the whole party all day long with his spirit and his gifts, had enlivened the whole place, was dragged along like a piece of cattle, no longer capable of any sense or sensible word, babbling unintelligibly and with weak limbs.

It was terrible times for Lydia when these festivities approached, and horrible hours and moments when her husband was brought home to her in such a state, as a victim of infernal spirits. Night after night, while the whole region was swimming in festive frenzy, she often had to wait and tremble as if being tortured in the soul, until her husband and father of her children returned home, in fear and trembling aware of the sight in which he would show himself to her. What a disgrace it was in front of the neighbors and all the inhabitants of the village! And what for a sorrow in front of their own children, to whom the shame of the father often could not be hidden completely!

Since the grandfather was in the house, Lydia had at least a helper for the bodily care and maintenance of the man who was struggling violently in his heavy drunkenness with shortness of breath and heart trouble. Also, now there was at least someone with whom she could talk and weep herself out about this bitter suffering, and who helped her to bear the so terrible burden of her soul.

But the bad thing was that in the last years, with increasing decline in health, Karl's drunkenness was always more connected with great irritability and wrathfulness. Whereas the run-of-the-mill festival leader used to be overflowing with good-natured wit until the last moment of consciousness, he now often became quite very angry, nasty and quarrelsome. The overstimulated soul felt hurt quickly. And quite suddenly and unexpectedly, the best mood and temper could change into the most dreadful rage and into a furious fury, in which infernal powers seemed to pull the unfortunate one completely into their power and urged for some sinister deed as a trigger for their dark will.

Very especially on the way home or at home towards the helpless, unhappy woman, these thunderstorms discharged themselves. As if she was the one who would begrudge him an innocent, happy life, who oppresses and constricts him with her fearful nature.

Why then sigh and cry when he came home? Or this silent, wordless sufferance, which irritated him even more than the greatest flood of tears. And why didn't he get anything to drink anymore? He had thirst that wanted to be quenched! Why did she put him to bed instead of letting him see his friends one more time?

Thus began the quarrel every time Liebhardt was brought home drunk. And the irritability, which sometimes increased to the point of assaults, usually continued for days under the aftermath of the intoxication and showed its effect also at school, where the pupils, who were otherwise very attached to their teacher, as well as their own children, had to suffer a lot under it.

Only when a few days had passed and a walk in the fresh forest air or a few hours of hard work in the garden had restored the strength of body and soul to some extent, things got better. And then the tormented victim of his passion was bitterly sorry for what had happened and he was especially ashamed of his lovelessness towards his angelicly good wife.

But at the next opportunity, temptation pulled him again into its power and increasingly higher flames of unworthy lust and evil and destructive anger overcame him again. To his great horror, old father Liebhardt soon had to become aware of all this in the schoolhouse and witness it again and again with sorrow and grief. There was no unalloyed happiness anywhere in the world after all.

Everywhere there was an open or secret stain in the picture, everywhere a wound that bled, everywhere a thorn in the flesh, given to men by God so that they would not exalt themselves and so that they would learn to seek and cry out for God and to implore Him for only His effective and beneficial help.

Father Liebhardt then also did the latter abundantly in faithful union with daughter Lydia. But still did no visible fruits want to ripen. Yes, exactly now again an apparently very bad time was approaching.

A warm summer and early autumn had ripened an excellent vintage. Already the harvest had begun here and there. Soon the new product would pour out in a stream of heavily loaded trucks from the wine region to the towns and cities of the surrounding area and the autumn vacations would begin with folk festival activities, fireworks and long, moist sessions. The preparations of the clubs and societies already took up all Liebhardt's free time. And already his reddened expressions and somewhat piercing, hard gazes and tense mood showed that something special was surging and churning inside him this time.

## Chapter 6

But what did the old Sauerbrot say to these circumstances - when they gradually became aware of him during a longer stay - who, as an invisible guest, despite all the incantations and sermons of grandfather Liebhardt, had taken up residence in the schoolhouse and made the stove bench and a half-dark fruit chamber in the basement his favorite places?

In this quarrelsome and scheming spirit aroused a great, gloating glee when he noticed that the son of the pious old man he hated, was such a drunkard and fiend. 'Yes, yes, so it goes with these head-hangers', philosophized Sauerbrot. 'Thus they bring children into the world and must be glad if they have a shelter and a feeding place with them in their old age! - Lydia indeed was in a fine pickle! But so she had also deserved it. Why had she run away from me at that time!?! She would have had it so good with me. But when the goat is too comfortable, it itches! And so the simple-minded thing had run into this misery and there she sat now with four children and had a drunkard together with his old nagging old man on her neck! Right so! It has to become much worse! It still went far too well to those in the school house! There the devil still first had to kick up a righteous, terrible fuss, in order to upset this whole hypocritical clan, which acted superficially and externally so honorably and upright, and to put them in the pillory!'

Yes, he, Sauerbrot, wanted to make that his task, that should be his job here - as he had also done in his lifetime - to throw the fire torch into this prowler work, so that their whole, true nature would come to light and show what was up with such bigots.

He already wanted to take advantage of the coming autumn season to thoroughly expose the schoolmaster in his still insufficiently exposed weakness and to, if possible, make it impossible for him to continue in his profession. Because that was really a disgrace - such a drunkard as a teacher of the youth! How could the Pastor and the school authorities stand back and do nothing? That after all was such unbelievable abuse!



The pastor also need some work, the dean and the school board, thought Sauerbrot, crouching in his chamber in the basement on a bundle of fruit sacks, that can't go on like this any more. The guy must be removed from office, must be removed from house and yard! As he took Lydia from me, I'll take his wife and children from him! And the grandfather, the old bonesack, must also go to misery!

In his rage and vengefulness, the evil spirit went into a complete frenzy. In his thoughts he magnified the faults and weaknesses of the people he hated, completely overlooked their merits, and thus gained a distorted image of their true nature, which again and again enveloped him in wild rage as in a sea of flames, in which he could no longer grasp any other thought than to inflict the greatest possible damage on this clan as soon as possible.

With delight Sauerbrot noticed how the teacher Liebhardt, with beginning autumn days, again headed for his doom. He had discovered that if he approached the teacher physically closer, it was possible for him, with a kind of hypnotic power, to breathe into the excitable man certain images, thoughts and desires, or at least to bring the germs of such things existing in the teacher's soul to development and to predominant validity.

About this power and force of his thinking and will, which he had often found tested and proven in a similar way in his physical life, Sauerbrot had a great joy. And this was the reason, undreamed of by the whole family, that this time the teacher's eyes sparkled so particularly, that his whole being showed such tension and excitement, and that he developed such great zeal for the preparation of the festivities of many clubs and societies. It indeed may turn out well, Sauerbrot thought, and decided to apply his experience with will-tests on other persons. He wanted to stir up the whole village, not just the schoolhouse.

Above all, he wanted to go over to the neighboring rectory! The clergy were a nuisance and a thorn in the eye of the old former freethinker and Haeckelian<sup>1</sup> anyway. And he needed this pastor as a tool for the downfall of the teacher. He also wanted to take on the dean living in the neighboring town for this purpose and, if necessary, also the school authority, the school Councilor, who would soon be coming for the fall visitation. Yes, all people who had anything to say to the schoolmaster, he Sauerbrot, were to set up and mobilize. Above all also the local chief, the mayor, together with the municipal councils. All of them should and had to serve!

He had, after all, with his local permissiveness in the secret power of influence, a wonderful means for such an enterprise! As I said, first of all, however, it should be the Pastor's turn! - What was that then? One rarely saw him. He seemed to sit at home a lot - probably working on his preaching or on the books - and making only few pastoral visits. He might be a man of about 40 years. Rather tall, broad in stature, reddish blond, with a pale, somewhat bloated face and introverted nature.

His wife was a slender blonde who did a lot of needlework, cared little for her job as a pastor's wife and preferred to read novels or go on hiking trips with her numerous acquaintances.

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<sup>1</sup> Ernst Heinrich Philipp August Haeckel (\* February 16, 1834 in Potsdam; † August 9, 1919 in Jena) was a German physician, zoologist, philosopher, draftsman, and free thinker.

The Pastor, whose name was Loschmann, seemed happy to let her have her way in all this. There was a kind of good fellowship between the two spouses. There were no children, and Loschmann did not expect and did not demand from his wife any parish work, visiting the sick, holding Sunday school, and the like, as is otherwise customary in the country - because he himself was not very fond of such things, whether out of a certain unhelpful timidity, or out of convenience, or out of an unpleasant coolness of heart.

Loschmann considered as main task of his ministry a beautiful, well-polished sermon on Sunday, a sermon with good, clear, reasonable thoughts, which pleased him and his wife and which could be heard in front of any educated person - thoughts about the nature and life of man and about healthy moral guidelines in harmony with the Scriptures. Loschmann was a so-called liberal, a friend and admirer of science and advocated the right of scientific research even in Biblical criticism.

The Old Testament was for him a book of God's teachings and morals compiled over the course of a millennium from many, partly historical, partly edifying folk writings of the Israelites, contemporary historically originated and contemporary historically colored in it's reports, teachings and views. In the New Testament, he valued the Gospels as later, human testimonies about the legendarily embellished life of an unusually wise and loving prophet Jesus of Nazareth. And in Paul's epistles he saw the further development of Jesus' teachings by the fire-drunk apostle to the Gentiles and his ecstatic, enthusiastic congregations.

In his heart, Loschmann did not really believe in the true deity of Jesus, even though his mouth had to speak of it much and often. For him, the Savior and world-redeemer was a prophet and a man like any other, only that in him the truly Divine love and wisdom of love had adopted a special degree, so that even today one can say that in him dwelt the fullness of the Godhead as in no other man. He relegated the virgin birth, the miracles and healings to the realm of fable or he indeed also explained the latter purely rationally according to the known, generally valid laws of nature.

So that's how it was with the Pastor in this place!

He had been there for almost ten years now, preached his sermon every Sunday, and otherwise, buried in his books and magazines and being a solid morning sleeper, did not care much about his congregation and let the world take it's inevitable course. He also looked through his fingers at the distressing events in the schoolhouse, albeit with great inner disapproval. Why start noise and quarrel about a matter that actually concerned the school authorities first and foremost and about which everything else in the village seemed to willingly turn a blind eye? Sauerbrot soon found out about this attitude when he began to pay his unseen visits to the neighboring vicarage.

What was there to look at and touch and sniff at in this old, spiritual house. There it smelled properly of hundred-year-old mustiness in the high, wide and bare rooms. The pungent smell of tobacco in the study room was disgusting. - And the Pastoress in the living room at the sewing table with the old-fashioned leafy plants and the aquarium with the goldfish - what kind of novels was she reading then!?

Aha! - Sauerbrot backed up with horror as he looked over her shoulder into the book! - Zola! - "The gospel of fertility!" - Yikes, thought Sauerbrot, is that such a thing!? Zola, that's the French scribbler, isn't it? - Does something like that belong in a vicarage then?!

No, there would also have to rule a beautiful spirit! - He had to watch more closely in this house! ...What was the Pastor doing then at half past three in the afternoon? The Pastor was in his study. He had drunk his coffee until two o'clock and smoked a pipe adorned with student insignia. He was now lying on the divan, still asleep. That was one healthy sleep! Some flies that had settled on his forehead were not even shoed away. With an open mouth, a deep breath was taken, as if a strong meal had to be digested with effort! O woe, o woe, was that a Pastor of of God!

Sauerbrot coldly stroked a few times over the dormant one with anger and disgust. With his will, he could set the air in rapid motion for this purpose, and this gave him the ability to touch people as if with ghostly hands, to frighten them, to rouse them and, if it had to be, also to instill some fear into them. Father Loschmann then also felt quite anxious when he woke up. He felt as if an unpleasant dream had flitted through his soul. An uneasiness had touched him, one of those cold, unpleasant thoughts of death that often crept over him, the heart and kidney sufferer. How long would it be for him until the gravedigger shoveled him for eternity!? Would he then really see an afterlife, as the Scriptures taught and colleagues seemed to preach so convincingly? These were Loschmann's thoughts as he rose and, yawning and staring into space, remained seated on the divan for a few moments.

Then he got up, opened the window, brushed the slightly sticky, somewhat coarse hair out of his forehead, drank a sip of water, sat down at the desk and was just about to set the pen to the concept of a lecture he was about to give at the pastors' conference on the subject of " Continued Existence", when from the neighborhood of the rear, small hall of the "Traube" (Inn), the music band of the Landlust Association began their exercises with the windows open.

Yes, yes, on Sunday it was parish fair! There these fools, mostly younger boys, but also quite a few older craftsmen and some farmers' sons of course, had to set to work diligently in the middle of the week's afternoon under the direction of the teacher Liebhardt and rehearse the purest spectacle of hell!

It was not possible to collect oneself and work with this noise. Displeased by the disturbance, the clergyman got up from his desk and left the office located on the ground floor to join his wife in the living room on the first floor. "That can become beautiful again, this autumn" - he rumbled as he entered - "if Liebhardt continues again with his music and singing orgies and day and night the tootling in the Traube does not stop!"

"Yes" - said the Pastoress, still young and aglow in reading, hiding her book under her crochet work with strange eagerness - "I just want to see how long you will continue to look through the fingers this man and his activities! This is indeed a scandal, this desolate existence and life! - If this continues this fall and winter as it did in the previous one, then you absolutely must finally intervene and give the school authorities a very emphatic hint! How then can a youth be taught and educated fruitfully, if the teacher has only music and strange stuff in his head, is occupied in his whole spare time over and over with sideline activities and gets drunk like a pig at every bowling brother's party!

The reputation of the whole village is at risk and especially your reputation as the spiritual shepherd! After all - and the last says it all - the Pastor should not have tolerated it!"

Like a long accumulated stream, this speech had gushed from her mouth. The Pastor silently wondered at this abrupt, explosive approval of his thoughts. Of course, he did not know that he himself was partly to blame for the sharpness of his wife's pent-up feelings, or at least that he was one of the causes.

Her reading of the novel had often prompted the young pastor's wife to make comparisons between her sickly, dry and somewhat coldly lifeless husband and other men - such as the full juiced, bubbly teacher. Even if this one was also a drunkard, a quarter drunk, as some called him, he nevertheless had obvious life in him, overflowing with strength and wit. What had the teacher's wife to enjoy at the side of this spouse, despite all the temporary sorrow - besides the four dear, blossoming children! Was she even properly married then? She often didn't know herself or had to negate the question. For this spiritless and joyless cohabitation with the eternal student of theology and science, whom she had married on her mother's advice, had not really been a true marriage especially in the last years, which were darkened by her husband's suffering.

So the dissatisfied young woman, when she spoke so sharply against the teacher, spoke more from a secret indignation against her husband, whom she wanted to rub his nonchalance under the nose. But also a kind of jealousy against the teacher's wife was involved and finally a to her herself almost incomprehensible irritation against the teacher himself, who had never done the slightest unkind thing to her, the young pastor's wife, than at the most that he was not her, but Lydia's husband.

Sauerbrot, who had followed the Pastor into the living room and had become a witness to this scene, noticed with delight this outburst of displeasure of the wife as well as the provocative effect of the speech on the husband. He quickly made his way behind the woman and, with all the power of treacherous persuasion and incitement, instilled in her all sorts of other evil thoughts, images, and feelings that were inclined to further increase her and her husband's displeasure with the teacher.

"These teachers' people" - said Mrs. Pastor Loschmann, continuing after a short while - "live straight on and make themselves broad and important as if we were not even there. Far and wide in the whole area he plays a prominent role and people talk about him. And no-one even talk about the Pastor. The Pastor plays no role at all, counts for nothing and is not even there. He just sits behind his books and does his preaching, while the teacher is the chives on all the soups!"

"I indeed don't attach any particular importance to it, to be the chives on all soups" - the Pastor replied.

"But you cannot and shouldn't let the teacher upstage you and trample on your nose on every occasion either! And you can no longer tolerate his wild drinking-brother life silently, if it continues like this again this winter! One truly thinks that we do not have the courage and strength to stand up against such a monstrosity! We are not yet a rotten, sap- and powerless nothing, that can simply be pushed against the wall!"

Well, that was enough for Pastor Loschmann to drill an effective thorn into his heart. He already wanted to show his wife and other people at the next best opportunity that he, even if patient and indulgent for a long time, is able to appear with energy and vigor in due time.

Sauerbrot had also heard and achieved enough for the moment. He was highly satisfied by what he had heard and expressed his good mood by slipping into the bookcase of Mrs. Pastor, filling the cracks of the woodwork with the ethereally fine elements of his spiritual body, and then suddenly expanding significantly through the power of his will. In this way, as he knew from recent experience, he could produce that strange, surprising crashing of the furniture, of which he had often read during the time of his physical life as of a well-known ghost spook. That's how Sauerbrot did it now in the bookcase of Mrs. Pastor. There was a mighty cracking sound three times in a row - just in the corner where the French novels were.

The Pastor folk looked around, a little concerned at this unusual noise in broad daylight. And the young woman quickly said: "It's going to be different weather!"

## Chapter 7

Yes, yes, there should soon be different weather. But not, as the Mrs. Pastor meant, in the natural, but in another sense.

The Sunday of the parish fair was approaching. In the whole village, in all the houses, there was the aroma of fruitcake baked by the housewives on Saturday with flower-white, new flour and the delicious fruits of autumn. Although the festival was called "Parish Fair," there were even fewer people than usual in the simple, rural house of worship on this Sunday morning.

On the men's side, only a few steadfast churchgoers could be seen, who sat quite isolated and abandoned in the wide pews. It was a little better on the women's side. But even there only a small part of the benches was occupied. The Pastor had too little to give to the hearts of the female gender. He spoke too "high". That was not so attractive - and even less so today, when the feast made so many demands on the household. And so the name of this celebration, "Parish Fair," which might have made good sense in more devout times, had actually become a mockery. For this whole feast no longer took place in the church, but in other, secular spaces.

The main activity in our village was in the evening in the "Traube". The inhabitants of the village and the whole surrounding area gathered there. For here, under the direction of the teacher Liebhardt and with the vigorous cooperation of the village leaders, the local councilors and many friends of the enjoyment of life, there was every year with autumn, lantern illumination under the old chestnut trees of the farm garden the most cheerful public entertainment, which attracted people from far and wide.

This year, a high tower or chimney was built from empty oil barrels, from which the bottom and lid had been removed, and filled with tar-soaked brushwood and other easily combustible materials, on the festival lawn immediately adjoining the kitchen garden.

When night had fallen and the merry dance couples left the seats under the chestnut trees - dimly lit by red, green and yellow autumn lanterns - to sway to the sounds of the band on the fairground, the contents of the huge barrel tower were set on fire from below. In an instant, the flame inside the vent rose up and blazed out above like a mighty torch, filling the darkness of the night with a ghostly twitching reddish-yellow brightness.

A loud cry of admiration and delight escaped from the throats of the many spectators when they saw the wonderful success and impression of this new thought of the teacher. Yes, that was very clever! What all he came up with! From the old oil barrels of the merchant, he was able to create the most beautiful lighting, visible far into the farthest villages, even into the small district town! And how beautiful it was to dance around the huge torch!

The band played a wild tune. The twitching, flickering reddish light gave a very unique, exciting glow. They also had already drunk a lot of wine. And the heat of the column of flame caused increased thirst. The drink was hastily consumed and the dancing became energetic and exuberant with joy.

It was as if the prince of the underworld had raised a mighty beacon to lure all the host of the spirits of darkness out of the night and to draw people into his abyss in the frenzied delirium of earthly lust.

This intention of the invisible satanic powers, which indeed tend to be behind events of this kind, was not noticed by the crowd, which was pouring in from all sides. The astonishment and pleasure increased the more the majestically the giant lamp, fed by the tar substances, blazed out at the top of the high vent like a mighty candle flame.

Gradually, especially on the upper part of the tower, the flames began to jump out between the individual barrels and consume the shells themselves. Now a violent quarrel suddenly erupted from a trivial, childish incident among the highly heated and wine-befuddled festival leadership.

Liebhardt wanted the burning chimney to be toppled over lengthwise over the festival meadow. It would then burn down completely on the ground, and then the youth should still get the most fun from it if the couples would jump together over the fading, only faintly flickering debris.

This proposal, however, did not seem as acceptable to the mayor and various other festival leaders as letting the torch stand and fully burn to the ground. To let the youth jump over the flames seemed too dangerous for many older people, especially for the parents. And so, when the critical moment approached at which the torch should have been overturned, there was a fierce back and forth of opinions and intentions.

Liebhardt, who had thought everything out so beautifully and expediently and was agitated by the roar of the people and the babble of voices as well as the wine he had already enjoyed, suddenly fell into an immoderate rage. When he was asked to let the band continue with the dance music, he broke his conductor's baton, called the mayor a stubborn man who didn't want to understand anything and always wanted to chatter away.

"Anyhow" - shouted Liebhardt - "I'm in charge and it'll be done as I say - and you've all done best at that so far - or you'll have the floor at the fairgrounds as at the town hall!"

But then I don't care about you one bit anymore, because you don't understand anything about these things and because I don't need to be told anything by you at all. And if no-one helps me to knock down the column now at the right time and in the right direction, then just let it collapse. But get off my back! You all steal from me! All these shenanigans are too stupid for me!"

With that, he threw his broken conductor's stick at the mayor's feet and, to everyone's sudden, angry consternation, stormed away from the festival site and went to a small, somewhat disreputable inn at the other end of town, where he sat down in the corner, boiling with rage, with a pint of wine.

The innkeeper of "Lamm", an old, greasy master baker with red-rimmed eyes, shuffled over after a while and wanted to start a conversation with the guest, who was somewhat rare in this pub, and to interrogate him about his strange escape from the fairground. But Liebhardt didn't respond to anything.

Only around midnight, when the teacher had downed one pint after the other in displeasure and was hanging drunk and asleep over the chair, did some friends from the singing club come, who had been looking for their leader everywhere and now finally found him here in this pub, obviously heavily drunk again. The singing brothers saw well that there was nothing more to be done with this conductor today and that out of Christian duty he should but be brought home and to safety. They persuaded him to go with them, grabbed him under the arms, paid his bill, and to avoid any fuss, walked with him along garden paths toward the schoolhouse.

Along the way, Liebhardt complained bitterly about the insult done to him, that his well thought-out instructions had not been followed and that people who understand nothing, suddenly want to make themselves important and interfere in such matters. On and on he murmured, slurred and scolded in this manner, while his friends dragged him laboriously along the winding paths from one resting place to another. A wailing misery threatened to overcome him as he considered how this mayor, this puffed up peasant pig-head, slowly progressed. But for all the days of his life he will never again take a parish fair or any other festival into his hands. He will discard everything, the music and singing societies, the bowling society, the forest hiking society, the civic and agricultural societies. Everyone must look for another conductor and board. It was his firm decision. He's fed up with everything.

The singing brothers already knew what to make of such drunken speeches and resolutions, let their friend talk, consoled him with tomorrow and with a better, lighter time, and delivered him at the front door of the unhappy Lydia, who had been waiting with her grandfather for hours at the window with trepidation and had heard the coming of the company with a trembling heart.

"Good night Mrs. Teacher" - said the friends with a touch of genuine regret. "Get him up there safe! - Shouldn't we help?" - they secretly added quietly. Mrs. Lydia shook her head. "The grandfather is here!" - she said, giving thanks and letting the friends and comrades of her husband's mischief go out into the moonlit night, from where they had fluttered along with their victim like night bird rabble.

## Chapter 8

Meanwhile, Liebhardt had sat down on the stone steps by the front door. He continued to talk and rant to himself in the manner of drunken people with his upper body and head hanging forward. And when Lydia and the grandfather, who had followed from upstairs in the meantime, approached him to help him up and lead him up the stairs to bed, he looked up angrily, lashed out and said he wanted to sit here on the stairs in the fresh air and spend the night. And all people would have to see how he is treated!

"Has anyone done you any harm then?" asked Lydia. - "We all then only mean it well with you!"

"Go to the hangman - here too - all of you!!! I don't want to know anything about you!" Liebhardt gushed. "You are in cahoots with the others! You two are to blame for it at all! You yell me around everywhere as an out-of-house one and a drunkard! I don't want any weeping or complaining when I'm working for my dear bread day and night and come home broken from all the toil, trouble and annoyance!" The longer Liebhardt talked and the more he looked at the anxiously saddened faces of his wife and grandfather, rose into an ever more violent rage, finally jumping up and thrusting violently around himself with elbows and fists.

Since he only got all the more upset at Lydia's helpful approach, she finally retreated into the darker hallway, hiding her tears. What nonsensical thoughts he had this time! She had never complained about her husband to anyone! She had only opened her heart to her grandfather, who was watching everything himself. And he, as she well knew, was as silent as the grave. Who then had put these thoughts into her Karl's head?

Lydia could not see the dark misty figure that had attached itself to the unfortunate man like a shadow and at times surrounded him like a cloud. It was Sauerbrot, who had not left his victim all day today.

It had also been he who had conjured up the abrupt, senseless quarrels in the fairground. To his delight, he had discovered the ability to read to a certain extent in people's minds the thoughts and desires and even to instill in people like the mayor his own, Sauerbrot's, unholy thoughts and desires. Not all people, of course, responded to these secret whispers of wickedness.

In some, who stood as if in a mantle of light, they did not seem to penetrate at all, or the uncharitable, malignant thoughts and images were immediately expelled and repelled. But with most of them something always penetrated, more or less stuck, connected itself with their own similar thoughts and pictures of the people concerned, strengthened, condensed and developed to firm views and inclinations and so finally became words and actions.

In this terrible way, at the feast today, when the spirits were excited and confused by the wine, Sauerbrot had easily provoked this quarrel and caused this terrible disturbance of all the joy of the church feast.

And now it was also he again who instilled in the drunken Liebhardt those thoughts of anger and hatred against his wife and father, and with his breath of will put him in such a rage against the two innocent human children who only wanted to help him and put him to bed.



To grandfather Liebhardt, this unfortunate companion of his son had not escaped his notice. He had recognized him at first glance and knew what he was at. He then immediately said a short prayer in his heart to Jesus, the Lord and mighty Commander of all spirits, implored His help, and then, gathering all his strength, went toward Sauerbrot with a firm, stern gaze, which turned completely black with anger and hatred and sparkled like a rocket fire.

The old man, strong in faith, said briefly and half aloud - so that his son would not hear it - nothing but: "*In Jesus' name, depart!*" Then Sauerbrot had to step back from his victim in great resentment.

Liebhardt the son, now immediately became obviously calmer. He let his father take him under the arm and, though still protesting and scolding, lead him up the stone stairs to the front door. In the hallway, Lydia joined in and supported him on the other side. And so they began to lead him up the stairs inside the house to the second floor, where the teacher's apartment was.

On the way, of course, things soon began to go less well again. Sauerbrot, or rather the demon within him that had taken possession of his soul, seemed to have drawn reinforcements to himself. His call into the night of the lower spirit world had not gone unheard. He indeed didn't need to go far and search after all.

Popular amusements such as parish fair celebrations with drinking and dancing festivities always attract swarms of unrefined beings, whose lust and love are still attached to such things and amusements with the old, hot desire even in the spiritual realm beyond. Even though such spirits can with their etheric bodies also no longer participate directly in the bodily pleasures of men, they still can nevertheless in the co-feeling of the pleasure of men themselves enjoy a certain co-pleasure, especially if they approach men as closely as possible or possibly take possession of their bodies completely.

So there was and still is, especially on such festive occasions, when many people come together for a cruder, more ignoble enjoyment, a large, evil clan of spirits, which overlays such gatherings like a cloud, incites and spurs people on to all kinds of evil and takes its sinister pleasure when things get quite mad and intemperate at such celebrations, when innocence falls and vice triumphs.

No-one can be surprised that from this atmosphere, a whole swarm of similarly minded, sinister companions from the air quickly and with joy rushed to the aid of Sauerbrot's demon. After all, the Scripture says: "Then he goes and takes to himself seven spirits more wicked than himself."

With this pack of darkness, Sauerbrot entered the teacher's house. And like a swarm of hornets, the infernal mob buzzed and roared around the two helpful people who were struggling on the stairs to lead the drunken man up to the second floor to rest. Grandfather Liebhardt felt and saw their coming. But in the excitement he also lost his head and reflection. He pushed and tugged at his son to bring him fully up the last steps. Also Lydia, in new distress, did her utmost. But just these well-intentioned efforts immediately brought the drunkard back into harness in the most powerful way.

"Go away" - he shouted - „Go away! You well think I'm a piece of cattle!? I am as sober as a cat and know exactly what I want and do!!! But also, what you think and want, I know!!! "If only we had the pig in safety first!!" - you think! - "If only the devil would finally take him!" But away!! No way!! - I want to drink! I want to drink!! I'm thirsty! And if you don't give me something to drink, I'll go and get it myself!"

"Karl, Karl!" pleaded Lydia. - "For the sake of your children - come! - You shall have something for thirst! - Only be quiet, don't wake the children!"

"What will you have me for thirst!? Such whining! Or sermons or seven days of defiance and rainy weather! I don't want to know about any of this!! And if I don't get anything to drink here, then the weather hits in! - Go away!! Leave me!! I have to get to the "Traube"! The choir must sing again! - I am not your donkey to be tied in the stable! - Up! - Air!!!" With that he pushed his father and Lydia away from him and wanted to turn back and descend the stairs again to leave the house.

Full of delight, Sauerbrot witnessed this with his cronies. The pack regarded it as their triumphant work that such a spirit came to the breakthrough in Liebhardt. The strange fellows, summoned to help, had seen with fierce anger and hatred the glow of light that flowed around the figure of the angelic Lydia as well as around the inconspicuous, lanky old man. They had to be hurt! One had to do them harm and make life as sour as possible! Because from this side of light there was a constant breakup on their side, the kingdom of darkness! So let's go, the whole murderous horde decided.

And when Lydia, in the greatest anguish and distress of her heart, embraced her husband with both arms to keep him from the pernicious turnaround, they filled the man's breast and whole being with their own dark anger and hatred. Like a wild, infernal ember and flame, it shot through the heart, veins, and every fiber of the man who was defenselessly exposed to the forces of evil. A boundless anger seized him that this woman with her silent will and her clinging arms wanted to restrain him in the freedom of his will and action, to tie him up and to deprive him of his life-habit, which had become a necessity to him.

With a very sudden inhuman strength rising in all his nerves and muscles, he, standing on one of the top steps, escaped from Lydia's grasp, seized the terrified woman around the body, lifted her up and hurled her backwards down the stairs in a senseless frenzy. The grandfather uttered a loud scream. There was a thud as the body hit the stone tiles below.

The mighty swarm in the air dispersed with a shrill laugh inaudible to humans and disappeared. The perpetrator Liebhardt stood like a statue, motionless and pale on the stairs, staring fixated in the direction where his wife lay in the darkness of the lower hallway without a sound and - apparently - without sign of life.

## Chapter 9

The first to regain consciousness from the spell of terror was the grandfather. He groped his way down the banister, as quickly as his trembling knees would carry him, to the unfortunate woman. At the same time, the children's bedroom door opened, and in their nightgowns, the two oldest, Bernhard and Irmgard, rushed out, while the crying of the two younger ones came from the bedroom.

Irmgard stopped at the top of the stairs with folded hands and stared with horrified eyes soon into the depths of the lower hallway, soon at her father, who stood with glazed looks, no movement and not able to speak a word, still with his hands propped up on the banister, until his limbs, as if paralyzed by ice cold, failed him and he slowly sank down onto the stairs.

Little Bernhard, on the other hand, who had always been particularly intimate and devoted to his mother, rushed down the stairs without a glance at his father and was horrified to see his beloved mother as if lifeless in her blood lying on the tiles. A dark red streamlet trickled from the back of her head and formed a pool on the floor. The eyes were closed. One arm seemed broken. The other was bent over the head as if for protection. The grandfather sought to raise the upper body, held his hand on the bleeding wound and called for help, water and the doctor.

Little Bernard saw all this in a flash. It also became clear to him what had happened. He indeed had heard the voices. He thought, "Go for the doctor!?" Yes, that's what he want to do. But he was in his shirt! - He just wanted to quickly put on the necessary clothes. Would it still help? Mother was certainly already dead! - A terrible, wild rage suddenly flared up in the young mind. He grabbed the thick, oak hoe stick that his grandfather used to use when he went out and that was always behind the front door. Armed with it, he ran up the stairs in a few leaps.

Grasping the lower end of the stick, he struck with the crude tool in tremendous strokes at the father, who was still sitting on the ground, unable to do anything, and shouted in a shrill, screeching courtroom voice: "Mother-killer!!! Rascal!!! Rascal!!! Mother killer!!!"

Liebhardt let it pass motionless. - It was a kind of satisfaction or redemption for him.

Only when the young man had thus vented his dreadful rage did he throw away the stick, hurried up to the bedroom, dressed himself on the fly, and dashed off to the doctor who lived nearby. Liebhardt now also came to himself again. He got up, hurried down the stairs and saw with horror what he had done.

"Lydia!!!" he shouted and clutched his wife. "Lydia!!! Come to yourself!!! Listen to me!!! Listen to me!!! Lydia!!! Lydia!!!"

He could not bring out anything else. Upstairs in the upper corridor the children were crying and screaming. The two smallest ones had also come out to Irmgard in their shirts and had heard what had happened. The grandfather went upstairs, tried to calm them down and and locked them in their room. Then he went back down, giving his son instructions in a low voice about what to do. And now the two men carried the woman, who still gave no sign of life, leaving a thin trail of blood, up the stairs and laid her on the white bed in the parents' bedroom.

The old man fetched water in a bowl, washed the blood from her face, hands and clothes and ran for vinegar. The son could not help much. He was sunked down on a chair at the foot of the bed, slapped his hands in front of his face and sobbed - terribly disillusioned - tearlessly in violent strokes.

In the meantime the doctor came, fetched by Bernhard - an aged, silver-haired man, who had himself been ill for years with a painful inner affliction and through this school of torment had become a and a quiet, thoughtful man of sensitive nature. He was already informed by Bernhard about the most necessary things and after a wordless examination he found a concussion, a broken arm and several broken ribs. Only the concussion was life-threatening. But all hope was not lost. There was still life and, if God gave it, it could be strengthened anew.

In a friendly, calm manner, old Doctor Winfried, who had brought his tools with him, did everything necessary. With the help of the two men, he bandaged the head wound, splinted the arm, applied healing compresses to the broken ribs, and repeatedly poured a spoonful of invigorating medicine into the still fainting woman, which finally had the effect of restoring her breathing and heart to a somewhat more vigorous activity.

What Liebhardt, the husband, went through in this most terrible hour of his life, cannot be measured. One hellflame after the other assailed him. - Would she wake up again!? Would she remain alive for him and the children!? And whether and how it could and would continue with them, Karl and Lydia - after this event?! - These were questions that raged dully and wildly in his mind and heart.

Finally - towards morning - the time had come and Doctor Winfried could go his way with the calm awareness that everything necessary and possible had been done. He left the house as the first dawn was breaking and just as the last insatiable guests were returning home from the fairground near the "Traube" and heading for their homes. Yes, man - thought the knowledgeable man - is close to the abyss of death and destruction! - How few consider it in the rush of life! And how many miss the true, eternal goal of this short earthly span of existence for the sake of deceptive, illusory enjoyment!

## Chapter 10

Lydia lay unconscious for the rest of the night and two more days and nights. Like wildfire, the morning after the crime, the horror story spread in the village that the teacher had pushed his wife down the stairs while intoxicated, so that she was unconscious and seriously injured and her recovery is doubtful.

Everybody was horrified. For in general Lydia was loved and respected as a calm, prudent, kind woman who liked to do good to everyone. Against the teacher, however, the voices of discontent increased. This drinking in recent years was not right anymore after all! Such a thing was not fitting for a teacher of youth! And the quarrels he started lately with God and the world in his excited temper, surely all came from alcohol too! - This is how it always had to end when a person could not restrain himself and pull himself together!

The woman, a pure angel, was certainly quite innocent! There he, the teacher, had of course only vented his displeasure because of the nonsensical quarrels with the mayor - and so this horrible deed had happened as an outgrowth of intemperate, wicked spirit!

Especially also in the parsonage such reflections were made and words of indignation were heard. Mrs. Pastor was in favor of her husband immediately submitting a written report to the dean's office for further action with the school board. Because with such a teacher who kills his wife while intoxicated, can be continued under no circumstances.

Pastor Loschmann was a little more prudent and of a milder opinion. He said that as long as the woman was still unconscious and hovering between death and life, he could not proceed. That was contrary to his feeling. And even if the man was obviously guilty over and over again, it was necessary to wait and see how the event would turn out in its consequences. Well, there was nothing to be said against that, and so the rectory so to speak stood ready to battle.

On the evening of the first day, Mrs. Pastor Loschmann, who visited the schoolhouse to make inquiries, learned from old Liebhardt, who was alone to talk, that the injured woman had still not returned to consciousness. On the second evening it was the same. Only towards morning of this second night, when the day dawned, did Lydia show signs of returning consciousness.

In the evening, the grandfather had brought a plate of fresh fruit into the room and placed it on the table next to the bed - wonderful pears and apples. And the lively fragrance of these fruits seemed to do the sick person good. She took a deep breath a few times, and Liebhardt, her husband, who had been sitting with her all the time, day and night, never took his eyes off her. He brought the glorious fruits very close to her, also administered the strengthening medicine to her at regular intervals according to the specific instructions of the doctor, and waited with trepidation, hope and trembling for the blessed and yet so terrible moment when she would open her eyes and recognize him, the sinner.

What would she think - what would she say, if she was able to!?

Was it a word of doom for him and their future life together? A death sentence for their family happiness? - Or was there still forgiveness?? - He hardly dared to hope for the latter and prepared himself for the worst, for it had not been a single, one-time aberration! This drinker's mischief had come again and again and in continued increase had shattered the whole, once so untroubled family life in the innermost core and finally led almost naturally to this terrible catastrophe.

He was - Liebhardt now knew clearly and firmly - a drunkard, a notorious, irredeemable weakling who fell prey to this vice again and again and certainly ruined himself and his wife and children. He was a real rascal and now also a criminal, and for him there was no help, no salvation and - rightly - no forgiveness anymore!

He just wanted to wait until Lydia opened her eyes again and then receive his verdict. He just wanted to nurse her back to health and then let her go her way with the children. He would anyway lose his teaching position after this incident. But what would then happen to him and his wife and children, he could not even imagine. Then it just became black before him - there was a gaping abyss without a bottom with hell-flames of remorse and despair.

At last, when the daylight was already coming in hauntingly from between the shutters and curtains, and the curtained lamplight was becoming dispensable, Lydia took another deep breath, heaved a sigh, as if returning from another, higher world to this earthly, heavy existence, and, without moving further, opened her eyes still dimly, but brightly and calmly. She looked into the tense face of her husband, deeply lined with joy, fear, and guilt, who bent over her, keenly guarding her every emotion.

"Lydia!" he breathed in a quivering voice- "Lydia! Do you recognize me?? - Can you forgive me?" he added, as her eyes seemed to affirm his first question. Lydia felt her broken arm lying immobile in a splint. The limbs were as if shattered. Her back and chest ached and also seemed immobile. The limbs were as if shattered. Her neck and back of her head also suffered burning aching and could not be raised from the bed. She felt as if crushed.

Then her eyes, as she lay there wordlessly gazing at her husband torn by remorse and pain, slowly filled with tears and two pearls ran down her cheeks onto her night shirt.

"Lydia! Lydia!" Liebhardt cried out, slapped his hands in front of his face and buried his head against the weeping woman's chest, while an enormous, primordially deep sob burst out of him and shook his whole body. - "You cannot forgive, I know that" - he groaned. "I know that, and I also cannot expect it. But do not reject me now! Let me stay at your bedside until you are healthy again!"

When he sobbed like this, his whole body and being trembling violently, begging like a child, Lydia quietly and without speaking a word, put her healthy, free arm around his shoulders and silently and painfully pressed him against her with deep, intimately womanly fervor. This was an experience for the poor, lost and forlorn man Karl Gotthilf Liebhardt!!! He imagined sinking into a sea of flames of repentance and at the same time of thanksgiving, love and fervor. He could say nothing anymore, only with a thousand fervent kisses he covered the chest, throat, face and hands of his beloved.

"There is another life coming now, Lydia!" he vowed.

"Yes" - she nodded - "with Heavenly Father's help!"

## Chapter 11

Only one person in the whole house was not at all satisfied or agreed with this turnaround, this victory of unshakable, heavenly love - the secret, invisible and unsolicited guest, Sauerbrot. He had watched and listened to everything through the open bedroom door, sitting on the stove bench outside in the living room.

That is for once a terrible goose, that Lydia! Instead of getting the wretched rascal off her back at this opportunity, chasing him out of the house into misery and taking him to the deserved prison, she did not even have a single word of reproach against him! As if nothing had happened and he had done only love and good to her, she put her arm around him and just wordlessly pulls him to her chest! That then was the topsy-turvy world itself!

Such a fool is what the Christian doctrine make of man - that he no longer knew whether five was even or odd, and that he let every brute and libertine trample on him!

No, something like that had never happened to him, Sauerbrot, in his whole life! And that he also had to experience this from his own flesh and blood! How did such a spirit get into this daughter? She did not have it from him - that he was certain of. But of course, his late blessed mother, the mother of Lydia, had been of a similar kind. There was also the Bible from morning to night on the little work table near the window in the living room. All kinds of sayings from her school and youth days were still at home in her heart and all too often, to his great annoyance, also flowed over the lips of the busy, much-troubled woman. That's where Lydia had to get that sense from! –

Or had she brought it from some star!? - From him, Sauerbrot himself, that was certain, she did not get such a crazy - things, people, circumstances and laws of this world - completely upside down spirit!

What could be done now?! - The foolish woman had completely spoiled his meticulously laid out, cleverly spun and boldly executed concept. He had certainly reckoned that after this deed, which had been set in motion with the help of invisible friends, there would be a sharp, incurable rift and break between the spouses and that the rest would then inevitably unwind itself. The pastor and the school board could not remain silent about such a thing after all!

This fiend of a teacher could then no longer be looked through the fingers, this criminal who hurled his own wife down the stairs in a frenzy and violent temper, so that only by a miracle her life was still saved! Such a person one could no longer be entrusted with the instruction and education of the youth! Where would then the necessary respect of the children for the teachers be and where the trust of the parents in the spirit of such a youth-educator?

And now this Lydia went and acted - waking up from several days of unconsciousness, still lying in bed with fresh wounds, immobile like a log of wood - as if nothing had happened, as if everything was all right, as if at most a small, innocent indisposition had overcome her!

But still "Poland was not yet lost!" Sauerbrot fired himself up in his surging, evil thoughts. If the simple-minded, stupid woman put up with this obscenity, this crudeness, well, this was then her personal business. But he, Sauerbrot himself, wanted to ensure that things and people would receive their justice in a natural, logical sequence. He wanted to make the disturbed legal order a rewarder and avenger!

Yes, he immediately wanted to go over to the pastor and induce him to take the necessary steps with the authorities, to finally create a great upset for the good-for-nothing teacher and his house. No sooner said than done!

Soon Sauerbrot was over at the parsonage, in the study room. But the sought-after person was not to be found there. He was still sitting upstairs in the living room, sipping the fragrant coffee while reading the morning papers. The freshly dressed, still youthfully pretty Mrs. Pastor sat across from him and, after quickly finishing her breakfast according to her habit, read some letters from relatives and friends that had arrived with the morning mail.

Then there was a gentle knocking at the door, and at the "Come in" of Mrs. Pastor, a peasant child, a girl of some twelve years, entered and brought the milk for the coming day. "Did you know Mrs. Pastor" - said the chatty girl - "Mrs. Teacher has come to life again this morning. She has woken up all at once, and everything is quite well again. Of course, she will have to stay in bed still for a long time!"

"So, so?" said Mrs. Pastor Loschmann and inquired - while also her husband, having become attentive, put down the newspaper - what the child knew further, how things stood over there in the schoolhouse, what Mrs. Teacher had said when she came to herself. Of course, the child knew nothing more about it. "Mrs. Teacher had gone back to sleep soon after, he said. She was, of course, very weak and in need of rest."

"Well, yes" said Mrs. Pastor - "one can think that indeed!" Outwardly seemingly unaffected by the matter, she gave the child a small, tasty roll from the table and released the curtsying little one with a benevolent nod of her head.

But energetically, when the child was out, the excitable wife turned to her husband: "So, now you know where you are at! And it will be time for you to act! You can't wait until other more active and concerned people beat you to it - run to the school board, and raise an objection about this teacher Liebhardt and his activities. Or shall grass also grow over this misdeed? Do you want to take a chance on whether this good-natured, fearful and in any case also somewhat simple-minded woman in her way, will also put up with this mistreatment and in the end also the mayor and the whole village will say: "Well, if the woman doesn't want to do anything about it, then we don't want to do anything either? Should this water also go back down the stream without driving a mill wheel? - In my opinion, now that the woman has obviously passed the dangerous turning point, but the matter is still fresh in everyone's mouth, action should be taken! And you should immediately, already this morning, submit your written report to the dean's office with a request for further instigation to your superior school board!"

"Well yes, well yes" - Pastor Loschmann replied, somewhat stretched by his wife's eager speech - "so very hasty and heated is the matter, however, certainly not yet! One should not eat anything as hot as it is cooked, it spoils teeth and stomach. And I also don't want to do this thing in writing. One does not need to expose oneself unnecessarily in black on white in such a nevertheless not ordinary and in addition personal thing.

Today at noon, when I have time for a walk anyway, I will go to town, arrange to meet the dean and report the matter to him verbally. Then I also do not have the responsibility and also does not lay on myself the obnoxiousness and unpleasantness of this thing. Rather, the dean can then decide on further steps himself and also has the sole responsibility for it internally as well as externally.

I myself am in any case justified and saved. So nobody needs to know about this step of mine at all. It is not official, but private and yet leads to the same goal. And that's certainly better as how you mean in your somewhat hasty fervor. For neither of us want to come into open conflict with the school house, especially since one indeed does not know in advance how the school authorities will react to the case.



Whether they will transfer or even dismiss him, or whether, considering the other undeniable abilities and merits of the much-loved teacher, they will once again turn a blind eye after all."

"That would be even better in such a case!" the woman replied. But against the diplomatic prudence of her husband, she could basically not object. Rather, she rejoiced in her heart that he had also once been really worldly wise - which was unfortunately so rarely the case with this bookworm and scribe.

That behind her husband, behind his apparent diplomacy, soft, better heart-feelings of pity for the teacher's family were the actual motives of his hesitant action - and that he, knowing well his own nature and trains of thought, urges and impulses of his wife, had only feigned these clever considerations and careful detours in her sense in order to be able to proceed more gently after his own nature, she of course did not suspect. But petty marital wars makes one inventive. And if one spouse with straightness and vehemence goes on recklessly and fights validation, then often the more tolerant, calmer part must try to help itself with some stratagem.

That was then the result of this morning conversation in the parsonage, overheard by Sauerbrot from the sewing table chair, that in the afternoon, after having had coffee in good time, Pastor Loschmann set out on the beautiful footpath through the valley meadow and the forest to the small district town where the dean had his official residence and where school Councilor Moser also lived as the head of the district authority.

Loschmann told the dean - still in his middle years and an agile, worldly bachelor, an excellent pulpit orator and also an capable administrator - about what had happened in the schoolhouse during the parish fair night and also did not conceal the fact that unfortunately alcoholic lapses had become a frequent occurrence with the teacher Liebhardt. In the interest of the reputation of the school as well as the whole spiritual atmosphere of the village, this saddening fact could not be tolerated from the church's viewpoint and it was therefore up to the dean to decide whether he considered it appropriate to intervene with the School Council.

Dean Winter was highly indignant about this report. Such bottomless brutality to throw his wife head over heels down the stairs, leaving her unconscious for two days! Intervention was needed immediately! If such a spirit spread unhindered and unpunished in a congregation, if the youth saw such examples in their own teacher - where should this lead in time - also for the church!? No wonder the church was always more than half empty!

Yes, alcohol is a bad thing! What sacrifices it demanded in this forest region, where cherry and huckleberry schnapps was in vogue and the seductive juices of the vines flowed in floods from the neighboring southern wine villages!

The teacher, who was the chief master of ceremonies of the Prince of Hell at all festivities, had to leave after this incident, that was clear! Here an occasion presented itself in which no decent person could hold anything against the authority. The dean thanked Pastor Loschmann for his friendly, conscientious communication, talked with him about this and that from the parish, also about his health and family circumstances, and then, when the pastor had made his way home again, went without delay to School Councilor Moser, with whom he was already good friends since university, as a covenant brother.

## Chapter 12

The School Councilor couple Moser, an already aged couple whose children had all flown the nest, lived secluded and modestly in a friendly country house of their own possession, outside the city.

They were just about to eat a frugal supper of home-grown garden vegetables, fruits and good wheat bread with the best of appetites, when Dean Winter entered and was of course immediately invited to join in by the extremely affectionate, somewhat obese, kind-hearted Mrs. School Councilor.

These excellent occasional snacks at Mrs. School Councilor's house were never turned down by the dean, who as an unmarried man, had to rely on inn food - since here, in addition to the cheerful conversation, instead of the eternal meat diet, one received a vegetable diet most carefully prepared by Mrs. School Councilor herself with the help of a maid.

So that evening, the congenial circle was soon closed around the three close friends. And over dessert, which consisted of splendid trellis pears, plums and nuts, Dean Winter was able to unearth his great, if most regrettable, tragedy from the neighboring church and school community in all peace and comfort.

Quite horrified, Mrs. School Councilor heard this gruesome tale. Yes, was then such a thing possible for an educated man at all - such terrible crudeness! Throwing his wife down the stairs in intoxication! Was he then still a Christian man at all!?

"In intoxication" - said the dean, who was a great opponent of alcohol - "is just anything possible. Then man becomes a beast! Or rather, less than an animal. For an animal follows the inner instinct, the voice of God, and remains within the natural measure, while man in satanic defiance and wantonness disregards the order of God and, reaching for the false stars of deceptive lust, plunges back into the primordial depths of prehuman creature forms - again and again repeating in the small, human-earthly measure, the craft of Lucifer unrolled on grand scale.

"But what to do now with such a person and family father?" sighed Mrs. Moser, while looking anxiously then at the dean, then at her husband. "That matter will be for your dear husband, i.e. probably be first thorough investigation! For we cannot give free rein to such a story from either the ecclesiastical or the school council point of view. Here, everyone rightly expects the authorities to intervene in a foreseeing and precautionary manner."

"Dear me - but the wife and children!" said Mrs. Moser, who could not down another bite of the delicious fruit. "I feel terribly sorry for them. They are also lost if the man loses his position as a result of this unfortunate step! You Mr. Dean, as a bachelor, probably don't think of that!?"

"It does not have to go immediately to the extreme under circumstances" - the school Councilor now let himself be heard - "we want to see in any case. Of course, the case must be strictly and thoroughly investigated and especially the whole previous life preceding this final catastrophe. The man is otherwise popular in the whole area and also quite a capable, indeed exceptionally well-talented teacher. That he has unfortunately been drinking for a few years, has certainly also been brought to my attention.

But he was generally forgiven for it with respect of his pedagogical, musical and other talents. The music souls indeed all have, as is well known, a dry, thirsty throat! It's part of the handicraft, so to speak. And when you're standing like that in the heated hustle and bustle of the festival business, it's easy to go beyond the actual need. I can empathize with that, although I myself am no friend of alcohol and of such mass amusements and club celebrations, and I do not underestimate the great public dangers of the unfortunate drinking habit, but deeply regret it.

However, I did not know until now that things were so bad with the teacher Liebhardt. And this egregious aberration makes an atonement and preventative steps absolutely necessary. One who has so little control over himself and is capable of such excesses and bestial crudities, nevertheless can no longer be entrusted with the education of youth! In some circumstances, with all due leniency, patience and appreciation of other merits, there is a need for firm, ruthless crackdown. It is better that one die than the whole community!"

"At any rate" - adds the dean approvingly - "I have never heard of such a thing from a teacher in my whole life and my whole office, that in drunkenness he went so far as to lay hands on the life of his wife, the mother of four children, for nothing and nothing again."

"Indeed" - said the school Councilor" - such fruit falls from a very, very sick tree!"

There the power of darkness must truly have flourished far in a soul, and there must be more rotten, brittle, and doomed than we think." "Indeed," said the School Councilor, "such fruit falls from a very, very sick tree!"

Restless and inwardly very upset by this revelation of the dean, Moser pushed back the plate and also did not want to enjoy anything else that evening. He was embarrassed that the church authorities had had to bring this case to his attention while he himself had been more up to date with the teacher Liebhardt, whom he had always particularly appreciated.

The dean had not wanted more for the time being, and so they were quickly at peace with each other without many more words being exchanged about the matter.

Only the good Mrs. School Councilor, as they said goodbye at about ten o'clock that night, heaved another deep sigh and said, squeezing the Dean's hand: "Don't be too hard on a stray brother - and consider his wife and children!"

The dean shrugged and said evasively: "We're putting it in God's hands!"

The School Councilor, however, could not sleep much that night. The fate of a person, yes, of an entire family, lay again in his hands, placing him between law and leniency, between order and forbearance, between the strict, unavoidable demands of the world and the message of Jesus of Nazareth. - Such a thing was always the most difficult and painful thing in his whole, versatile and widely ramified office.

## Chapter 13

Within the following few days, early on a beautiful autumn morning, the school Councilor walked on the same path on which pastor Loschmann had come, through the forest and the meadow valley to the village on the heights.

How delightful was the dew-fresh nature! The trees turned yellow and the summer flowers were gone; but the splendor of the autumn asters and sunflowers in the country gardens, the red glowing leaves of the wild vines on the houses and fences contrasted splendidly with the deep blue, glittering sky and the still strong green of the meadows. And in the forest, the now already completely yellow foliage garment of the beeches and birches worked itself like gold brocade into the intense velvet green of the firs. O how today, walking through the living dome of God's nature, one could have bathed the soul and raised it to the beauty and bliss of the eternal origin of all these creations!

"Yet today, my business is - murder!" said Moser, thinking of Wilhelm Tell's soliloquy in the alley of Kuessnacht.

Yes, such an official criminal matter does not at all suit the clarity and holy peace of such a cloudless, pure autumn day, on which the Creator once again seemed to pour out the special radiance of His love over everything naturally imperfect and perishing, as if from an inexhaustible cornucopia, as if He wanted to say: "Be of good cheer, My Being is eternal and infinite, My riches inexhaustible, My power without limit, and even in death I only bless and mature life to give the most blessed perfection in new forms!"

When he arrived in the forest village, the school Councilor first went to the town hall to hear the mayor, who was an experienced and authoritative figure in such public matters, about the case. The hard-working mayor had already been in office for several hours. Besides this official activity, he also had to live his not insignificant agriculture, which indeed was mainly taken care of by his wife and daughters, but still needed his supervision and assistance. And so with him, as a rule, the first hours of the morning and also the evening hours, were dedicated to the community office.

The tall, lean man, about sixty years old, with very graying hair and a shaved chin, was just checking the bills of the township clerk for expenditures of the township budget when the school Councilor entered. The two gentlemen, who were very fond of each other, greeted each other like good old friends. And the school Councilor immediately got down to the business that brought him here. The mayor had thought of it right away. And so they were quickly in the picture and directed the discussion to what mattered.

Was the distressing incident a one-time, unfortunate aberration, or had the teacher's drinking grown into such a habit that this crude act was, so to speak, an inevitable, naturally necessary outgrowth, which made the magnitude and severity of the vice obvious and now absolutely required intervention in the interest of the school? - This was the question to which the school Councilor wanted to get an answer from the mayor.

The mayor leaned both elbows on the backrest of his council chair, took a deep breath and, looking ahead of him, said: "Yes, what shall one say!? - We not want to harm the man.

One feel sorry for him. In some respects he has made himself generally popular here for years; but if I am now officially asked in this way by you, Mr. School Councilor, I must probably stick to the truth!

Drinking has become a great and pernicious vice with our teacher for more than two years. Not a festival goes by where he doesn't come home or is brought home under strong, often high intoxication. - Of course, the temptation is indeed also great for him! Everything calls and demands him and compels him to drink with true force! He gets told from all sides: "Mr. Teacher, come to us! Come to us! Instruct us! Help out! You must conduct!" - Where there is music and singing, there one just sheerly gets him out of bed. And if he just doesn't want to - he must to the front! From all villages around - hours away - he is called! - He often complains about it himself and, if he really wanted to, he could certainly put a stop to it and refuse: but he doesn't have the will or the decisiveness for it! He cannot say no where he necessarily should. - And so, in this way, he got deeper and deeper into the flood and turmoil which finally had to come to the bad result as we now see it. Now the case can hardly get any worse - yes, the top has certainly now been reached.

The mayor was sadly silent. The fate of this man who, despite everything, he did not dislike, was a heavy cross for him.

"And how then does he come to commit such an outrageous, crude act against his wife, who, after all, as I know her, is the purest angel of patience and forbearance and has certainly not given him the slightest reason for such an atrocious offense?" - the school Councilor inquired further.

"Yes, that is also another chapter!" said the mayor. "It is said, and it has been observed not infrequently, that the more the teacher got into drinking, the less he became the jovial man he used to be. He became, as one often noticed, so heated and irritable by the alcohol, the beer and the wine, that social gatherings by miracle yet very seldom end without quarrels and arguing. This did diminish his popularity significantly; but people still needed him and called on him again and again. And the more Liebhardt realized that despite everything, he was indispensable everywhere, the more he also dared himself and became rude and violent at the slightest provocation."

That the mayor himself had a collision with the teacher at the church fair was not mentioned by the good-natured man. He didn't want to dip the unfortunate man any further into it. The school Councilor could now figure out for himself how this bad thing had come about.

Yes, yes, that was certainly a bad case! This was not a one-time, forgivable gaffe! Ad open ulcer had broken open on a very sick soul! - Should such a person continue to teach and educate the youth, who was so completely out of control of himself and had become a senseless and unrestrained animal!?

Shaking his head, anxious and restless, the school Councilor rose to leave. "And what do the people say now about this case and the man?" - he asked before turning to the door. "'The people are horrified, of course" - replied the mayor. "Most people say something like this shouldn't have happened. No-one can have any respect anymore, as is so important for a teacher! - Only a few, his special friends, shrug their shoulders in silence. But even they do not dare to advocate. This case is just too heavy!"

That was just what was missing in the balance of official judgment! - After a short farewell, the school councilor left the town hall with a heavy heart.

Down in the open space, in the glaring sun that was now already close to its zenith, he had to reflect for a good while - what to do now? - Should he go to the rectory? - Inquire any further? - Or personally pray for teacher Liebhardt himself? Further inquiries were indeed not really necessary! - The mayor had obviously given a most clear, completely accurate picture of the matter in all brevity! - One could now very well imagine the whole career of the teacher and the development of his tragic catastrophe! There was hardly anything new and decisive to be learned from the Pastor, since he led a secluded life and knew only the least about the very side on which this distressing drama was playing out.

Then suddenly a thought passed through the school Councilor: - How would it be if he paid a visit to the unfortunate victim, the teacher's wife herself, whom he indeed knew personally - to see how she was doing and to hear what she herself had to say about the matter!? Should he receive the judgment of the teacher, her husband, from her mouth? - She had to know best whether this person was still curable or not!

'Strange' - Moser thought, as he headed for the teacher's apartment - 'what was it that drove him so determinedly to this visit to the teacher's wife!? Wasn't it really ridiculous then - after the mayor had given his opinion and that of the whole village known to him so clearly - to now still want to find out the opinion and attitude of the woman who was certainly still dazed by the severe injuries she had suffered and in any case also filled with fear of her husband and feared for him, his position and the family?'

Nevertheless, it was like a secret, inner compulsion that school Councilor Moser had to direct his steps to the school building and - without registering on the ground floor with the teacher who was holding school there - immediately went up to the second floor to the apartment.

On the way, he looked carefully at the place of the crime, the high, steep stairs. And he shuddered at the thought that here a man could in violent intent hurl down his wife, with whom he had lived for ten years in an apparently happy marriage and with whom he had fathered four children. - Appalling! He thought. - It must have been a terrible fall - down there on the hard stone tiles! And a miracle that the woman was still alive at all! - What must she have gone through, how must she have suffered physically and mentally! Yes, yes! - Often, life on this world was a cruel game.

## Chapter 14

Above, at the glass door leading to the apartment, old father Liebhardt came out to open it and was not a little startled when he saw the School Councilor before him. Fate had already appeared in person! Now things could be set aright indeed! - What would Heavenly providence indeed bring!?

With these thoughts, the old man led his son's superior with reverence, but nevertheless as a Christian and a man of God with dignity and composure, into the living room. The school Councilor, without taking his seat according to the invitation, inquired about Mrs. Teacher's condition and, when he heard that it was going satisfactorily, asked if her condition permitted him to greet her briefly. Old Liebhardt said that there was certainly nothing to prevent this, and that his daughter-in-law would undoubtedly appreciate being able to exchange a few words with Mr. School Councilor.

Lydia had just awakened from a morning nap. The shutters, against which the sun was shining, were still half closed when her grandfather told her with a beating heart that Mr. School Councilor was outside and wanted to say "Greet God" to her.

The young woman quickly collected herself in her abruptly startled mind, had the shutters opened, checked the exemplary order of the bedroom once again with her eyes and then, after an armchair had been moved next to the bed, let the school Councilor be asked to enter.

School Councilor Moser laid down his hat and cane outside in the living room and stepped into the clean, friendly cool bedroom. He reached out his hand to the sufferer and greeted her with warm, sympathetic words, asked how she was doing, if she was in pain, what the doctor said, if her healing progress is satisfying, and so on.

Lydia gave him calm, friendly answers to every question. The physician, Doctor Winfried, was very satisfied with the result of his efforts. The pain is bearable. There is no more danger. She now need to have much patience to remain in bed until everything would be good again.

After the school councilor had sat down in the armchair provided by the grandfather and the father had disappeared from the room after this courtesy, a small pause arose in their conversation. None of them was able to move from the more external questions and concerns to the main issue that so moved both their hearts and minds. Lydia did not want to anticipate her husband's superior. And the school Councilor did not quite know whether he was allowed to expose the very affronted, wax-pale woman to an exciting discussion.

Then chance wanted it that the school Councilor's eyes fell on the wedding picture of the married couple Liebhardt, which hung by the bed of the wife and showed both in intimate happiness. She followed his gaze and, noticing its aim, blushed and lowered her eyes.

Would you have well thought then, Mrs. Liebhardt, when this picture was taken here - that it could ever go like this between you?" - the school Councilor asked with regret.

"O never could I have only thought then that our happiness could ever once dim!" - Lydia replied in a low voice. "In the first few years, our marriage was indeed also a true heaven!" - she added.

"Why then did it change so much over time?"

"Oh God, Mr. School Councilor - the world, the people, and the tiresome wine at all the invitations and parties - it has completely brought my husband out of joint over time!"

"Could he not, then, with a little firmer will, have preserved his personality, exercised more restraint, and taken more account of his family and position?"

"People are bad and quite intrusive, Mr. School Councilor! As it seems to me, here - especially in our region where there is so much temptation! You wouldn't believe how my husband is afflicted on all sides because of his cheerful disposition and gifts! The seducers are always around him in droves and do not consider that they are plunging a family father into ruin with their impetuous demands.

If only they have their will and their pleasure; whether my husband succumbs with his powers little by little, whether he is devastated and ruined - it is all the same to them! The mob attaches itself to his heels and sucks him dry to the last drop of good spirit. And if then in the overstress and overstimulation he forgets and pass out, then nobody wants to accept blame for himself, but only with him - and then those who have enticed and seduced him, are the first to break the rod over him!

Don't just believe everything, Mr. School Councilor" - cried Lydia in tears - "what the malevolent people carelessly say about my husband! People know him only from the one, the outer side! I know him as he is inside - as a really all too good person, who can refuse nobody anything and is gladly at the service and will to all the world, even at the expense of his own well-being! - And how he is in his profession as a teacher, how conscientious and understanding, and therefore so very popular with young and old - the school Councilor himself indeed knows that best!"

Certainly, the school Councilor knew that even last year no school in the forest was in a better condition than that of Liebhardt. The children cling to their teacher with a passionate love, so that even the sick ones often still come to school with rugs and pillows - and that was always the best sign. And in knowledge, there nowhere was a class more thoroughly taught and further ahead.

And that he had to possess a good core of mind - that the school Councilor had seen again and again with pleasure - in religion and nature lessons given by Liebhardt. With what understanding for the childlike soul he presented the Biblical story to the little ones, and how he introduced them to the wonders of nature, always pointing to the greatness, goodness, wisdom and power of the Creator. It was a terrible pity that just such a person is afflicted by such a flaw.

"Certainly" - said the school Councilor on these thoughts - "it is eternally a pity about this man with his indisputable, good gifts. But what should then we, the school board, hope on, if under these circumstances things went more and more downhill with him - down to such a catastrophe!? - I have heard and known that you are a silent sufferer, Mrs. Liebhardt, and think that you must have suffered terribly in the last few years in this fall from the heights of fullest respect for your husband.

What an experience it must have been for you to see the husband, the father of your children, slide down from step to step to a will-less plaything of his passion! - But if things are so bad now, so hopeless, that you yourself are now lying here in bed as a pitiful victim and may have to bear a heavy damage for months to come - can we, the authorities, still have hope, patience and forbearance? Will relocation be able to help, if the terrible spirit goes along, because the bad is seated in a tiresome weakness of the will!"



School Councilor Moser had actually spoken all this more to himself in order to give vent to his inner perplexity and to gain the necessary clarity and strength for his necessary decisions. But Lydia had understood well what it was all about - the fate of her husband, her children, that in the breast of this man, who sat there as impenetrable as a god and yet also like a weak, indecisive man in front of her, the wheels of fate were working and the lots of life were falling for her and her dear loved ones.

She looked up, searched with her eyes for the gaze of this man who, despite all fear, was so highly esteemed and dear to her, who was also a husband and family father, pushed the hand of her healthy arm a little forward, placed it lightly on the arm of the chair on which the right hand of the school Councilor was resting, and said quietly and urgently in a hot pleading tone: "Do not destroy a whole family, Mr. School Councilor! - Have a kindly forbearance and a little patience with him! - It will surely get better with him with God's merciful love after this incident!"

At that moment, footsteps were heard in the hallway and then in the living room. Teaching in the school on the ground floor had reached its end. Teacher Liebhardt, informed by his grandfather of the presence of the school Councilor, had hurried upstairs and now entered the room, his heart pounding, his face alternating between redness and paleness.

The school Councilor rose, greeted him seriously and measuredly, and said after a short pause: "Those are some nice stories, what I have to hear from you there - and (looking at the woman) must see, Mr. Liebhardt!"

But he already regretted the somewhat sharp, reproachful tone with which he had said that, for Mrs. Lydia changed color and covered her tear-damp face with her hand. And Liebhardt himself made such a deeply devastating, most sincerely saddened impression that the old connoisseur of human nature saw quite well that here judgment, sentence and punishment had already been passed in the fullest measure. He could not find many more words. Liebhardt, however, also covered his eyes and, turning away from the school Councilor, began to weep painfully.

At last the teacher, pulling himself together with all his might, brought out: "I do not hope, expect or ask for patience and forbearance for myself, Mr. School Councilor - but I ask for mercy for my family! I would like to ask Mr. School Councilor and the Supreme Authority for a probation period. I promise with everything what is still a good force in me, that the time period will not be lost! I will drink no longer! I will cancel all clubs and societies in which I hold a board- or leadership position and resign my office and membership and have already taken the preparatory steps to this. And it shall be different and better with the help of heaven and my wife and all good people!"

With that, Liebhardt fervently and stormily seized the school Councilor's hand, squeezed and shook it, and cried out: "I promise you, Mr. School Councilor! I promise and swear it before God! I have passed through hellfires that have annealed and purified me during these days and nights while my wife was hovering between death and life. I know that I have sacrilegiously, criminally played with the values and goods of life, and in the frenzy of pleasure, have completely missed the purpose of existence on earth, the way of God, the way of eternity, and that I was close to becoming a murderer of my own soul, a murderer of my wife and my children! I want to turn back, Mr. School Councilor! I want to set out and return home to my loved ones!"

With these words, Liebhardt threw himself down in front of his wife's bed, clasped her hand and covered it with hot tears and kisses.

The school Councilor himself had to turn away and hide his intense emotion. He had heard and seen enough. His judgment and decision were firm. He indeed did not speak out further, in order not to anticipate the decision of the higher authority. But he calmly, firmly, and consolingly reached out his hand to Mrs. Lydia in parting, encouraged her, wished her a speedy recovery of health, and then allowed Liebhardt to escort him down the stairs and out of the house.

"Just only continue calmly in the school, until the decision of the supreme authority comes. I hope and think that your request for probation will be considered. You will resign from the clubs as soon as possible and report to me as soon as it is completed."

"Certainly, certainly, Mr. School Councilor!" - said Liebhardt eagerly.

With that, the two said goodbye. The school Councilor went to the "Traube" for a refreshment. Then he drove home in a small rural vehicle, deeply immersed in the mysteries, errors and confusions of the human breast. A sigh escaped him at the thought of the weakness, the eternal falling, rising and falling again of man, the uncanny power of evil, the so-called sin and guilt of sin. And he wondered whether teacher Liebhardt, who had sworn improvement so hotly and fervently, would find in himself the strength to overcome the hopeless inclination that had been kindled in him and nurtured for years.

His wife, the good Mrs. School Councilor, heard with the greatest participation the course and result of the examination from her returned husband. The knowledgeable soul said: "He cannot do it by himself! - Only One can help - Whom we want to ask - JESUS!"

## Chapter 15

Yes, that is how it then also was. The implementation of these good so hotly and fervently conceived resolutions was not possible even for such a heavily tried man as Liebhardt without help from above. And this help could only be obtained through the heartfelt prayers of all the faithful ones standing around the endangered one.

The powers of darkness also were definitely not quiet and idle. - What had Sauerbrot, the secret witness of all these events, yet gone through in passionate sympathy with what had happened since the arrival of the school Councilor at the teacher's house! Of course, he had not attained any knowledge of the conversation with the mayor. Sauerbrot's field of vision did not extend so far that he could have watched over everything that was happening in the village from his usual place of residence in the schoolhouse, or also could have co-sensed it. Such a far-reaching ability only the higher spirits possess even in the hereafter. Admittedly, he felt as if the school Councilor must be on the way; and so he had been highly delighted, but not actually surprised, when the man really appeared in the schoolhouse.

Initially, he was also not dissatisfied with the conversation that was beginning to take place in the bedroom between the school Councilor and Lydia. But then, when he saw the school Councilor becoming soft and compassionate, and fully when Liebhardt came and gave his confessions and his resolutions as well as his deadline application with success "to the best", then Sauerbrot was plunged into a blinding rage.

"What!? Should this one also go astray!? Should this school Councilor also be outwitted as a fool!? Right, the husband's tears and oaths and the wife's silent sighs seemed to have an effect on the old donkey! That was to drive one out of one's skin! - Such a scandal! - Such a camel of a school Councilor! Such an embarrassment of an authority!

Yes, what else could be done!? Should he clear the field? thought Sauerbrot, and leave this clan to themselves!? No! Never ever! Especially not now! - The probationary period was still there! Liebhardt had proposed only good intentions yet. He was indeed still the old, weak man! Much could still be accomplished there, yes, only now could the main devastating blow be executed! Because if the teacher fell even once in this probationary period, then everything, the whole game, would be lost for him forever. Then he could wrap up and look for his bread on the street with his family.

So he began spying with greater eagerness and more emphatically than ever after every weak minute, every impulse, to penetrate into every crack of the soul, wherever the essence of the hated man appeared accessible to temptation - thus Sauerbrot considered the situation and that was his sense and his goal for the coming time. For this he also inflamed all those sinister fellows who had rushed to his aid for the great atrocity in the parish fair night.

This gang, too, continued to take a lively interest in the fortunes of the schoolhouse. How would this fine, splendid stroke, which they had undertaken there in the merry, hearty festive mood with each other, turn out!? Would it bear beautiful fruit for hell!? Would one inflict a right blow to these head-hanging heaven aspirants, to these hypocritical God-followers?! - Yes, they wanted to cooperate strongly and unanimously, that this history would come to a good goal. And that indeed the simple-minded teacher, in his pompously stipulated probatory period, would come to the right ways, i.e. the most brilliant deviations, which would inevitably bring about his fall - that was what they now wanted to push through with all their united might! Here was indeed a most beautiful opportunity to bring a whole family to the great prince of darkness!

In this spirit, and with this purpose and aim, the wicked gang - after the school Councilor had taken his leave - soon entered the teacher's house with bustling zeal, and took up their abode with Sauerbrot in that chamber in the basement from which they hoped to best keep an eye on their victim and to get him safely into their full power.

But the good spirits and angels of God were also on the plan, because where hell is active with its treacherous attacks, there is also the other side, the Divine army of light, alert and active. Yes, when people seek God's help in trusting prayer and in tireless love, there the powers of the heavens become all the more powerful and prepare delight and victory for those who are of good will.

Also in the schoolhouse, these good God powers were not missing. Lydia and her grandfather suspected what kind of battle erupted in the invisible world for their beloved husband and son. The grandfather also looked with the eyes of his spiritual sight at the enormously expanded, raven-black swarm that had joined the unfortunate Sauerbrot and surrounded him like a cloud. He revealed it to Lydia, and they resolved to stand together unceasingly and imploringly, calling down the help of Heaven against these fiends, these invaders and besiegers.

The prayer of these two pure people of love then had a great echo in the upper spheres. Especially Lydia, who lay in bed suffering silently, bearing her bodily bondage with tranquility and peace, and who had returned the adversity done to her with so much holy, steadfast love, was looked upon from the heavens with great grace. Yes, around this heart, around this forgiving, trusting and devoted woman, who looked up to the ruler of destiny full of faith, the highest angels stood with flaming swords. Nothing evil was allowed to approach her in a harmful way. And also to the loved ones she carried on a pleading heart, should receive advice, help and strength. For even though God's wise providence and mercy are infinite and always prevail over all beings, thus He gladly pours out the whole cornucopia of His grace on the needy at the right time for the sake of the special love of His true children.

And what seemed to be impossible with man, became possible in this case with God and in God. In spite of the wild, threatening cloud of darkness under the roof of his house, it was given to the teacher Liebhardt, predisposed with a weak nature, to walk steadfastly, and without derailment and defeat, the prescribed path of sobriety and Divine order. He cancelled on all his clubs and societies. This indeed well stirred up a storm. The chairmen and committee members were dismayed and partly angry and beside themselves. Bang and fall to let one down like that! Even now before Christmas and New Year! No, that could not and might not be! The teacher had to consider this again! He should nevertheless let some time pass over the unpleasant occurrence. This water will also run down the stream. And in half a year, no-one will think about the vinous, stupid thing anymore.

No, Liebhardt did not cave in to all these and similar speeches. He relentlessly stuck to his refusal and resigned from all those so-called social circles. Not as if all such things and undertakings violated the better order of life he now recognized and were to be avoided by everyone; but for him they had become a danger and a source of ruin. And therefore, completely out with the root and - away with it. That was and remained - with the help from the heights - his attitude.

Most of the people in the village, especially the mayor, agreed with him completely and with joy. Yes, he owed it to his wife and children! And the renunciatory resignation from the old friend- and singing brother circles was also seen as a kind of atonement for the atrocity committed against his wife, yes, as a complete repayment of guilt. Nobody now allowed himself to speak of it in a gloating or judicial, judging manner. The matter was settled, the guilt was erased by this manly step, which visibly manifested a new sense and a new life outwardly.

A week after the visit of the school Councilor, a letter arrived from the school authorities, which had long been awaited by the teachers' spouses with trepidation, but also, in view of Moser's comforting words, with composure.

It contained a sharp warning to Liebhardt, drew his attention to the impropriety and impossibility of his way of life, held out the prospect of the most severe penalties in the event of a repetition, but concluded with the declaration that, in view of Liebhardt's other merits and achievements, the higher authority wished to refrain from further action for the time being and gave itself over to the hope that Liebhardt would let the incident serve as a warning and return to a life better suited to his official and family duties and his reputation.

With glowing shame this reprimand poured over the man humiliated before himself by his aberrations. But he was grateful that the school board had found these words and gave him credit with the insight, the will and the strength to change the direction of his life. This trust was not to be disappointed - Liebhardt took it upon himself with holiest earnestness from the bottom of his heart. And also for Lydia it was an incentive to envelop her husband even more than before with the spiritual field of the strength of her prayer.

And so the autumn passed and Advent approached. - In the schoolhouse reigned peace, tranquility and quiet happiness. The black mob had no power. The grandfather saw them contract and condense more and more as if into a ball, as if an icy cold clutched and froze them. Unfortunately there wasn't much more to do for them in this house after all. But they did not want to leave their post yet. Perhaps, they thought, there would be a good opportunity later. Persistence leads to the goal, and he who laughs last, laughs best. The teacher, when the Christmas- and New Year's festivities approached, or eventually even the carnival, would soften after all - one could not expect otherwise. Man remains man and especially most of all such a weakling!

But also these hopes and dreams of the black ones were not fulfilled, thank God. As the Christmas season approached, the teacher called the best singers of the village, as far as they were also serious, solid people, one evening to the schoolhouse and submitted to them the proposal to found a church choir, which was absent in the village until now and which should embellish the coming festivals and also otherwise bring noble, sacred choirs to the performance in the church throughout the year.

With this, everyone heartily gladly agreed. There was great joy that the teacher should put his good gifts in the service of such a beautiful, good cause. And right away that same evening, Liebhardt began practicing classical choral songs with the voices he knew well, by choosing the simplest tone pieces of the great masters to begin with.

Ah, now that was a whole different outcome of art care for people's hearts! Whereas in the earlier, secular singing rehearsals, a frivolous, superficial spirit had prevailed and had brought the leader a lot of trouble and some annoyance, but the participants no deeper lasting gain apart from fun, time-filling entertainment, leader and singers now took home a great inner enrichment and a lasting refreshment from these practice hours, aglow with celestial sounds, thoughts and sensations. These new vocal rehearsals, this close, living connection with the pure soul-life of great sound creators who were connected to the Eternal Source, had a gratifying, clarifying and invigorating effect on all thinking, wanting and striving of the week.

It was seen and felt: everything - also music and singing - can be done and practiced in two ways - in an unblessed or a blessed way, an anti-Divine or Divine way, a worldly or a heavenly way - depending on how the human being adjusts himself, depending on whether he allows the animal or the god in his breast to come to the fore and to speak. In itself, no thing and no action is evil or good. What matters, is only love that is inherent as the core power. If this is of an ungodly, hellishly selfish nature, then the work and its effect will also be evil and ruinous. If the love is of a Divine, selflessly pure nature, so the work becomes uplifting and blissful.

## Chapter 16

The founding of the church choir gave special pleasure to Pastor Loschmann as well as to his wife, who was a good singer and would have gladly joined right away, if only the relations between the rectory and the schoolhouse had been closer and better.

When, in the course of the last few weeks, the two of them had convinced themselves of how much the teacher Liebhardt regretted his former dissipated life and his misstep, and how serious he was about the new, better attitude, they felt quite sorry for having made so to speak a show of themselves before the authorities, after the disastrous events. Had he nothing better to do than to snitch on this erring human being to the superiors right away, and yet also in a covert, insincere and unmanly way!? Was not such behavior, such an ambush attack, which could result in the destruction of the whole family, also a kind of attempted murder, yes, by the coolly considered execution before the eyes of the eternal judge, the God of love, perhaps worse than the rash, sudden act of anger of the teacher in the heat and turbidity of the soul?!

His wife tried to comfort and justify the thus self-accusing Pastor. "You have only, and in the mildest and gentlest manner, fulfilled your official duty!" - she said. "Could you have known that the teacher would draw a lesson from what had happened, regret his licentious life and nature, and would set out to repent! At that time this was not to be known and assumed at all! For such drinkers are deeply and firmly rooted in their addictedness. And if they temporarily make better resolutions after great debauchery, thus they usually do not succeed in execution and perseverance, and at the next best opportunity they fall back again into their vice.

That it is really different with Liebhardt in this case, we indeed want to wish and hope most sincerely, but unfortunately we cannot know it for sure probably even today. And even less could one have said it at that time, when you went to the dean with the report of what was soon a universal matter anyway. According to the state of affair at the time, you simply had to act that way if you didn't want to make yourself guilty of laxity against your office!"

"I should have waited - should have - instead of listening to the word of man and the own voice of the blind worldly mind, asked for and listened to the voice of the heart, the voice from above!" - replied Loschmann. "Then I would not have become a braggart and judge of a weak and basically most pitiable confrere, whom the Lord now visibly helps so wonderfully, and whom HE has enlightened with clarity and equipped with power, that everyone must only wonder joyfully. We humans should always live more according to the heart, not according to the mind!"

Then we would also always be much more closely and blessedly connected with the heavenly powers and hosts, and would find our way through the earthly confusions more easily and cheerfully, and be able to encounter a much greater abundance of blessing at the goal."

Against this conviction, Mrs. Pastor Loschmann could not reply anything further to her husband. The experiences of the recent time had also made her question, opened up some subsoil of her own being more deeply and threw a new light into her thoughts and feelings. How do even the self-confident man, even most clever, most gifted man stand at any time so close to the abyss! Was it then not most necessary to reach again and again for the hand of Him Who had said: "I am the way, the truth and the life" - and Who had exemplified through and through only pure, tireless love and sacrifice to us humans!

Was it then not palpable - could any other truth and any other way lead to the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of the highest, all-embracing, no-one-judging love - than that very sacrificial, untiring, pure spirit, which had embodied Itself in the God-man Jesus of Nazareth so inexpressibly glorious in the most perfect fullness, to the people of this earth and to the angels and beings of all worlds for an incomparable, ravishing example!

Yes, the example of Jesus, who did not condemn the adulteress and beatified the thief - makes one think!

When the news spread that the teacher had called into being a singing choir to sing in the church, Pastor Loschmann, even before the teacher could give him a formal notice on the basis of the first discussion with the singers, went over to the school garden one afternoon, where he saw the spry, again cheerful man busy with gardening. He sat down with him in the arbor and opened his heart to him - that it depressed him so much to have been the braggart in the dean's office at that investigation time of the matter.

Liebhardt did not let the clergyman finish and said: "Dear Mr. Pastor, that was simply your official duty. And in truth, you have only done me a great service. As a result, School Councilor Moser came to me just at the time and in the right way, as it was good and necessary for me then, in order to completely clear my mind and help me reach a breakthrough. Things are often better directed from a higher point of view than we humans suspect and immediately comprehend while it happens. Only afterwards a light dawns on us and we understand that here and there, where we did not believe it, we were allowed to be an instrument of higher will."

"You look at what I have done very kindly!" - replied Pastor Loschmann. "But I am now very glad to finally have spoken to you and to have told you what is depressing me. The relationship between the rectory and the schoolhouse, in which I do not wish to see any cloudiness, now seems to me to be more clarified and the good relationship more consolidated again. And now, above all, I would also like to express my joy at the news that has come to my attention that you want to start a choir for church singing."

"With this" - said Liebhardt - "I actually wanted to come to you as soon as the matter proved feasible and offer you our participation in the coming Christmas festivities and also for the embellishment of the other church services - in the hope that in this form and for this purpose, musical performances would not be unwelcome to you."

"You are fulfilling a wish long cherished by me and especially by my wife! And my wife has instructed me to tell you that she would be happy to sing along with her quite good soprano voice, if you can still use her in addition to the already existing singers."

"Of course, with thousandfold pleasure!" - exclaimed Liebhardt. And so then Mrs. Pastor Loschmann became a member of the new choir and a student of Liebhardt. - The pastor, who admittedly did not have an outstanding voice, also participated - but more as a representative of the general good will of the people and as a manager of the business affairs of the choir. In this happy way, the relationship between the parsonage and the teachers' house gradually became a really close and cordial one.

At the beginning of December, when Lydia's injuries had healed almost completely without scars under the care of Doctor Winfried, the first excursion of the revived woman was to the parish house, whose inhabitants greeted and welcomed her with great joy. Now also a close family traffic arose between the houses. The childless Mrs. Pastor felt a warm love awakening in her for the pretty, well-behaved children of the teacher's family. What a delight it was then when the lively, warm young crowd came over to her and discussed their Christmas secrets with her, asking her for advice and help her in her work for the parents and other dear people.

Especially the eldest, now almost nine-year-old Bernhard, who in the aroused, lively manner of his father already displayed a strangely chivalrous nature, attracted Mrs. Pastor Loschmann's attention and affection. With peculiar pleasure she heard from teacher Liebhardt one day that this boy had given him with the grandfather's cane immediately after the crime at that time, the deserved punishment by a strong drubbing.

There she really had to laugh when the father still added how the beating had been a real refreshment for him in those terrible moments. For Mrs. Pastor herself, those cane strokes of the young hero on the back and head of his father were also somehow - she didn't really know why - a satisfaction. For this Liebhardt, this man, who charmed all women when he was really on fire, had really once to be taught a lesson as penance for his disturbance of the weak, female sex. Yes, little Bernhard, the young hero, had done right! And now all was well.

Mrs. Pastor Loschmann had also become more satisfied with her lot in so many other respects as a result of this favorable change of feelings, which had never been achieved in the earlier years of neighborly cohabitation. She was no longer so lonely. She could now talk heartily with Lydia, whose value she learned to appreciate more and more, about everything that moved her, and could also put so many a thing into action with her.

So the two women agreed to distribute Christmas presents in the rectory for the poor and for the old, infirm people in the village, and also decided to set up a kitchen for the sick for the whole winter. And this and similar things gave more and more cause and material for friendly living together and mutual harmony, blessed by the indestructible, genuine joy of charity.

But also in her husband, Pastor Loschmann, Mrs. Gertrud - as she let herself be called by Lydia - was allowed to discover new pleasing tendencies and facets. It was as if a tree, which had been somewhat barren for a long time, received new life through the supply of fresh water and sprouted new buds, new little branches, to wrap itself in a fresh green.



Whereas until then the praise and extolment of faith had been by far the main thing, indeed almost the only theme, in Pastor Loschmann's sermons, now the word "love" became more prominent. It had finally dawned on this man of theological books and concepts that Jesus' message to mankind was in truth a much simpler, plainer, but at the same time also more intimate and deed-happier than many learned Christians thought.

What then had the Savior said to the rich young man when he addressed him about the true, sure way of salvation with the question: "Rabbi, how do I obtain eternal life?" - The great, Divine master of life on this earth as well as the life on the other side had not told him anything about dogmas and points of confession. He had not even demanded faith in Jesus Christ, the One sent by God, and in His blood to be shed on the cross - but only replied to the questioner: "Keep the commandments!" - And when the earthly rich young man asked further: Lord, what commandments?! - the Savior and Redeemer of the world called the eternal basic law of the Kingdom of God: "Love your neighbor as yourself! - and all special commandments derived from it!"

So love was what mattered if one wanted to get to God and eternal life! For God, the All-Creator and All-Preserver, is in His actual, deepest basic being love Himself and nothing but love, love-wisdom and love-power! And only he who is and remains in love is and remains in God and God him. But how should a man love God whom he does not see?! - Thus, as Pastor Loschmann felt and thought, love is not only the fruit but also the root of genuine, true faith. Only a loving heart can grasp and comprehend the deeper faith truths of God at all. For it does not only apply what a great poet pronounced: "You resemble the spirit you comprehend!" It is also true vice versa: "you comprehend only the spirit you resemble!" - And so Jesus had clearly and truly pronounced and promised: "He who keeps My commandments of humility and love, it is he who loves Me.... to him I will reveal Myself!" (John 14:21)

Therefore, in the future, Pastor Loschmann wanted to preach love unto ones neighbor as the gateway and first step to the right beneficent faith and, of course, to exemplify it himself more actively and better than before: charity in all the forms offered by marriage, the family, professional, economic and popular life! Then Jesus, the Lord, would come and help him to plant the right beliefs in the hearts of his congregation, which lead ever higher into the kingdom of Divine knowledge. This true, genuine basic thought of the Gospel also removed from Pastor Loschmann's heart all hardness and impatience against those who were cognitively different and immature in their faith.

If one sees people only by the way of active love, then, he now thought, according to the promise of the Scriptures, everything else - even the highest knowledge of faith - would already fall before such striving at the right time of maturity of the soul! This great point of view made him confident and calm.

And so, in this and other ways, the turnaround of teacher Liebhardt unfolded in the course of time it's various effects more and more to the benefit of the entire community.

How rich and happy felt the secret prayers, Lydia and the grandfather, when they saw this transformation. And how blessedly they entered the sacred circle of the Christmas days.

*The light shines in the darkness!* (John 1:5) These words obviously became truth through the painful, but still so wise and loving guidances - despite the efforts of dark forces!

## Chapter 17

There has probably never before been such a joyful, intimate and thankful Christmas in the schoolhouse.

After the exceedingly blessed giving of presents to the children, the whole family went to the church for the evening celebration. Two lovingly decorated fir trees, reaching almost to the ceiling, were resplendent in light decorations to the left and right of the altar. The church was crowded. Liebhardt played the organ. And Pastor Loschmann spoke warmly and to the heart.

Then the choir rose in the gallery and sang in a heavenly manner. Singing like angels, the women's voices soared above the powerful pitches of the men. The whole congregation listened enraptured to the message from the heights, which descended with majestic sounds as if from supernatural spheres.

Yes, this was a true food for the hearts and minds! One could catch a glimpse of an eternal, blessed kingdom, sublime above the confused, desolate everyday life of this earth! Truly, up there, in the light - there had to dwell a great God, a Creator and Father, Who was only love - nothing but love Who and wanted only love from us!

*Glory to God in the highest  
and peace on earth!*

Thus the angels once promised it - and thus it also sounded from the organ down from the mouth and the heart of all those men and women, who as if by a higher power, had moved from the dust of earthly life here into the sublime sphere of existence.

And after the service, the congregation outside the church - on the wide square in the middle of the village - thankfully closed this solemn celebration under the twinkling stars with the communal singing of the eternal song of the silent, holy night, resounding like a testimony in all alleys and corners.

At that very hour, however, just as the Christmas carol was being sung by the entire congregation in the church square under the direction of teacher Liebhardt, a terrible thing happened in the schoolhouse.

While the birth of light was joyfully celebrated in front of the church in the open air, albeit in the dark of night, the power of darkness gathered in the teacher's house for one last wicked stroke of violence, concocted in irreconcilable hatred.

Grandfather Liebhardt had stayed home alone that evening, as hard as it had been for him not to be able to go to the celebration with the family. He was confined to bed by a rather severe feverish cold and had again to deal quite laboriously with coughing and breathing.

When everything was gone and the whole house was empty of people except for the grandfather's little room, things began to stir suspiciously and came to life in the fruit chamber, which was Sauerbrot's and his comrades' place of residence. The sinister fellows had considered this hour suitable to finally give a proper, resounding expression to their long-pent-up atrocious wrath and vengefulness.

The old man, who had become the greatest stumbling block to them all and an object of wildest disgust - that they held him responsible for the effective countermoves of the good forces of fate - was to receive a crushing lesson for all time. Now, when he lay so alone in his little room up there and dozed off by the dim glow of a sick's light, the best thing to do was to attack him and, if possible, tie up his throat or squeeze out his wretched heart. He had to be brought around the corner, made cold without grace and mercy, so that at least in this way a right vexation and damage would be done to this house and with a strong fright the stupid festive joy would be spoiled - since it already seemed impossible to achieve no more true, hell-pleasing results under this roof.

When people would come home from the celebration and the old man was lying in bed, dead and cold and with a twisted neck - that had to get into their bones after all! And everyone would rightly reproach the relatives that a sick, old man should not be left alone at home, especially at Christmas.

So out of the cellar and up to the old man into the chamber! Grandfather Liebhardt had just read Luke's Christmas story with great difficulty, coughing and shortness of breath, but still with great heartfelt pleasure, and, covering the little bedside lamp again with a light cover, had reclined to reflect with folded hands on what he had read - when suddenly the parlor near the door was filled with dark shadows that abruptly gathered together. Liebhardt saw angry, glittering looks of hatred flashing down at him from this fiercely billowing cloud.

"Aha" - he thought - "there's the clan!" - His heart indeed did beat a little faster and harder, but why should he be afraid? Was he not in the hand of a higher One? Did not He dwell in his heart, Who had to command over all spirits, as well as all angels and worlds? Surely none of these nonsensical brothers could resist the name of Jesus! Thus, he quietly let the murderers gather their evil will and unfold their machinations and only waited attentively to see what would happen.

First, the electric light went out with one blow. The conspirators cut off the electricity with their will. Then they approached his bed with an eerie roar that sounded like the clang of weapons and ocean waves, and with strange, sharp whistling sounds, and suddenly hung over the old man in the uncertain, dim moonlight that penetrated through the window, like a huge bird of prey with meter-long spread wings, fiery eyes, sharp, powerful beak and terrible clutches. Now Liebhardt finally let out a cry of dismay, but kept his gaze fixed sharply and firmly on the monster and crossed his hands over his chest in prayer.

Then the bird, resembling a supernaturally large, black-brown eagle or vulture with flashing eyes, slowly descended lower and lower on him. And now, with a palpable jerk, he sat down with his ice-cold clutches on the crossed hands of the old man. The terrible beak opened, and out of a glowing maw came a forked, furiously curled tongue.

And a voice like sprays of flame cried out: "Confess, O man, that you are a sinner to the prince of this world, from whom you were begotten and born, and whom you have denied and forsaken, for the sake of Him who never and nowhere had any power to save you in the hour of need! Confess that you are an apostate, a traitor and an evildoer! And plead for a lenient punishment and death! For your hour has come!"

This is how this voice sounded. And at the same time the giant eagle dug its clutches deeper and deeper into the hands and chest of the old man, who was struggling to breathe. The beak seemed to strike a mighty, deadly blow in the next moment, tearing the throbbing heart from the victim's body.

Then the tortured man spoke with gasping but fearless voice: "Jesus, the Eternal Love, is victor!"

The beast cawed terribly, flapped its wings and cried: "Don't mention that hated name anymore, unfortunate one!!!"

But the old man calmly repeated: "Victor in time and eternity is the Divine Love in Jesus Christ, the Crucified!"

Then the animal made a huge crack. It wanted to take the man's heart, but its claws and clutches reached as if through the air. No power was given to him over this strong believer. And with a grim, howling roar and hissing, the infernal rabble, which had gathered to form the terrifying shape of this murderous bird, rushed away and fled to the cellar room in the basement which it had occupied as its base quarters.

The stuffy smell that had filled the old man's room during the presence of the wicked brood, turned into a wonderful scent of roses. The light came on again and spread its dim, peaceful glow. And the old man lay there quietly with folded hands and closed eyelids. He breathed easily and happily and a smile played around his features. He knew that this was the last attempt of this unfortunate horde. Now they had enough in this house!

And indeed, down in the basement, things were grim. The blacks unanimously accused the trembling and quivering soul of the unfortunate Sauerbrot that he was to blame for all the misfortune. Why had he even lured them into this cursed house and promised them wonder what for a booty! Nothing had come of it, because he, Sauerbrot himself, was a sissy, a drip, a half traitor, basically also such a darned brother of God, who had only wanted to hold them here and make them harmless. "Down with him to the lowest hell!" - they shouted. And in doing so, they pounced on the miserably howling soul and tore him with them in a frenzied whirl into the abyss of the depths.

Thus the house of the teacher Liebhardt became free from this evil inhabitants. When the family returned from the celebration with uplifted hearts, they found their home cleansed of everything by heavenly powers. And so it remained henceforth.

That night, invisible to the eyes of men, but palpable to the minds of all the inhabitants, that One entered this temple with His host, whom the old Liebhardt had called the Victor in time and eternity and whose name was and is: Council, Power, Father from eternity and Prince of Peace.

## Chapter 18

Only one could not be helped so quickly by the triumphant love, because there was too much of Cain's defiance in him - that unfortunate one whom the black mob had dragged with them into the lowest depth of darkness. But also for him the holiest Ruler, Completer and Redeemer knew ways and means.

In those deep, dark realms of midnight, Sauerbrot's soul lost the vision he had temporarily been given for the earthly world. And he saw and felt itself again merely in his own, hellish fantasy-world. Here, in the terrible vengeful anger that dominated him through and through, there was nothing more for him to see and feel but anger and revenge. The whole world, developing in his inner imagination, was for him full of just such very similar spirits, bristling only with anger, revenge, hatred, a sense of violence and the most merciless cruelty, with which Sauerbrot's I had to fight a continuing, truly infernal battle day and night without rest and peace and to fight it out to apparent mutual annihilation.

Oh how burned this spiritual hell created by one's own malice and spite! How did Sauerbrot's soul have to experience in and on itself how terrible, how devastating in their last dimensions and effects these characteristics are, which he had so self-lovingly upheld, nurtured and cared for in himself all his life! Was there no salvation, was there no end, no goal and prospect to be found?

Yes, of course there was a way out, a rescue! Also in Sauerbrot's soul lived a "worm that does not die" - or better said, a spark that eternally never goes out! It was that Divine breath, which once the Creator had breathed from His holiest innermost into the soul of the first man, formed from the finest life elements of the earth, and by which Adam's soul had become a "living soul". Such a breath of God, directly from the purest essence of God, has every man in his soul as the innermost focus, as the main life-ground power, as the secret builder, director, purifier and perfecter. - And so it was also with Sauerbrot.

The soul, instead of nourishing this Divine spiritual spark with its true life food, the holy fire of love for God and neighbor, can also let it starve and wither and fill it up with the murky earthly floods of selfishness and pride. The spark, which has to grant the soul its holy freedom of will on the way of experience of the earthly school and trial life, will put up with all this for a long time - so that the soul gets to taste the hard consequences of the self-power and the bitter yeast of the chalice of self-love by its own fault. But the soul cannot grieve to death, torment out or destroy the eternally glowing spark of God. And just then, when in the soul through its own folly and wickedness all its own light is extinguished and complete darkness envelops it, then shines to it, as the only help and salvation, the indestructible light of this spirit and speaks his voice to it warning, admonishing and light-bringing words.

Blessed is the soul which, in the flames and torments of the self-prepared spiritual purgatory, finally listens to this voice and follows this inner saving light!

Unfortunately, this quiet, inner light is not enough for most people. And to such souls, the Godhead must send special messengers of the highest and purest love, who can and will dare to approach such unhappy beings in the lowest, most devilish hell and bring them the gospel of the heavens as the way to better conditions.

And so it was also the case with Sauerbrot. He could not believe the tender, inner warning and admonishing voice of his spirit spark. He found no confidence in the spirit of Divine love at the center of his heart, which he had maltreated, repressed and ridiculed throughout his life. And so it became necessary to send him a friend whom he had come to know as true and powerful. But where was this friend who was useful as a messenger of heaven for the unholy spirit?

According to God's wise, miraculous counsel, it was that very man who had so fearlessly, so downright superhumanly resisted him and his united comrades and had put them all to flight with a single word. In him there had to be helping, saving truth and a power and strength conquering all of hell! Yes, and that is why it pleased the almighty, all-wise and all-loving God to take old father Liebhardt gently and quietly to Himself on the second Christmas Day into the spiritual world!

The illness complaints of the old man, who had been mistreated by the unfortunate enemies, had indeed strangely diminished considerably during that night of consecration and had almost completely disappeared on the first festive day, so that the grandfather was allowed to get up in the afternoon and still spend several happy hours with his grandchildren.

But when he went to bed in the evening, tired of joy and love, he said to Lydia and his son: "Children, I am now allowed to go home soon - soon! Do not be grieved! I am so happy and joyful about it and look forward to taking off this earthly garment and to the heavenly Jerusalem as of the greatest feast day of my life! I won't wear this garment there anymore. Give all my possessions to the poor! And if tomorrow I am no longer among you, remember that over there, I love you all forever, and grant me the light and nearness of my Savior!"

Son and daughter, of course, did not want to accept their father's prophecy. But it did not help. In the morning, the old, frail, almost child-weight man lay passed away in bed and never again opened the eyes of his body for this earth. To the bereaved ones, it was a bitter, heavy loss.

But the grief transformed into a confident certainty. They knew: of this faithful servant, little earthly had remained in the coffin and had been handed over to the earth at the burial which took place two days later. Spirit and soul, and probably most of the body that had been purified, had entered into the glory of the Lord.

And indeed, Father Liebhardt had a wonderful experience at his homecoming. He was not, like Sauerbrot, when the angel of death carried out the ransom, taken downward into uncertain, dark depths - he was carried upward, toward an indescribable light. Was it angels lifting him up? Did he himself float by his own power that came alive in him? He would not have been able to tell.

But above - above white, endlessly waving, snowy shining clouds, in blue heights of the sky, surrounded by a wide, white, rosy and golden shining wreath of innumerable angels, stood that ONE, as Liebhardt was used to see him according to his ideas, in a garment of the softest shining, delightful brightness.

That ONE and ONLY, for Whom all his love had ever been, held out both hands to him with a smile whose mildness might melt mountains, and said to him, "Thou hast been faithful over little; thou shalt be set over great things!" With these words, the redeeming Savior drew him, the man born in sin, up to Himself and let him taste all the glory of His love.

With shivers of the deepest delight, the blessed one was allowed to feel and experience what it means to be a child of the Most High.

The heavens opened up above him. He saw the transfigured light worlds of the angels. Also into the deeper situated spheres of the spirit world, his vision opened. From the paradises, those realms of the better souls ascending to the heavens, so many a dear relative and friend who had already passed over to the realm of the spirits met him and greeted him with the great joy of reunion. To them, these inhabitants of paradise, the Lord referred him.

In the company of a gloriously shining angel, the wonderfully refreshed one moved into unspeakably festive rooms, where innumerable crowds of blessed spirits listened to the words of the great angel. The eloquent mouth spoke of the love of God the Father. And a stream of delight of heavenly love went out in floods from the high messenger - friend Liebhardt, the son of the barren earth, felt as if drunken in this fullness of Divine light. As if dreaming, he let himself be led out of the halls of the temple, after the angel had concluded his instructive and inspiring speech, and with renewed amazement he arrived in a garden that stretched out seemingly endlessly on a gentle slope, and in which he was confronted by glories of a kind never before seen.

There were shimmering avenues, lined on either side by tall, shady trees, like the cedars he had once seen in pictures in earthly life. There were narrow paths leading into secluded groves or across laughing, flowery meadows to brightly shimmering lakes full of peace and heavenly silence and consecration. O how blissfully did the rescued fare on these banks! How thankfully they sang and rejoiced to the Lord and Savior who brought them here through night and hardship and earthly turmoil!

This rejoicing and thanksgiving also took hold of the pilgrim Liebhardt and filled him completely. *"Only Jesus,! Only Jesus!"* That was his heart's only feeling and only thought. And in this feeling he could have embraced all these brothers and sisters whom he saw here, pulled them to his heart and let them taste the whole fullness of his blissfully glowing love.

His gaze also wandered into the spheres of the less fortunate spirits, not so close to God, lying far outside from his Eden hill like in a dusky haze. He was instructed about the meaning of these Middle Kingdom areas of the still unbelieving and Godless souls and he could see from a higher place of the garden into the farthest depth and distance, also the nightly black spheres of hell or midnight, overlaid as if by dark smoke, now and then also flashing a red, volcanic glow, and the self-prepared torment of those beings of hatred and contempt of everything Divine and heavenly, was explained to him.

O this sight - this commemoration of the lost and erring, who were nevertheless also creatures and children of the one, all-loving God and Father and consequently brothers and sisters of the blessed - this cut deeply into the heart of the kind-hearted inhabitant of paradise. That was to him a strong turbidity in this lightful garden and life! Especially since he knew down there, in those hazy Middle Kingdom districts and under the infernal, pitch-black smoke of the midnight cloud, so many a soul from his own circles of kinship and friendship from the earthly lifetimes!

There, yes, there in the dark, infernal chimney must be also Sauerbrot, the unfortunate one! - What was with his soul!!? O God - in what depths did he dwell and suffer with his anger and hatred! Liebhardt's mind turned away depressed from this picture of terrible aberration and stubbornly self-prepared torment and pondered whether there was no possibility to break through this judgment of God, to carry grace also there and to bring the light of the heavens, the message of the eternal, all-embracing and all-merciful love also to those very least and very poorest. Should the gulf between here and there - between "Abraham" and the "world wastrel" - as it was indeed pronounced in the parable of the Lord, really be "insurmountable" and unbridgeable? Should there be then any limits to Divine mercy here - in the realm of Eternal Love?

Oh, Liebhardt could no longer believe it in the pure, Divine light of his blissful state! - The One, the Only One, who had met him so infinitely mildly and kindly after his homecoming at the blessed ascent above the earthly clouds - this royal Eternal Love embodied in Jesus the Redeemer of all beings - this Father of eternity and infinity - this Council, Victor and Prince of Peace could not leave creatures and beings of His Creator's hand and His Divine heart, which He Himself formed according to His image, in eternal torment and damnation for all times - because in their imperfection and blindness they did not recognize Him in His true, Divine-Fatherly nature and out of ignorance, despised and hated Him.

*No, no!* - Now that he had seen the face of Eternal Love in the immeasurable kindness of Jesus and had tasted the bliss of paradise, this absolutely no longer seemed credible and true to the warm-hearted Liebhardt. This was simply not possible - that mercy was limited by an irreconcilable resentment of the wounded holiness of God!

Didn't then Jesus reconcile *everything* on Golgotha? - Had He not bridged the whole abyss between heaven and hell - made a new path for every repentant and penitent sinner - whether he still dwelt on earth or sought his maturity and perfection in the spiritual hereafter!?

"Behold, I make *all things* new!" (Rev 21:5) - *All* - the Lord had spoken. And His last word on the cross beam had been, "*It is accomplished!*" (John 19:30) Yes, accomplished the atonement and the paving of the way for all who wanted to follow Him, whether there or here in earthly or spiritual life, in humility and in love.

Only the following in His track, the good will, the taking up of the cross, the humility and the selfless, untiring love, which we see in Him, the great Atoner, Pathfinder and Redeemer - this was the condition of forgiveness, of deliverance from the bonds and torments of judgment, and the thing to be fulfilled by man to gain eternal salvation! This truth, in its unlimited significance for time and eternity, for earthly as well as for spiritual life, became clearer and clearer to Liebhardt's pensive, inquiring and observing mind. It was as if an inner voice spoke to him and illuminated to him this question from all sides.

And what an indescribable delight it was for him when, after what seemed to him like almost a year's time which he had spent with the Blessed in the Garden of Paradise, the great angel came again and, speaking once more in the high hall, confirmed the views which Liebhardt had formed about eternal damnation and the unlimited mercy of the Father.



Loudly and clearly, with a raised voice and fervent ardor, the high messenger said that the eternal love of the Father has no limits and that every sinner is eternally wretched and damned only as long as his self-importance and selfishness separate him from God and drive him into an agonizing distance from God.

Oh, were those redeeming, liberating, refreshing words! - How could the angel with overflowing mouth and tears of fervor explain how the Father's love for ever and again goes out into all spaces of creation to search for the lost and to bring back everything that can be redeemed on the world bodies, the suns and the earths, on their animated surfaces as well as in their bright, spiritual spheres or also in their dark interior and bring it to the freedom and glory of the children of God. To free all creatures from their groaning and to mature to heavenly perfection in the Divine-Good - that is the goal of the Eternal Love! And Jesus, the Father, the good Shepherd pursues His will and holy plan of creation everywhere and always! And there are no limits to His Divine mercy and power! Everything is still brought home and to their destination - even from the hell fire!!! There will be no more banished! And before Him, the All-Benevolent and Almighty, all knees will yet bow in showers of humility and love!!

O how inflamed were the heart of our pilgrim at such words of the angel! How the longing desire glowed in him to descend into those deep, dark spheres in the distance, into those mountains of night and smoke, among whom, with so many, also Sauerbrot languished - and to bring them this glorious, this inexhaustibly comforting message of the highest heavens!

He fell at the angel's feet, clasping his knees in tears and silent prayer. But the latter gently lifted him up, drew him to his bosom and led the transfigured one out of the garden of paradise up to a new, higher level of the spiritual world.

## Chapter 19

To Liebhardt's spirit, purified in the paradisiacal realms, heaven now opened up in its endless stages of perfection and bliss. The more the new citizen was enlightened by the singular feeling of love for Jesus and all God-created beings, the higher he climbed into an unspeakably glorious light of recognition, in which the nature and workings of God and His sublime angelic hosts opened up to him ever more purely and fully. And finally, after some time full of exuberant impressions, he was allowed to approach the holiest realm, that very highest heaven of love, in which Jesus, the Lord and Father Himself, has His dwelling among His perfected children and from where He overlooks the whole creation, the whole infinity, and rules its life.

Here the Lord met the now most blessedly matured spirit, who had once borne the name Liebhardt during his earthly wanderings, again - simple and plain, like a family father in his home, welcomed him with a new heavenly name as a friend and brother and led him into that city of golden gates, which is called the Heavenly Jerusalem.

An unspeakable wonder and amazement filled our blessed friend's heart. How was he worthy of such grace and glory? Ah, that was too much - too much! But the Lord, at the head of many angels and perfected children, led him into His house, which stood there in the midst of the Eternal City.

After He had fed him there most deliciously with a meal celebrated with numerous heavenly guests, the Lord came to him and addressed the words to the humbly contrite one:

"My son and brother! I perceive a burning ember in your heart that does not let you come to rest even in this house of peace. You are a true, true glutton of heavenly love and bliss and want to share it with all - all souls, even the most discarded ones. So then, I must let you go from My side, My beloved friend! Carry you My glory and My mercy's fame and reputation into those utter darknesses where there prevails howling and gnashing of teeth. And go seek your brother, after whom your heart aims and burns. And lead that poorest, according to his weak powers, from step to step up to brighter heights of knowledge and life! Angels will accompany you and stand by you with advice and action.

Thus, the faithful, loving servant and now angel of God, through the humble hot spark of mercy in his heart, became a messenger and tool of the Lord in the depths of hell.

It was not easy to get close to Sauerbrot's flame-spitting spirit of anger and hatred. But the high angel who, together with a younger companion was given to the messenger as a guide, soon found him - torn to pieces and bleeding from a thousand wounds - lying like a hunted deer in a night-black, rocky mountain cleft, surrounded by enemies who were burning to finish him off. This was a gloomy, hellish pit, not a place on earth or another heavenly body.

Rather, this whole, frightening and tormenting imaginary world of Sauerbrot with its wild, bloodthirsty inhabitants was a creation and spawn of the own, devilishly degenerated imagination of the unfortunate infernal spirit, who had to live with the hatred and vengeful comrades conjured up by himself, as it were, in a bad dreamworld. It seemed to him as if already eternities have passed in this utter darkness. What terrible things he had already been through! On a tablet as large as the sandy desert of the Sahara, it could be written how the creatures of his own imagination and fury had hounded, pursued and mauled him, even torn him into pieces that again and again reassembled themselves.

Now the worst of the enemy's fury was again imminent. He saw this from the glowing spikes and tongs that the black, horrific figures brought from all sides. A king, a conqueror he had wanted to be to them all. Now they had conspired against him again, to this time certainly tear him apart and destroy him, for all time! O why had he, Sauerbrot, brought all this on himself through his own fault!?

Already the hordes were plunging down from the heights of the rocks all around. Wielding their glistening tools, they circled him with deafening howls. Then suddenly a light glow, which quickly increased to a dazzling glow, filled the gap. And from the entrance, three men in shining white robes approached. With a single, shrill scream of terror and disgust, the hell-gang scattered and disappeared into the rocks and canyons as if the ground had swallowed them up.

Sauerbrot, the unlucky one, straightened up from the crevice in which he had crawled. He had recognized in one of the three men his former, most hated enemy, old Liebhardt. What did he want here? - Feast himself on his misery!? - Then the fieriest lightning of the lowest hell should strike him right away!!!

Oh no! For these three had not come in Jesus Christ's name! They wanted to free and save him from this tomb - and lead him towards a more light-filled, happier existence! Sauerbrot, still quite dazed from the unspeakable hardships and terrors he had endured, listened as if in a dream to the good, comforting, hopeful words that flowed like balm from the lips of the three messengers of God. Can he then trust it all, believe it all? Also to him should still beckon a light, forgiveness, grace!? He then was condemned in time and eternity by that God Whom he had denied, disregarded and mocked on earth all his life and Whose servants and children he had persecuted!

He had convinced himself well in the spiritual world with fear and trembling of the existence and prevail of an omnipresent and omnipotent God. After all, the whole struggle in hell was aimed hourly at this one God Who on earth was often denied by men! And how often had Sauerbrot had to experience now in the spirit world how this Mighty-Powerful One victoriously beat back all attempts and storms of the underworld!

Yes, a God, a very mighty and powerful one, was not to be denied and disputed - that had become certain to him here in hell! - But could one make peace with Him whom one had denied as an earthly man and rejected and scorned beyond measure, in the hereafter? Could one ever still hope for His mercy!? Haven't he already in his early youth read in the Holy Scripture: "Woe to the wicked! Into the eternal fire of damnation with them!" (2 Peter 3:7) There was always only punishment and judgment to be expected - and therefore only eternal, deadly enmity between this God and hell!

About these erroneous thoughts, which flashed through the poor hell-dweller's mind like flames, the three men of light, however, enlightened the unhappy spirit with such convincing, warm-hearted words, that Sauerbrot had to feel that there is something real and true about it after all! Was it not better for him then to follow this well-meaning advice and climb out of this abyss with those who had come, this fiery volcano of night and torment, where only enemies forever circled around him? Or should he go for more eternities through such truly unheard-of torments of hell!? - Yes indeed, he had been, as the Scripture expresses it, in a truly eternal damnation. He had languished throughout time periods that seemed endless to him, in utter darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth! Shouldn't he then finally think better of it yet and turn back and make peace with the almighty God, whom he and the whole hell eternally never conquered after all?

The promotional words of the three heavenly messengers sounded too tempting! - Yes - good! - He wanted to try it! He wanted to trust the three messengers and let them lead him! - He even threw himself on his knees, raised his hands on the night-black floor of his hell for the first time in his lightless life to the much misjudged, mocked God, and cried out from his flames of fear and remorse, "Grace!!! - Mercy!!!"

"Grace!!! - Mercy!!!" - The rock walls seemed to echo it. The call continued into the depth of the earth's center, to the seat of the dark prince of the transient world and up to the height of the benevolent Creator and All-Father of eternity.

Then there was a thunderclap and the whole, terrifying underworld of the repentant sinner collapsed as if from an earthquake. Before his dismayed eyes, the carbon black, rigid rock walls sank. A flat land appeared. Still in twilight and completely bare, like a steppe or desert. Only a low, moss-like growth sprouted here and there. But still, the air was lighter. It was easier to breathe here. It was as if he had finally emerged from a burning mine shaft into the open, even though onto a stony ground.

Really - had the call for grace and mercy been able to do this!? - Had the great almighty God performed such miracles and destroyed the dungeon walls of the horrible hell!? So in the end one could indeed trust the messengers after all! And old Liebhardt was right then when he spoke today, as he had in his lifetime, of the great mercy of the mighty God! Ah, how this refreshing sigh of relief went through the whole being of the liberated prisoner of the underworld! He would have liked to fall around the neck of the redeemers.

But what now? - Was there safety here in these realms? - Was here then a possibility to rise further into happier spheres of light? In him who had been so terribly imprisoned and condemned for so long, a burning, insatiable desire for freedom, air and happiness in life now awoke. And he was ready to do anything he would be told - just to finally get to different, better circumstances and conditions of existence.

But the oldest and, as it seemed to him, most dignified of the three heavenly messengers spoke to him:

"Freedom and the air of life you have here now, and as a symbol of your better knowledge, a spring of pure water also flows and murmurs here from the rocky ground over the stony soil. But now you must by yourself create a higher, permanent happiness in life on the standpoint you have reached! See, here this still a rather meager, bare, life-poor area with meager soil on the hard rocky ground - it exactly resembles your inside. Your soul, your mind is also still such an uncultivated, rough wasteland and desert. And it has still need of revival and fruitfulness of your spiritual earth realm, just as much love, work and diligence as for the reclamation and cultivation of the ground and soil visible to you here.

But do not be afraid! Here this to you since a long time well known brother" - (at this the angel pointed to Father Liebhardt, who was very rejuvenated in his appearance) - "will be a faithful companion, advisor and helper to you. And under his loving guidance and care, with earnest diligence, you will soon succeed in preparing from this desert a flourishing, fruit-bearing garden and a familiar home, kindly blessed by the Father of Light!"

After these words, the dignified eldest took his leave with the accompanying younger angel, leaving only father Liebhardt with the somewhat disappointed Sauerbrot in the desert.

## Chapter 20

Ei! So stay here and hold out!?! - And to make this rocky desert a fruit land and a homestead - that was the heavenly Helper's counsel and will!?! - It would not have taken much for the man, who had barely escaped hell and was still very weak-minded, to fall back into his old resentment, doubt and anger; for to toil here in this wasteland, lonely and laborious, and to cultivate a rocky area, did not make sense or appeal to him at all.

But father Liebhardt, who now looked like a spry man in his forties, lent a hand in a cheerful and hopeful manner, took out a hoe and spade from a niche in the rock, which seemed to have been standing by for a long time, and immediately began while talking happily, to dig up the ground and pick out the stones, so that Sauerbrot himself finally felt a hearty desire to share this work with him.

Ah, that soon gave a nice thirst, this busy digging! And how tasty was the spring there! - Liebhardt also had a large bag of bread with him, which gave the busy workers refreshment and, no matter how much was taken from it, did not become empty. Besides these strengthening of the spiritual body, Father Liebhardt, however, also donated from his rich heart an abundance of enlightenments about all the many questions with which Sauerbrot now came to light with during work as well as during the breaks for recreation.

He taught him that with him, Sauerbrot, in the soil of his heart the main element, love, was missing until now. Love is the fundamental being of God and therefore also the fundamental force of all life. Where love is missing, there warmth and light are missing. And where there is no warmth and no light, there, according to general, well-known experience, no life can develop and sprout to height.

Yes, Sauerbrot had indeed experienced this all too abundantly in his existence so far! - Where had he ended up - without love? - In a hell devoid of all true, happy life! - That was already indisputably certain! - But that should and had to become completely different now!

With seeds, which Liebhardt pulled out of his hiking bag, they now sowed the cultivated area. And lo and behold - in a miraculous instant, where there had just been a stony desert, there waved a lovely, swelling, light-green field of seed. Shrubs sprouted and clothed the slopes with greenery. Young deciduous and fruit trees grew up. Yes, even the decoration of the flowers, the lovely dress of the meadow, was not lacking. And in the midst of this nascent paradise, Father Liebhardt began to lay the foundation wall for a cottage. With joyful eagerness, Sauerbrot helped to carry along the necessary stones, to work on them and to arrange one after the other for the sensibly thought out building.

Ah - hardly had a summer passed, according to Sauerbrot's feeling, when the lovely home already stood ready in the midst of a fertile, blooming oasis! - How had it all happened so quickly and happily? Yes, the heavenly love in the good friend's eye and being had a visible blessing!

When autumn arrived, they could harvest many fruits from the field and garden and from the bushes and store them in the small storage barn, which father Liebhardt had also built not far from the house for the sake of preservation.

But why then did he harvest and collect so much? - Them two certainly did not need that much! - That was indeed food for a whole crowd! - Also the cottage was actually much too big for two people!

"If only" - said Sauerbrot one day - "a few such poor wretches from the underworld would pass by here as well - quite a number of quite poor wretches! So that we could also give them something from our possessions and host and entertain them under our roof! - That is in fact what is still missing here in this corner!" Oh, for this first stirring of true love in the heart of the brother awakening to eternal life, Liebhardt had waited with fervent longing!

It was not long before Sauerbrot, who was digging up a new piece of land on the edge of the small estate and making it usable, hurried over in a state of great excitement. And already from afar he called out to the friend who was working in front of the house: "Two are coming! Two are coming! A woman and a young man! - Both of them, it seems to me, are exhausted to death!" He quickly took the jug made of clay by father Liebhardt, baked in the sun, and hurried to the spring for fresh water, while the announced ones approached and were received by Liebhardt and led into the cottage.

When Sauerbrot soon returned with the filled jug, the strangers were already sitting at the round table made of a beautiful stone slab. And when Sauerbrot first caught sight of them, he backed away and stared speechlessly at the appeared ones. How!?! - Wasn't that Martha? -His wife!?! - She, who had preceded him into eternity many years before!?

"Karl!" the woman then already also shouted and jumped up from her seat. - "Is it you?!" - My God, how did you you come here? - Do you still know me?!"

"Martha!!!!" - cried Sauerbrot, rushing toward the re-found one with open arms, joyfully pulling her to his chest. Never in his earthly life had he embraced his wife so tempestuously and sincerely. And tears of emotion and joy fell down the cheeks of both spouses because of such an unexpected, wonderful reunion.

"But whom have you here then?" - said Sauerbrot at last, looking at the young man who sat motionless at the table with an astonished, serious expression, and seemed to observe the meeting of the two with doubt and distrust. "Who this one is?" said Martha. - Don't you know - our son Albert!?"

"What!? Albert!?! - the runaway!?! - who left me and went to America - after you have hardly closed your eyes in earthly life! - What is he doing here? What is he doing in the spiritual realm over there?"

"O God" - Martha sighed, suddenly in tears - "he has given me bitter grief and heavy sorrows, which have left me no rest and no peace in the soul-kingdom. O, what have I endured for his sake! He has deprived me of my bliss!"

Indignantly, Sauerbrot looked at the wayward son.

"He did not find happiness over there in that foreign land" - Martha continued - "and in time he got into bad company. In the game he wanted to win what life denied him and work could not give him. And when luck did not favor him there either, he took recourse to violence.

With a companion, he lay in wait for the winner of the game and beat him down in the dark of night, robbing him of the cash he had with him. But the act did not remain hidden. The other companion, with whom he did not want to share his robbery, betrayed him to the judge. And so came our son - under the axe of the executioner! And had to breathe out his young life! O God, what was that for my heart - when I had to witness this fate of our child from the light in the spiritual world! - Angels and good spirits did indeed tell me that God allowed all this for wise reasons, to purify our son through experience. Also that God now continues with him in His kingdom of souls and that this is even better possible here than in the bad, earthly world.

But to me, all this was a weak, poor consolation. I couldn't believe it after things had gone so badly in the world for my son. And so I set out in sorrow and worry to seek him in the whole spirit world. Crying, the unhappy mother buried her face in her hands, deeply shaken by her experience. The witnesses remained saddened and silent. Then she continued, sobbing:

"Oh God, but how I felt there! All my peace, all light and my Savior I lost! In endless night I wandered through deserts. And darker and darker it became around me. And as much as I sent prayers to heaven, nothing showed up! No light! No angel, no good spirit came to me and led me to my child! Only images of horror beguiled me. Like in a heavy dream, I saw the son suffering the horrible torments of damnation in ever new hardships and dangers. Finally, finally, one day - I found him! Here, in this region, in front of the gates of hell! There he lay in a fiery desert, sweltering, near death, at an empty, dried-up well!

From a small bottle I had with me, I wet the unconscious one with the last drops. Then we went on and looked for a way out of this terrible region of horror and curse. But nowhere was a way out, nowhere showed a place where there was water, hope-green trees and hospitable spirits and huts. Already we both thought we would pine away and perish. There - thank God! - we saw today from the top of a sandy mountain this lovely garden, like a green island in the arid, waterless desert. Heavenly Father had heard my plea! And now here we are, with fervent thanksgiving, by Heaven's grace, escaping horror!"

Shocked, Sauerbrot and Liebhardt listened to this report of a woman who, in the excess of her motherly care, had left the order of faithful trust and had lost her way in the desert of self-reliance.

And, looking at the son, she continued: "With difficulty I brought this with fear and remorse tortured poorest one here." "I'm damned after all - I want to go to hell with the other gamblers and robber-murderers!" - was his constant word and only desire. And only by force, by not letting him off my hand, did I bring him here to this saving home!"

"Yes" - said the young man, rising from his seat - "and now let me go on! I am not made for such a bigot hermitage! - What then are you doing here also, father? You don't belong here either yet - but in the lowest hell! After all, you're the one who escorted me off to the fire lake! Why are you still hanging around here with the pious soul catcher in his dull desert hermitage with water and bread? - There the weather is about to come in! You, who rushed me to foreign lands, to death, live here comfortably! And I must wander without rest and quiet as a murderer, a Cain! And I must pound at the gates of hell - only to find a place where I have peace and quiet!?! - Away!! -

Off!! - Let me out of these scoundrel's quarters! - I must go to hell - I, a gambler, robber, fornicator and murderer! To hell!!!!"

## Chapter 21

"Listen, my son" - with these words Father Liebhardt approached the despairing sinner and discordant - "there is no 'must' in these rooms! Neither do you have to stay, nor do you have to go to hell - your free will alone determines your fate and destiny here in this world. If you want to flee to hell into the fires of your own bitter disposition - well, so go! Everything is free to you in the spiritual kingdom of our heavenly Father! - But consider that you can never never find anything else there far away from God but your own soul night's dark, restless horror. Never before has a spirit found light, life and peace in hell! That is certainly also clear to you!

But if you want light, rest, happiness, peace and life - then you must - as every child can tell you and prove - seek it there and turn to where such goods are to be found - where the great Source of light, truth, peace and life is! - Behold, here in this hut is a part - a small, tiny part of that great kingdom of the upper spheres of Divine light and heavenly love! - In the midst of the desert, at the gates of hell, is this little garden created by us with the eternal All-Father's help and out of His counsel. And how does this little patch of heaven, this little piece of green with the refreshing spring, give you a testimony of the Spirit of the great, united, holy Kingdom, which you unfortunate poorest want to flee like the plague! Come, stay with us and enjoy with us what heaven offers us! Never and nowhere will you find rest and peace - than in God's shelter and in the radiance of His love!"

"How can I, on whose hands is vice, murder, and blood, find peace with you!" - replied the young man gloomily, with a confused, unsteady look - "I am haunted by memories, by the ghosts of revenge! - There! Don't you see him, the slain friend! - There he stands at the edge of the garden - with the club in his fist!!! And behind him a whole pack of his companions! If I only lay down for a moment to rest, he comes sneaking up to slay me! Only in hell do I have peace from him - he does not dare to enter there! There I am safe from him!"

"My friend" - replied Father Liebhardt - "what you see there is only a delusion! - Go there with me! Convince yourself! - Look - I only wave my hand and it is gone - wiped away! - Forever - if you only believe what I tell you! - Behold, God our Lord is not a God of punishment and vengeance!

He is a God of the holiest love, Who even looked at Cain, who killed his brother Abel, with mercy and Who eternally ponders how He can still lead even the poorest, who transgressed against his neighbor, into the light and into the kingdom of love, also even perfect him into the image and even mature the murderer into a child, a being of pure love.

O believe me - just you - He wants to save you here and draw you from the desert, from the edge of the abyss to Himself in His heavenly light! He wants to make you free from fear and distress - make you pure and good and blessed!



- Yes, those whom He lifts and retrieves from the deepest depths - He looks especially at those - His Father's heart wants to carry them through night and horror to the most blissful enjoyment of light and to fill their hearts once with unspeakable gratitude at the destination. For he who has gone through deserts, night and hells - will one day feel all the more intensely how glorious God's mild nearness is with it's light and it's blessed life!

Come then, my son - look, that club man is gone, along with all his avenging spirits! The air is free and pure! And you feel only peace in all that lives here!"

"O God - truly!" said the young one, after he had convinced himself by taking several steps into the garden, that all his tormentors had really disappeared. "By heaven - the pack is gone! I am redeemed! ... Thanks, thank you, good man - whoever you are, Father hermit! - Your excommunication has worked! - If only I could now believe that even a robber-murderer can still find forgiveness in the hereafter! I am dead now after all! The executioner has cut off my head! But I am still alive! That is then what is called the hereafter!? And once one is here and has missed his life in the world - then it is over after all, then one is lost! There is still the Last Judgment and the trumpet of the great angels and the punishment of eternal damnation!? How is it supposed to be with me after that - and forgiveness and a beckoning blessed, eternal life! - For me there's only hell, only hell, hermit! That's what every Pastor says!"

"Albert!" - said Sauerbrot then, stepping closer to the son, who in the meantime had stood aside with his wife Martha in wordless wonder and awe. - "Listen! That is - thanks be to God the almighty and all-merciful - all fable and fairy tale, yes a black lie, what you say and what is claimed, written and slobbered - about an implacable, unforgiving God! I have learned and experienced it myself! He has brought me from the very thickest, darkest hell here into the light! And He will lift, guide and carry me even further in His endless grace and mercy! Believe it, Albert, believe it! He takes us sinners - out of the boiling, roaring hell He takes us! And has already taken us! And what people say of Him, of His relentless, merciless severity against the lightless separated ones - that is indeed all nonsense, it is all completely different! - Yes, yes - He is holy, exceedingly holy - and also strict in His order, which is indeed also necessary in this great, wide kingdom. But greater than His holiness, and wiser and more glorious than man's conceived, harsh judgments and punishments, is His boundless love and mercy, which still wants to ready and mature even the likes of us and to make us true citizens in His blessed kingdom!"

While Sauerbrot thus spoke with increasing, holy fire, his wife and also the son marveled over and over. - They saw how a strange light burst forth from the once so night-black soul-heart of their earthly husband and father. And the more enraptured he spoke, the more gloriously the whole figure of the fiery speaker was transposed into a radiant pink glow from his inner light. Was this still the hard, cold-hearted, poor egoist, who had once brought so much misfortune over the family and over his whole environment with his pitiable nature!?

'Great God' - thought Martha - 'a great, holy miracle has happened here - a masterpiece of the eternal love! Such a thing can only a very, very great and glorious God - a holy, exceedingly holy good, wise and powerful Father do! A Creator and Perfecter without ends and limits.'

How small, how poor, and how trivial seemed to her the little people who, according to their own soul's small standard, in such a case, as here with her husband, could only think of an eternal condemnation and an eternal, unmentionable punishment in hell! Here she saw something quite different: From an imperfect - one might well say - bad and apparently completely lost man, the heavenly Shepherd, God and Father had made a convert even in the hereafter, a fiery praiser of the eternal, Divine mercy, a worshipper of the glory of the Lord and a loving confrere in the kingdom of the angels!

"Out of stones God is able to create children for Abraham" (Matt 3:9) - these words, the meaning of which had so often seemed dark and unbelievable to Martha in the past, now came before her soul in a new, bright and blissful light. And in the exuberance of her emotion, she fell on her knees, raised her folded hands and cried out:

"Father, Father and God in heaven! Be merciful and gracious to me, too! O forgive, forgive that I have not relied on You alone, that I have not left everything to You and entrusted it to You! That I believed that even here in this realm to do it better than you! That I left Your heaven and in my foolish worry chased after the delusion of being able to take better care of my son!

Thank You for teaching me so deeply in this night and desert wandering, in which I recognized my powerlessness and my folly! And thank you that you have now also given me back the spouse whom I thought I had lost completely! There, too, I underestimated You and the greatness of Your love, mercy and power! But You have done it wonderfully and gloriously and have led [us] out! - God and Father, You are truly more glorious than we poor people can imagine! You are more glorious and mightier - yes and much, much holier in Your greatness, love and wisdom and power than the human mind can ever grasp and an angelic mouth can utter! To You all our thanks and all our love for ever!"

"Amen!" added Father Liebhardt and Sauerbrot, and led the likewise thoroughly shaken son Albert, who could find no words, from the garden back into the cottage and to the table.

## Chapter 22

Here in the peaceful rescue home of the two desert hermits, a simple meal, which the two of them put together from the stored supplies, was now to strengthen everyone. In plain bowls formed of dried clay, Liebhardt and Sauerbrot placed the good food in abundance before the blessed guests. With a glad heart they all took their seats. And father Liebhardt raised his hands and said:

"Come Lord Jesus, be our guest and in Your eternal love and grace, bless us with Your glorious, undeserved gifts! We poor are nothing without You and also have nothing without You! And You are eternally our one and only! Where You are not, there is misery and death. And where you draw near and stay, there is light and blessing! - We are Yours for ever! - Be You also ours!"

When father Liebhardt had spoken these words and all at the table had affirmed them with a hearty 'Amen' - suddenly there was light under the entrance of the hut. A voice sounded: "Behold, I am with you all days!" And in the door appeared a heavenly-glorious stature with a red robe, blue cloak and hands spread in blessing.

Liebhardt jumped up, rushed to his feet, and lay - before the others had even come to their senses - at the feet of the arrival. After a sudden cry of joyful recognition, he could only stammer: "My Jesus! My Lord! My Savior! My God! My Father!"

Then the others also jumped up from the table. But none of them dared to approach the Lord, Who was surrounded by the most tender light and Who stood before them in incomprehensible mildness, as if He were an old friend of the house. Then the Lord turned to Martha, who had shrunk back as if in hot guilt after the first joy: "My daughter, do you no longer know Me, the Friend of your soul, Whom you already sought in your prayers as a child and to Whom you pleaded so much as wife, spouse and mother!? - Behold, here I am at last in front of you! - And you shy away from Me?! - I have written your guilt in the sand, because after all it was love for your child that made you doubt and sin against Me, My love and My power! Behold, I make everything new and good! And mostly, yes almost always, in completely different ways and in completely different manner than people think. Only at the height of their perfection do they understand My ways and manners and are then all the more grateful and loving towards their Creator and Guide! - Come to My breast and receive strength, peace and power here for ever!"

Then Martha also rushed to the Father and buried her face at the holy Savior's breast with streams of tears of thanksgiving and wordless weeping. Overwhelming was her pain and remorse for having forsaken this Fatherheart even for a moment in her trust, and desecrated and saddened it by doubts! And how indescribably blissful was the delight of forgiveness, this feeling of peace and everlasting, deepest happiness at this breast!!! Yes - He - the One and Eternal - had saved her husband and son, while she had struggled, fainting and despairing! - Never, never again would she waver and give way! Eternally her thanks and her love should glow!

Then Sauerbrot and, behind him, his son also joined them, and they still could not really grasp the truth and reality of what had happened. **Jesus** - the Lord and Savior - the God and Creator of infinity - with them - with them under one roof!?! - No, that could not be! - A dream fooled them to plunge them all the deeper into the night of hell's torment after blissful hope and faith!!!

Then the Lord turned his heavenly face toward them. And from His deeply glowing Divine eyes, shining in unfathomable blue, a glance hit first Sauerbrot's, then the son's eyes and heart, that their innermost melted and a shell fell away and sank like a heavy dream into the sea of nothingness. Both the father and the son fell down on their knees. They still did not dare to rush to Him, the Lord, with their burden of sin.

But the Lord came to them, reached out His hands to them and said: "Arise, all of you! I have not come to judge, but to seek the lost and to set free and make blessed those who are bound and imprisoned! - Sit down with Me and strengthen yourselves with Me! - I am hungry from the great way I had to travel from My heavenly home to find you lost world-wanderers in the wilderness and desert. And I thirst for your love and the food your heart prepares for Me."

With that, the Lord sat down at the table in the simple little house with His blessed ones and ate the frugal meal with them. "Behold" - He said thereby - "I am not a distant, unapproachable God to you! Much closer am I to Mine at every hour of your eternal life than you can imagine; for I, the eternal, victorious Love, am everywhere, on earth as in heaven - even in hell I am!

Yes, there, where My weakest children are, in the abysses of night and horror - there I am closest and snatch with My spiritual arm many a one out of the burning fire, in order to make of him a lamp which carries God's self-experienced, holy message of love with mighty glow and brightest shine into the distance and makes it known to man and spirits.

Only then do many souls understand that God's love is really without limits, when they hear it from someone who himself suffered as a deeply fallen sinner in the fiery pit of the prince of hell, in hard agonies of remorse and was saved from distress and torment by the Shepherd's earnest seeking. - Yes, yes, so rejoice you also that the Shepherd have found you, and you the Shepherd! And never again let the bond of love break! The delusion, you use to say, is short, but the remorse long. But eternally blessed is and remains the happiness of the children who found their way home on the path of love!"

After that, the Lord rose, held His hand over each one once again with a deep gaze and said: "Follow Me in spirit! Never leave My holy order again, so I will not leave you orphaned. Eternal and infinite is My love to those who love and hold Me!"

After these words, striding to the door, the Lord disappeared from their midst - suddenly, as He had come. Father Liebhardt, however, who escorted Him out, uttered a shout of joyful amazement outside. What was that then? The whole garden was resplendent in the highest flora and far, far, as far as the eye could see, there was glory upon glory. A landscape of hills, forests, lakes and lovely dwellings stretched all around where before there had been desert. And temples rose here and there on mountain tops. An unspeakably blissful sun shone over the entire paradisiacal land. And it was to the highly astonished one in this area like at that time when he himself - at the hand of the angel - had stepped into that Eden garden, in which the light of bliss had become accessible to him for the first time.

Ah, was that a surprise for the others too! ... How did all this just come about? How could this happen? "

"This comes by the Lord's immeasurable grace all from ourselves, from our greater, inward love!" - declared Liebhardt. "It, which is a part of His Divine Being, conjures this spiritual world before our face as a reflection of our own soul! Like once the infernal underworld, like the desert and our self-created oasis - this paradise land is also a creation of our inward spirit, spread before our soul with Divine help!"

"Look" - he continued - "dear guests are already coming to the new big house! - Are they not those two angels who then led me to that dark place where we found the good friend in misery - and who showed us our place in the desert, where we finally found for our salvation what the heart desired!? - Ey, God salute, you dear, dear brothers!"

With that, the drunk-of-joy father Liebhardt embraced the high, light-shining guests. And after the two messengers of heaven had also greeted the other three inhabitants of the new homestead, they stepped closer before the house, from whose threshold one now enjoyed an exuberantly splendid view. And the elder said:

"Well, dear friends! After having been brought here by the Father's love and grace - look back at your way out of the depths! Look how the Lord and Master of life did let you mature spiritually!"

Look into your inward and see how He made you arise from dead, extinct germs of life of the fallen, great spirit of light! Knowing about your weakness and need, the Lord gave you a spark of His purest Divine light in your heart and let you walk according to the urges of your being, guiding you by the hand to His eternal goal. You have indeed stumbled and fallen many times and much in your weakness; but the patience of Eternal Love and His mercy helped you up again and again and guided you further through all the rocky parts. And now you are here - thanks to His ineffable grace!"

Then all, as they stood there in the blessed, heavenly radiant garden, fell on their knees and fervently thanked the Creator, Guide and eternally incomprehensibly kind Father. And father Liebhardt, glowing with gratitude at the side of the high angel, said: "What shall we do now? How can we show our gratitude and all our heart's love to Him?"

"It is up to you yourselves" - said the angel - "to dwell here in this truly heavenly beautiful home and to worship your Creator and God in thanksgiving and adoration - or to work with Him in the joy of industrious action in the great work of redemption and perfection of your brothers and sisters who still languish in the bonds of matter. - Whatever your heart urges you to - that will be and is your part!"

Then Sauerbrot, who until then had not uttered a sound in the most holy awe, opened his mouth and said: "If it is permitted, high messenger of our heavenly Father - what are our loved ones doing on the earthly world? Are they all on the good path? - That is our concern! We do well know that the God the Lord directs and guides everything in the best possible way, and yet our heart would like to dwell where our loved ones are - and also bring them something of this blessed light and life which so abundantly refreshes us here!"

"Well, well!" - replied the angel - "I'm happy to hear you say this! And know, I have waited for just that! - Yes, friends, this then may be your office, that you now descend into the valley of the earth as spirits of protection and blessing and watch over your loved ones who still walk in the heaviest earthly garment and want to pass through the darknesses of that world to the holy goal of our light. -

You brother" - the high angel turned to Liebhardt - "go before the others as a leader! Go to the schoolhouse in the friendly little village in the forest and surround your loved ones with good teachings, which you whisper into their hearts with a gentle voice as heavenly guidance! But do not force them in their will; do everything without compulsion, thus the Father's blessing will be over your actions. - Set out immediately! - My angel companion here, whom you also know, will administer your home above in the meantime and also faithfully guide you from this pure height in your new office.

With this, then, be committed to the care of our heavenly Father! - When you are tired of the difficult office of protection, then retire here to rest in this your homely home. The spirits and angels of God also need rest and quiet, just as the Lord Himself has a Sabbath in order to mature new thoughts and new strength in His innermost heart after great deeds of creation. - So also gather and strengthen yourselves after rich hours of activity up here in the heavenly light and let work and rest follow each other in wise exchange!"

When the high messenger had hardly spoken these words, he had disappeared as if by magic. The younger angel-companion, however, led the four new guardian spirits down to the schoolhouse in the remote forest village to replace the spiritual friends and guardians of the house who had been employed there until then.

### Chapter 23

How amazed they were to find everything so bright and blissful here in the old home of their loved ones. The earth air, of course, they felt as oppressive and heavy, about as a diver in the depths of the water feels the heaving weight of the wet element. Ah, that was a very strange feeling, here in the old earthly world - so tangibly close to everything - and yet no longer in the material, visible body! Intimately united in the same house with his loved ones - and yet separated from them by a partition, a spiritual, insurmountable gulf!

First, Sauerbrot and his wife looked around for their daughter Lydia. Where was she? - They did not see her anywhere in the house! Then the friendly young angel, who had guided them down and still lingered in their company, directed their gaze out to the nearby small cemetery near the forest. There they saw the wanted person at a grave decorated with flowers, above which on a simple, wooden cross the name of the deceased father Liebhardt was written.

Lydia had planted new flowers, geraniums and asters, and now stood pondering before the well-tended mound that held the earthly remains of her beloved fatherly friend. Where did his immortal part, his soul, his spirit probably stay? In light realms for sure! - These were her praying thoughts.

Oh how it flashed through Sauerbrot's mind when he thought back at this sight to that other time when he had frightened Lydia with his cold breath during his first spiritual visit to the schoolhouse garden! Now, too, he rushed to her in an irresistible urge. He wanted to tell her how blissful and redeemed and how happy he was now. But the partition of the earthly, material shell was there. His daughter lacked the spiritual sight and the full spiritual hearing. Only imperfectly could the highly moved spirit of the father make himself known to her.

Suddenly, a vivid memory came over the woman who was lost in her thoughts. She remembered her own father, once so unhappily departed from life. - Where could he be? - How was he?

"Oh - God's mercy and grace have no limits!" - she suddenly heard very clearly and loudly speaking inside of her. What kind of voice had that been? - No-one was in the empty cemetery at that morning hour! Yes, that must have been an angel - who had breathed this message of comfort into her soul with such strong power and cheered her heart! - These words she was allowed and wanted to believe! That was surely heavenly truth! Even the once so blind soul of the Father had found the grace and mercy of the eternal love in Jesus, the Savior of the poorest! Now she no longer wanted to cry and mourn! Christ is risen - also for him, whom her heart might henceforth seek in peace, no longer in darkness and misery!

Strangely strengthened, the faithful daughter hurried back home with winged steps. She met her husband - as there was a short break in the lessons - at the door of the house. A strange joy shone from his eyes as well.

As Lydia climbed the steps to the front door with light feet, he suddenly grabbed her around the waist with both arms, pulled her tightly to his chest and pressed a kiss to her forehead, which was slightly red and moistened from the rapid walking. "Leave it!" she said, a little embarrassed - "if anyone sees it!"

"What does it matter!?" - Who cares!?" replied the husband. ... "But know, we are no longer alone in the schoolhouse! - Father is there - the mine and yours - along with other loved ones!"

In intemperate astonishment, Lydia looked at him: "Why? - What do you mean by that?" "He told me!" With that, Karl Gotthilf led his astonished wife to the bench under the old pear tree in the garden and told her in flying words:

"I have just written an arithmetic problem for the children on the blackboard, and the children were engrossed in their exercise books to solve the problem, then suddenly a strange, alien force took hold of my hand, which was still holding the chalk, and wrote the words at the bottom of the blackboard - so that the children could not see it: "Dear Karl, we are here and greet you warmly! - Father Liebhardt, Father Sauerbrot, Mother Martha, Albert Sauerbrot."

"Listen" - continued Karl Gottfried, while Lydia was at a loss for words for astonishment - "isn't that wonderful!? Isn't that quite uniquely great and glorious!? So there" - he added with utter joyful fire - "would be your father, too, as a companion of the others - blessed!"

"Yes, that would have to be true!" - said Lydia, and now she also related her own experience, which she had just had at Grandfather Liebhardt's grave.

"That is most peculiar!" - exclaimed Karl Gotthilf. "So there is something to it then - about the spiritual world, and that they make themselves known to us! Never before have I had such an experience!- But I believe it now and think, that there would come more of this. Father wanted to still tell me more or write - I felt that clearly; but because of the school class it was not possible, because the children would have finally noticed it".

"God, God!" - said Lydia - "what a miracle! How happy we are! What grace! How good is the heavenly Father! Lets us hear from the dear loved ones! - And what for a happy, blessed message!!!" She, for her part, fell around the neck of her happy spouse and wept the most blessed tears at his breast.

The class break had ended in the meantime and Karl Gotthilf had to get back to his work. Lydia also hurried to her duty in the kitchen to cook lunch. What for a heavenly joy filled both of them and transfigured their actions! For the first time they now had experienced such a completely direct connection with the mysterious spiritual world! How has it so powerfully convincingly penetrated them from that side in these few words! - Yes, their loved ones were alive and happy!!! - And they were here and hovered around them and cared for them!

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O thanks be to God for this testimony from the heavens, for this glad tidings of an everlasting eternal life! Death was defeated! There were now no more terrors of separation and annihilation through it. Life is eternal! Life is victor! And above all life there reigns in the eternal light an eternal God, a Father of man, a Ruler of destinies and Perfecter of souls full of holy wisdom, power, might and love!!!

That was now incontrovertibly certain! - That was no longer only belief! That was experienced - experienced! - Now could come what may!

## Chapter 24

At the table, when the whole teacher's family was sitting together, the invisible spiritual friends now also saw the four children of the teacher couple.

Bernhard had grown a lot since the time of Grandfather Liebhardt's death. He had become a perky boy. Also the other three younger ones, two girls and a boy, were clearly quite healthy and lively. And even though the small crowd was loud and hearty, they were all clearly also well-behaved. There was no naughty, pert behavior at the table; also no moody refusal to eat. The father kept a tight regiment. And the mother, full of love, took care of everyone's need.

The prayer before and after the meal was said by little Bernhard by rising from his chair, folding his hands and expressively reciting a beautiful, meaningful table saying. The whole family concluded with a serious 'Amen'. Oh how this pious, in God well-ordered custom delighted the silent listeners in the beyond!

Here in this family circle, they felt they could find easy access to their hearts. Here were no impenetrable walls and obstacles to overcome in order to reach the delicate inner hearing organs of the soul. Here the noisy and seductive world could not unfold its numbing power over the children of men. And also the invisible demonic world and the army of unpurified spirits of the lower soul realm could only exert a small influence here.

Of course, also this house, like every human place on earth, was swarmed around by those dark flocks and clouds of the unholy spirits dwelling in the lower zones of the earth's air circle, tempting man to evil. All those souls, which after their departure from the bodily life in their further development, do not take the way upward spiritually, that is, to the true, pure love of God and brotherly love, remain also locally in the lower regions of the earthly circle of air.

And even if they generally lack the vision for the old earthly world in the dream life in which God continues to mature them, there are also always quite many who push back so fiercely and stubbornly after leaving the earthly world that the Lord of Life, on the basis of His great law of free will, finally opens their vision to them, as once to Sauerbrot's spirit, in order to show them by experience the uselessness of their foolish striving.



These unholy beings and those very bad primordial demons, who, out of stubborn malice have never even been in the flesh of man for the attainment of the childship of God - they all more or less hotly and wickedly seek to seize the souls of humans still living in the flesh, in order to turn their hearts into their own evil and to make them slaves of their infernal desires for domination and other passions.

Such packs of unfortunate demons and spirits surround every person and every house. Especially where there is a lot of traffic, they gather, lurking for prey. Also a schoolhouse, where many young and also older people go in and out, is the goal of their particular endeavor. And woe to the little ones, if the wise care of God had not put around them also a particularly strong defense in the form of effective guardian angels!

So it was then also now in the house of the teacher Liebhardt. And the main task of the new arrivals from the paradisiacal spheres was to counteract with faithful love and vigilant will the bad, seductive influence of those besiegers. And as the mighty hosts of the pernicious antipole struggle to win souls with their whispers and their breath of will, so they, the servants and messengers of the heavenly heights, had to instill the light of the Divinely true and good into their dear charges through the inner voice of the heart.

They have to be aware of every attack at all hours. And not only at the moment when some unholy spirit or even a dark demon approached one of their own was it necessary to watch and to overcome it's inspiration with a good, admonishing counterword - the hearts of the loved ones had to be constantly, at every turn, while awake and asleep, instructed, strengthened and fortified in advance - so that when an evil one came, there would be no possibility for him to approach and penetrate.

"We struggle not only with flesh and blood" (Efes 6:12) - Paul, the great messenger of God, had once said - "but with the invisible, dark powers and spirits in the air." - How clear and true these words of the enlightened apostle proved to the new guardian spirits in the rurally quiet schoolhouse! And how stood the people almost blind and deaf between the two life-poles of good and evil!

But this too became perfectly clear to the loving servants of God in the exercise of their office, that nothing wiser and more expedient can be thought of than this school of experience of the earthly world with it's tempting and guarding powers. Between the two opposite poles they saw the human heart and will in free suspension. And it was quite understandable that only in such a way man could be enabled to search independently for the right light and to take the path of life after the attained knowledge freely, be it upwards or downwards.

By experience alone, and not by any inner or outer compulsion, man thus finally matures - though often only after long journeys of wandering and struggling - to Divine perfection, freedom and glory of the blessed citizens of heaven! Yes, God's ways and the schools through which He leads His human children to the holy goal of His Fatherheart, are wonderful beyond wonderful!

## Chapter 25

On the evening of this highly significant day, which was also specially celebrated by the family as Lydia's birthday, the parents sat together in the living room by the lamplight after the children had been put to bed and were sleeping peacefully.

Suddenly Karl Gotthilf put aside the newspaper, in which he had been glancing rather carelessly with absent thoughts, and said: "Listen, Lydia, that writing on the blackboard this morning - it has not left my mind all day. If only I knew how that happened! My hand was very clearly guided! It was like a foreign power! It was definitely not my own will! And if I may tell you - now I continue to feel as if I have to write something again! That is strange!"

"Then take a sheet of paper and a pen!" - said Lydia, and quickly handed him what he needed from the desk, being quite excited herself because of the strange power, which also filled her heart like an electric current. "Here, take and write! Maybe grandfather will tell us even more?!" And Liebhardt sat down in front of the sheet, put the pen on it, and spoke loudly and with a firm voice:

"If it is God's will, so write again, father, and give us news of your existence and life in the other kingdom over there!" For a good while he waited like this, and breathless silence filled the room. Lydia regarded with the greatest attention and a certain anxious tension the writing pen in her husband's hand. But nothing happened, nothing moved. The hand lay motionless on the paper. Had it then all only been a deception? - Was that supposed message from the beyond only a deceptive inner voice of one's own soul?

While thinking these thoughts, it was to the waiting man suddenly as if light, clear words were spoken to him in his heart. - He clearly heard his name. And the voice touched his mind, as once in earlier times the calm, friendly voice of his father. "My son Karl!" - it said - "pay attention to what I tell you! - Write down my words on the piece of paper, because they are also for the others. - O believe, we are all faithfully close to you! All of us I indicated to you this morning. And over all of us, One watches and rules - Jesus Christ, the Crucified, the only Lord and God.

After Karl Gotthilf heard these words with a holy shudder of amazement, he wrote them down on the sheet. And then, after the voice was recorded, he continued to write and speak:

"O children of our love! How blessed we are that, through the grace of the Heavenly Father and His infinitely wise and loving guidance, after a long journey of teaching and wandering, we are allowed to be with you for your protection and instruction. Believe that you are not alone! We are around you day and night. And you may only turn the ear and eye of your soul inward to the Spirit of God in your heart, so we can speak through Him and guide and direct you in all the incidents of life with our counsel. - O believe, the love of God is more glorious than man can think and imagine. And the goal to which He wants to lead us all upward in earthly as well as in spiritual life, is nothing but light and bliss with Him!

O understand it correctly, then comprehend deeply and fully the meaning of your earthly life hurrying along so fast! There is so much high and great things to achieve in this school of the hard earthly world: the true full filiation of our eternal, immeasurably exalted God and heavenly Father.

The way, however, is that which He, the Almighty and All-loving Himself, walked in His earthly form as Jesus - the way of humility, meekness, purity and the most burning love for the Divine Father-Spirit and for all His creatures!

- O learn this gentle, humble and to every selfless deed ready love! Then you will give pleasure to Him Who watches over you through us weak instruments of His immeasurable grace and mercy. Now go to your rest today, well protected and in the blessing of the faithful Father in the heavens. Come again tomorrow and hear our words! For today, your dear faithful greet you with a heartfelt "God be with you".

. . . Ah, those were wonderful, mysterious and truly heavenly words! Lydia was completely dismayed and could not find expression of her whirling thoughts. Only a helpless: "O God - O God - is this possible!?" - escaped her mouth.

Karl Gotthilf was also deeply shocked. This certainly could not have come from himself! He had not thought and spoken that inwardly to himself! This could not have come from his own soul, or from unconscious depths. For he had never thought of such a message even in his dreams! So this really had to come from somewhere else, from outside or rather from above, from the spiritual world, in which father Liebhardt now stayed with the others.

O this was indeed unheard of, this was indeed wonderfully great - such a message from those who have gone home! And they were here - here in the same parlor - they, who had been searched for so widely and far away! They were here protecting and guiding! And through the heart's spirit gate was a way to enter into blessed connection with them! Tomorrow they would hear more from them!

With highly moved minds, full of blissful hope, the two spouses went to rest. Sleep fled from them for a long time. But at last the blessedly glowing souls loosened themselves from the bonds of the body and rose into the spiritual realm to find there confirmed what in the laborious, heavy garment of the flesh of the earthly body was so very difficult to make the soul understand. We indeed know that when the body lies in deep sleep at the silent, undisturbed midnight hour, the souls walk up to the spiritual world in a similar form as in the waking life of the day and communicate with the spirits invisible to the fleshly eye of man as with their own kind. We also find and talk to the dearly beloved guardian spirits there, as well as now and then the descending higher angels of the Lord.

In this intercourse with the good spiritual friends of the so-called beyond, we receive from the pure, vigorous life-emanations of these Paradise- and Heaven dwellers in the deep sleep of the body, that wonderful strengthening which we all know as an indispensable gift of God, a daily or rather all-nightly bread of the soul, which the Lord of Life gives us in slumber. It is especially received by those people who with prayer seek the blessing of God, the heavenly Provider and Sustainer, already in the waking hours of the day. And thus, since the strengthening of sleep is one of the highest goods of life, the vernacular then also says rightly: "The Lord gives it to His own in their sleep!"

On awakening, returning to the heavy earthly body, the soul loses, of course, according to God's will and counsel, the conscious memory of what it experienced in deep sleep.

But it is allowed to take with it that unconscious strengthening into the struggle of the day, in order to be free - without complete certainty - in it's searching, researching, wanting and acting. Only exceptionally, now and then, in a bright morning dream does it take something with over into the day, in order to feed on the rare light from a higher world.

It was the same with the teacher spouses. When they awoke early in the morning, they had no memory of the delightful reunion they had experienced during the night in deep sleep with their dear relatives and friends in the spiritual realm. Only Lydia, who often had vivid morning dreams, could tell that she was in a wonderful garden with a beautiful house on a hill, from where one looked out over a fairy-tale land with beautiful plains, lakes, dwellings and temples.

Oh, thought the spouses, how is the world and life so strange! - What is reality? What is dream? - Is not actually that other, that spiritual world real and true - and this life in the earthly everyday life a dream, although it seems so very real to man? Isn't then everything here on this earthly world, which is so roaring and resplendent, transient? And are we not then biased here in a true night of the soul, without knowledge of the very most important things of existence and of life?!

That spiritual world from which the mysterious message of the deceased grandfather reported and which showed itself so wonderfully and brightly in the blissfully quiet dream - was it not then in the end the true life - and this earthly existence only a brief, laborious preliminary stage?

„We will wait and see" - said Lydia - "one day the day will come when we will see what we believe!"

## Chapter 26

The heard and experienced things did not let the teacher Karl Gotthilf Liebhardt come to rest in his inner being. As evening approached, he could hardly wait until the children were put to bed and put to rest. Then he quickly took out the notebook again, in which he had written down the message of yesterday evening, describing the closer circumstances that had taken place.

With the pen in his hand, he sat down at the table again, while Lydia, putting her handiwork aside, moved close to him in order to read immediately over his shoulder what his hand was writing down in clear moves after a silent, inner prayer.

This time it was father Sauerbrot who spoke to them. With a hearty: "God greet!" - he began his speech. But he soon faltered when he wanted to start describing his otherworldly development paths and experiences. His strength was evidently not yet consolidated enough to maintain a connection with the spirit of his son-in-law, once so passionately hated, in the bitter remembrance of the hard experiences and schools he had survived.

Father Liebhardt took his place. As the spokesman for the entire spiritual society, he gave a lively overview of the fates of all the members of their small group in the hereafter and then promised to subsequently describe everything experienced by each individual in detail for the instruction and spiritual edification of those left behind on earth.

And so, in the following evenings, Karl Gotthilf and Lydia received a magnificent picture of the ways in which the heavenly Father had matured those dear people in the spiritual schools of the life beyond and partially rescued them from the unholy realms of hell and its gates.

There was no end to the amazement of the two spouses. - So good and great was our God! And so incomprehensible and immeasurable His mercy and the love and wisdom of His ways!

Oh, how they wanted to take life even more seriously and importantly in this transient, earthly death garment! How much pain and distress man could spare himself if he correctly understood the high meaning of this earthly soul-school and made every effort to follow the set goal, the perfection of the heart, in the Divine spirit of humble, pure love! "Years, decades, even centuries of pain and toil in the hereafter" - father Liebhardt said - "a man can save himself if he would understand in his earthly life what is offered in the Word and walks and lives accordingly."

As sacred as the two spouses intended to keep what they had heard in this way in nightly quiet hours as a blessed secret, it could not remain hidden in the long run from the more familiar friends of the house that the two radiantly happy people had something new and very special to process and accommodate in themselves.

"What heart is full of, the mouth overflows" (Luke 6:45) - thus indeed says a Bible verse. And finally, Karl Gotthilf thought that one might not withhold such an important message from one's closest fellow men, even at the risk of being held for a fanatic or a fool. "How good" - he said to Lydia - "would it be then for a clergyman, for example, if he also had knowledge of such things, so that he could form a true and blessed idea of the hereafter; for he has so often to point it out to people! And is it not to God's pity that in general the church people and Christians have only such a meager, yes, mostly completely wrong idea of it on the basis of the Holy Scriptures!"

"You are probably right" - Lydia replied, a little startled - "but consider how will the Pastor take it - that we are consorting with the deceased, the so-called dead! After all, that is against the Holy Scriptures!"

"Ei what- against the Holy Scriptures!? - Liebhardt replied - "how can it be against the Scriptures, when blessed ones come, led by the angels, and tell us of eternal life in God and of the kingdom of the angels, and call us with words of faith and fiery love on the way of salvation into the arms of Jesus Christ! Can this be against God's word and teaching?! - Never! - This is the highest grace from heaven!"

And - frankly and honestly said" - he continued with enthusiasm - "every true, genuine Pastor should be in such connection with heaven and its citizens constantly, in order to be able to be a true servant of God among men! - What is the use of reading and studying the Scriptures if not the angels speak to them in their hearts!? There everything still remains dead, if the cold, miserable mind only researches and judges! - There, of course, the hereafter becomes dark, closed and empty! - And if the Scripture rightly forbids the calling and earthly profit-seeking use of unholy spirits and demons, then this truly never ever means that we also should not and must not seek the blessed intercourse with the blessed beings of the light, the good spirits and angels!"

Praise and thanks be to God that the heavenly Father still allows such a connection also in our time as once in old Biblical times, where He sent His angels to people in dreams and when awake and even gave the deeply fallen King Saul, lost in a bloody spirit of violence, a great, true, even if deadly sad message through the spirit of the seer Samuel at the witch of Endor!

No, Pastor Loschmann shall know it, that also today God still talks with the people and sends them His messages through His blessed spirits and angels! Fear of man shall keep me away no more as in the past. Let us proclaim to the world this great truth and fact, which we were allowed to experience in such a wonderful way under our own roof! Even today I want to call the attention of our friend to it! And then it's up to him how he will handle it.

## Chapter 27

Despite Lydia's anxious concerns, the teacher soon followed up this convincing speech with action. Towards evening, when he knew the Pastor would be busy with light work in his garden, he went over.

Mrs. Pastor Loschmann was also there and planted a bed with a vegetables intended for overwintering in this already autumnal season. After this small business was quickly completed with the help of their hands, all three went to the arbor in the middle of the garden, where they often sat together in the evening as good friends for conversation and discussion.

"I want to tell you something very special today" - said Liebhardt, while they stepped into the arbor. "So? You are making us nervous!" - replied Frau Loschmann. "But tell me first, Mr. Pastor - what do you think of this: does God also still speak to us humans today - or was this only the case in ancient, Biblical times with the people of Israel?"

"Of course He still speaks today!" - replied Loschmann, hanging his garden apron on a nail and sitting down on the bench stretching all around the sides in the arbor - "Where would we humans be then, if God were not constantly speaking to us in our hearts through the voice of conscience or the Spirit or whatever you want to call it! He must then guide us at every turn - otherwise we are lost! How should we then get rid of the curse of the original sin - this old enemy in our heart - if God did not constantly instruct us by an inner voice!" "

"You must all be taught by God!" - it indeed says in Scripture (John 6:45)," Mrs. Loschmann added - "and whom the Son, the living Word of God, does not draw, he does not come to the Father!"

"Yes, I think so too" - said Liebhardt" - and in one place it is also still expressly said: 'He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me - to him I will reveal Myself!' (John 14:21) Surely this applies to all people even today!"

"Certainly, without a doubt!" - confirmed Pastor Loschmann with a conviction in his chest.

"And at His departure" - Liebhardt continued, "the Lord promised the disciples and all those who are of good will to follow Him as such: 'I will ask the Father to send you another Councilor and Helper - the Holy Spirit!

He will guide you into all truth and remind you of all that what I, Jesus the Lord, have taught and done before you in My lifetime. (John 14:26) Roughly so reads then also that important farewell word of the Lord, which is valid for all times and all people. - Or do you assume that these words applied only to the disciples and apostles of that time?"

"Certainly they apply" - replied Loschmann - "to all times and to all people who are of good will - since they are told by the Lord without any restriction, and, moreover, it is indeed also self-evident when one considers that God, our heavenly Father, makes no arbitrary distinction among His children, but gives His love and grace at all times to all those who purely and truly love Him and do His will."

"So we may believe" - Liebhardt concluded the train of thought he had gone through on the basis of the scriptural passages - "and accept as Biblically attested that even today God speaks to man through His Holy Spirit and His Spirit's bearers and messengers as in ancient, Biblical times, and opens up His nature to them and makes known His will?"

„That can not be denied!" - said Loschmann with conviction, but unmistakably also somewhat stretched, since he still did not quite know what Liebhardt was actually getting at. "And to our true, great salvation!" - added Mrs. Loschmann with warm eagerness, who with her sober, dry husband, being averse to all things mystical, had already sometimes had rather contradictory discussions about these things.

"But if this is now undoubtedly so" - said Liebhardt now somewhat hesitatingly, by observing the expressions of his two listeners - "what then do you think and say about the fact that we have had some quite strange and wonderful teachings and messages of this kind in the schoolhouse lately, which, according to their sublime, Divine content, can really only be from pure spheres!"

"What?" - both Pastoral spouses exclaimed as if from the same mouth - "you have messages - from the other world?!" "That's then indeed spiritualism!?" - the pastor added, lightly teasing.

"Spiritism?!" - retorted Liebhardt - "Well, you well don't want to indeed slay it with that buzzword right away?! - We have not curiously sought the mysterious connection with the spiritual world; but the messengers from on high have come to us unexpectedly and, without us anticipating it, have made us happy with their heavenly-glorious tidings!"

"What you are saying!" - exclaimed the Pastor, still smiling in disbelief.

"That indeed would be something quite fabulous!" - said his wife, very interested and with fire. – "Please tell us then!"

And now Karl Gotthilf Liebhardt reported everything that Lydia and he had experienced recently, the miracles of Divine guidance that had been made accessible to them through the words of the dear spiritual friends and what they were allowed to learn in this way about the otherworldly states and ways of development. The pastor's couple were amazed and couldn't believe it.

They know the teacher after all as a sober, scrutinizing man who did not easily fall for deceptive misdirection and certainly did not want to deceive himself or his beloved wife about any fairy tale. - These were indeed really strange riddles!!

Pastor Loschmann shook his head from side to side and could not cope with the best of intentions. His wife was much more able to believe. She reminded him of everything he had just said on the basis of the Scriptures about God speaking and the going forth of His living Word to humans.

But through spirits - not through spirits!" - cried Loschmann - "There is nothing of this in all the Scriptures after all, that even today He sends souls of the departed to give man tidings of things of the beyond!" It is rather most clearly and expressly forbidden in Scripture to call the dead from their slumber!"

"But dear man" - interjected Frau Loschmann, quite agitated - "that is truly no calling of the dead when they come of their own accord and bring you a most blissful, heavenly message!"

"Certainly" - Liebhardt interjected - "that is indeed something quite different from what the Scriptures intended to exclude among the ancient Israelites! A distinction must be made: Then as now, certain black-magical people, out of profit-seeking or domineering intentions, operated in the calling of the dead in order to obtain from them earthly, only in a worldly sense significant information - in order to gain treasures, to deprave enemies or to pursue similar purposes contrary to God. Such calling of the dead is, of course, against God's will and forbidden by Scripture! - But why on earth should it be denied to us by the Bible to listen to the messages of blessed spirits and angels who come in the name of, and no doubt also on behalf of, the Lord to enlighten us about the seriousness of earthly life and about the eternal goal in this world and the hereafter, to spur us on to strive with all our might along the path of renunciation, humility, and love for the will of God! This cannot be forbidden by God's Word after all!"

"Certainly not! That would indeed be insanity!" - agreed Mrs. Pastor Loschmann. "God can impossibly send to men messengers of His promised Holy Spirit and at the same time forbid in His revealed Word the faithful and willing listening to their teachings and exhortations! - Dear Heinz" - she turned to her husband - "in God's name, your theology and that of your colleagues is just wrong!"

"The Scriptures" - said Liebhardt, supporting the parish Pastor's wife in a clear firm voice - "must be read and interpreted in such a way that their meaning agrees with reason, that is, with the common sense of man enlightened by the spirit of love! What does not correspond to the love, wisdom and omnipotence of the sublime will of God known to us - that can not come from God, that is man's addition - be it in the literal word or be it in the sense of speaking to us."

"Well, well" - said Loschmann, stretched and forced - "so from a general, theoretical point of view, however, there is certainly not much to object to. But we still also read clearly in the Scriptures that it is not God's will to reveal too much about the hereafter to man! There, according to His will and for good reasons, we should remain more dependent on believing than on knowing. Otherwise, the Holy Scripture in the New Testament would have surely handed down and revealed more to us than the few, moreover still dark and ambiguous passages! Man knows enough when he is informed from the Scriptures that there is an afterlife and a survival. According to God's wise counsel, he obviously does not need to know what this is like for the time being. He will learn this then later, after death, when he has come from the state of faith to seeing and knowledge by God's grace."



"But don't you think" - replied Liebhardt - "that it may be expedient in God's counsel to give individual people, who strive upward with special zeal, or to whom it is especially essential for the sake of their state of faith - that He may also occasionally give them a special message and a special light, in order thereby to bind them the more closely to Himself?! - After all, did the Lord Himself still go around for forty days after His ascension as a transfigured spirit to all His disciples and friends, to bring them for their strengthening of faith the sure message of His resurrection and certainly also many other highly significant teachings!"

"Yes, that was something quite different - that was the Lord Himself!" replied Loschmann with strong emphasis.

"What the Lord did and does" - Liebhardt continued - "is always and forever for all humans, spirits and angels a holy, universal example! Moreover, still during His earthly lifetime, He presented the blessed spirits of Moses and Elijah to His most advanced disciples Peter, John and Jacob on Mount Tabor to strengthen their faith, so that they could tell them about eternal life! - These are enough of the most important examples from which we can see that it is the Father's will to reveal Himself and His kingdom to those who truly and earnestly seek Him - be it through a direct inner word or through His heavenly servants - further than the Scriptures do!

In my view, the Holy Scriptures offer what mankind in general needs to know about God and about eternal life, and has been able to grasp in the time so far. Even today, it is still enough for the simple, childlike person to know that there is a heavenly Father God, an eternal continued existence, a hell of the wicked and a paradise and a heaven of the good-willed.

The more mature, more profoundly searching person, on the other hand, understandably also has deeper needs, especially today in the torn, dark, mind-cold present. He wants and needs more extensive knowledge, and on the basis of such knowledge however, he will then also be a fiery disciple of the Lord and a better tool for His kingdom than the simple confrere, whose soul in a certain inertia has no higher and deeper needs.

To lead us humans, and also over there the spirits and angels, on and on to higher and more comprehensive points of view, so that through richer knowledge, we may also become more and more deeply grounded in the humility of love for Him and for all His beings - surely this is without doubt the purpose of the whole education which God is pursuing with us here in this earth school!"

"Yes, yes, that is certainly true! - But nevertheless - consider" - Pastor Loschmann finally brought out somewhat incensed by the reference to the 'spiritual inertia of the simple ones' - "where this finally leads to, if all the world, each and everyone, receives alleged heavenly revelations! After all, then the solid word of the Bible will shortly be overgrown or dissolved!"

"Each and everyone" - repeated his wife with an angry blush at the remark, which to Liebhardt seemed to be quite tactless of her, and which had slipped out of the pastor's mouth during the debate - "surely real, heavenly messages do not reach every random, perhaps unworthy and unprepared person! God will certainly already know to whom He can show such grace!"

"Indeed!" - said Father Loschmann, who in the meantime had become aware of his gaffe with regret. "Of course, I definitely do not want to say anything derogatory in the present case, but on the contrary - if light ever comes to people in such a way - it has thus sought and found sober and honest people here in the schoolhouse. Rather, I talk in general terms and look at the whole! If heaven sends messages to the people in this, as one says today, mediumistic way - then certainly also the power of darkness will tread this way and bring to the people, also to the believing and good ones, in the most cunning way deceptive messages and strive with all means to mix into the possible light from above their poisonous, corrupting influences.

And so, most of the time, if the intermediary is not completely Divinely pure and established in the heavenly nature, at best a dangerous mixture will emerge, in which the possible true and heavenly is connected with a deceptive, hellish ingredient, which leads people - instead of on the simple, Biblical way to God - on all kinds of wrongful and byways into the abyss of perdition and into eternal bonds of error.

The history of Christendom, indeed the whole history of mankind, has proved this a thousand times over in the writings of false prophecy and in the fortunes of deceived impostors and their misguided followers."

"There is good bread and bad bread, healthy fruit and rotten fruit, poisonous plants and medicinal herbs" - Liebhardt calmly replied - "and so there is also true prophecy and false prophecy! But as a sensible man will not reject the medicinal herbs because of the poisonous plants, but will gratefully use these latter for his sick body in case of need - so it is, in my opinion, also with prophecy, which is also a medicinal herb for our sick soul. Only, of course, we must also examine and select them - as well as the blessed medicinal herb - with caution and wisdom and not let a cloudy, poisonous mixture be presented to us as a pure, blessed gift from the heavens!"

"That is precisely why I think we should best stick to the tried and true, pure Word of God in the Bible!" - Loschmann persisted.

"How did you suddenly become such a hard-headed, firm Bible-Christian!" - said his wife in a somewhat pointed voice. "You have, after all, hitherto always taken the view that even in the Bible, the pure Word of God is strongly interspersed and mixed up with human ingredients added over the course of centuries by copying and translators. The great disputes and battles of opinion of the theologians of all times prove it abundantly that in the Bible actually also not every letter agrees with the sole, eternal truth of God and everything is expressed in a clear way. Otherwise, so many diverse and partly very erroneous and pernicious doctrines could not have been drawn from it after all, as Christian church history proves only too clearly."

"Certainly!" - agreed Liebhardt - "there you indeed also see that no word of God comes to man completely unveiled and pure! That is, the Divine Word, as it emanates from the Original Source and Father of Light and Life, is of course in itself always pure and true to the highest degree. But the man who receives it as a mediator is not always pure and developed enough in his soul, and so ideas and thoughts from the soul of the prophet or also, as the pastor has indicated, from other unpurified spiritual sources, from the so-called spirit world of the lower or even the demonically evil, mix into the stream of the Divine word.

Even among the authors of the Biblical scriptures, the Divine word was mixed and veiled. And also here, through human tradition, editing and translation, many things have still been changed in an erroneous sense, as your colleagues at the universities with their 'critical Bible research' have so thoroughly and eagerly ascertained. But God, the Father of light, allowed this veiling of His Word for wise reasons, so that man always remains free in his judgments, wills and actions and is spiritually awakened, enlivened and perfected under God's gracious guidance without coercion, through free, independent research."

"Haven't precisely you theologians of modern times then" - interjected Frau Loschmann - "because of this nature of the Word of God, put your cold minds to the Bible book in the sharpest way?"

"We critical Bible scholars" - replied Loschmann, somewhat hesitatingly - "want nothing but to liberate the true, Divine core from its earthly shell again, and to penetrate through the external trappings back to the essential, golden content of truth!"

"You see!" - Liebhardt interjected lively - "and that is why nowadays it also seems extremely necessary that - not people with their cold, short-sighted mind - but the heavenly Father Himself, through the Holy Spirit and the messengers of His Light, sends His Word newly to the searching and more advanced people in a more unveiled way - explains, supplements and interprets the Holy Scriptures in the light of His Love-Spirit Himself. The new Word of God should and will introduce future humanity deeper than ever into the mysteries of life and the depths of the Godhead."

"Yes" - said Mrs. Loschmann - "that makes perfect sense to me. As the illumination and warming of the earth progresses from winter to summer - so, I think to myself, the spiritual illumination and revival of the peoples and of the individual human beings will also be progressively increase by the word of revelation that goes forth, according to the state of need and maturity. And so I can quite well believe that God the Lord again and again makes known to individual mature people or nations new, more comprehensive and deeper revelations of His Divine Nature and Will."

"You are a real spiritualist!" - Loschmann turned to his wife in amazement at this spiritedly presented confession - "Where are we going with our catechism!"

"What, catechism!" - she replied - "What does man-made catechism concern us - when God Himself speaks through His angels and spiritual tools!"

"And believe it firmly and confidently, Pastor" - Liebhardt added with fiery conviction - "the Father of Light leaves no earnestly seeking human child, who humbly turns to Him for enlightenment, in the dark. He has placed a Divine spirit spark in the heart of every human being, which shines mightily in every loving and humble soul. This spark of the Holy Spirit tells every true seeker of God what in the prophetic writings as well as in other proclamations is truly from God and what is some other ingredient. God is love in His essence. And what is in harmony with the true, selfless, active love for God and all God's creatures, that is genuine and we may safely accept it as Divine and salvific.

The other we may consider to be a shell or even a fake. The refined content of true, Divine love is the unmistakable mark of God's authenticity. For God is love. And he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. (1 John 4:16) - Therefore do not be afraid, honored friend, and follow also in this point the apostle Paul, whom you hold in such high esteem! We indeed know what this great spiritualist wrote to the Thessalonians (1 Thess 5:19): 'Do not dampen the spirit! Do not despise the spiritual messages! Examine everything, and keep what is good! And the advice he gave to the Corinthian church concerning connection with the higher, spiritual world still serves us all also today: 'Strive for it, all of you! And I will yet show you the most delightful way to it - love!' (1 Cor 12:31)

"Bravo!" - exclaimed Mrs. Loschmann - "Mr. Teacher, we will come over to your house tonight after dinner when you write again and gladly allow us to be present. Then we want to hear whether the dear celestials don't have something to say to us, too!"

With this, Liebhardt as well as pastor Loschmann now agreed very heartily. They parted with a few cheerful words. It was also right for the pastor that the memorable conversation had ended with his wife's closing words, which were directed toward practical experience.

## Chapter 28

In the evening, the neighborly friends gathered again in the schoolhouse and soon sat in best harmony at the lamp light around the comfortable round table of the living room.

Lydia had, as always, scrupulously tidied up the parlor, and a soothing peace breathed throughout the home. The children slept in the adjoining room. Nothing disturbed the harmony of the small circle.

Liebhardt got a pencil and a pad of writing paper ready. And then he asked all those present, who had taken their seats in comfortable chairs, to gather and silently ask the Heavenly Father in their hearts to make known to them this evening through His servants something so very important and uplifting.

"Do you have any particularly moving question that you would like to see illuminated from the heavenly point of view?" - he turned to the pastoral couple.

"If I could express a wish" - said Mrs. Gertrud Loschmann in a timid voice, who had sat down close to her husband in fearful expectation" - so it would interest me most to now once hear a real spirit, that is to say a deceased, departed person, talk about how he is in the hereafter and how and where he is now. If there really is such a manifestation, this would sure be the most convincing thing for my husband! Especially when he sees it here rather physically and directly before his eyes."

"We have, indeed" - said Teacher Liebhardt - "already had various and very detailed accounts of this kind through the tales of our guardian spirits. And so I think that there is probably nothing against your wish in itself.

Whether it is of course in the Lord's will to instruct us in this way tonight as well, we must leave up to Him. And so we want to wait in peace and gratefully accept whatever He sends us."

While Liebhardt was still talking like that, he grabbed the writing pen. Then he put his hand on the paper. And in soundless silence everyone waited with deep seriousness what heaven would decree.

Suddenly the pen began to move. Liebhardt wrote words full of peace and kindness in a moderately fast, uninterrupted flow, which he pronounced simultaneously in a calm voice, as if on audition:

"Dearly beloved, you come to this house in doubt, to gain clarity about the deepest and most important questions of life. The heavenly Father's holy love gladly accommodates sincere, earnest seeking and research. As he has promised: 'Seek and you shall find! Knock and it shall be opened unto you' (Matt 7:7). - And we are permitted today, at your request, to present to you for instruction a spirit of the lower spheres, which has just departed from earthly life under quite strange circumstances. His fate will touch you all the more deeply, as he admittedly is not known to the writer from the earthly existence, but certainly to the two guests. - We will now step back and let the spirit itself speak to you!"

After a short wait now came - in a somewhat different tone and flow of the speech - from the spiritual world an announcement, which greatly astonished the present listeners.

"Oh God" - thus sounded the words pronounced by Liebhardt with lively inner agitation - "what has happened to me then!? I am indeed a terrible destroyer and murderer of my whole family! There lies my wife - I almost don't know her anymore! - And there my child, the only happiness of my heart! - To all misfortune also still the house burns with the rich goods store! - A sea of flames envelops me! - The forest will soon be a prey to the fire, too! - Help, help, I am lost!"

Oh God, how did that happen?! - It was the unfortunate engine that started it! - You time, you time! - Everything seemed to be fine - and suddenly the flame came out of the inside of the engine, seized my clothes. I rush into the open, call my wife. She comes to extinguish, catches fire herself. We rush into the house to the water tap. Then there was a terrible bang, the engine burst to pieces and the hall is on fire! The fire spreads with lightning speed to the neighboring house, and my wife screams: 'Oh God, the child is sleeping on the porch!'

"Lord of heaven!" - said Frau Loschmann to her husband with a horrified voice in between - "That won't be your cousin Hermann in Muehlbach then!? He always indeed has such a story with his inventions!"

"Shht! - Hush!" - placated Pastor Loschmann, according to the tone of his voice, inwardly also very agitated himself - "Don't interrupt! - We'll see!"

And teacher Liebhardt continued to write and speak:

"... Burning she hurries up, I follow. Great God, how did the rest happen then? I don't even remember how it happened! The porch was indeed already on fire when I came up. At last I saw only my burning wife with the child in her arms. And then everything was over and only flames, flames and - death!"

Walter Lutz, Victorious Love

"It's him, it's him, Heinz, - you'll see" - whispered Mrs. Loschmann to her husband, quite aghast.

"... So melted to me" - continued the voice of the mediator Liebhardt - "my happiness and my dream! First it was the engine of misfortune, on which I have worked for years, day and night! Thus it avenged itself that I forgot wife and child and sacrificed my whole fortune to build this machine of ruin, which should replace people - and, as I knew, would make them breadless! Now it has destroyed my own home!

Lord God, what now? - What now? - Why am I still alive? - Why did the machine not tear me apart, I who am to blame for everything after all!? Why bury the woman and the poor child in the flames - and keep me, the guilty one, alive to repentance and eternal torment!? - Where is a God, a just judge?! - There is nothing to faith! All talk of a God in heaven is a deception! If God took my wife and child from me as punishment, so I ask Him for what purpose did He make them suffer such torment? Why did he burn the good mother who, not minding her life, wanted to save our boy, our child - and now had to feel the unspeakable pain of her darling burning, holding him in her arms!

To a God of such cruelty I can never, never pray again! - He may be or not - I despise him, I hate Him! He has destroyed my happiness forever and made me His eternal enemy! To beg Him for mercy would be the greatest disgrace! A disgrace, truly a crying shame it would be!"

"That's exactly Cousin Hermann's attitude!" - interjected Mrs. Loschmann again.

"Just be at rest!" - warned the pastor emphatically, clutching the trembling hand of his wife in his warm right hand.

"... My house, my motor, my money to the devil! - Goodbye wife and child!" - thus continued Liebhardt's words - "It's all over with me! Only one bullet is still good for me! - But where do I get the gun? - The heck! Is it all just a dream then? Hey - hey - Alwine!"

Then, like an electric shock, it went through the pastor and his wife at this name. - Alwine' - did you hear that?" - she cried - "that's her name - after all, that's his wife's name!"

"... Wake up!" - Liebhardt continued to write and speak. "It is day, even though still dark twilight! - Help! Help! - It is burning - ablaze! - By heaven, Alwine, wake up! Take the child out first! Let the dog out too! The animal burns! Help! Help! Don't you hear then! All weather, she's asleep! - Up! Up! The whole house is on fire!

By God, this is not a dream! This must be then true! - But how should I understand this: the smoke fills the whole room, I have long since been burned to the bone - and yet I live, think, speak! - How does that come then!? How can that be explained!? Dash it, there is something odd here! There must be something behind it! - Is then the whole world bewitched?

Give me a bell and make some noise so that someone finally comes and tells me whether I'm alive, dreaming or dead! -

For God's sake, there's a terrible ringing! - Those are bells - bells like when there's a fire! - Everyone is running and shouting: "Fire, fire!" - Lord God, what a racket! - And I'm lying there - and Alwine is asleep with the child!

Hey, come here! Come here, people! - Here to me! - I'm lying down there! - The engine blew up! The house has collapsed above us! - Save, first save my wife and child! I am secure and alive!

Ah, this is horrible! - The beams are cracking! - My chest is being pushed in! - I'm losing my breath! - Help! Help! Help! - My air is running out! My God - the air - I am lost! It is almost impossible to breathe, I am choking! And yet I am still alive - and how strangely light I feel!

You people come forward! What are you doing? Come here, clear the rubble to the side and get me out! What!? - The heck, the big donkeys let the fire rage as it wants and run for the forest! The forest - of course, is much more important to them than a few human lives! Wretched gang! They let my wife, my child burn cold-bloodedly and suffocate me under the debris! Damned murdering gang! - What a dirty trick! - Let them just come to me and ask for work - I'll throw him out and rather close the den than continue to feed such dog-people! - The heck with the filthy pack! - Ha, if I catch those guys when I come back to daylight! Then woe, you mean scoundrels!

Oh God, it's really not a dream! It is all a just too terrible truth! - Only that I live, that takes me wonder! - There must still be air here! - And yet I lie completely in glowing rubble! - Is this in the end even - hell?! - It almost looks like it! It is plainly not possible that a human being lives in such glowing lava! - I am really already dead!

Ah, that is to burst out of one's skin, if I only still have one! But there's nothing left but ashes and bones! What do I say bones?! Not even that - a heap of dust! - And nevertheless - I'm alive! Is something like that even possible? - To continue to live without a body? - That is just nonsense! So this is all just a dream after all!

Alwine, hey! Alwine hey! Alwine! - A glass of water or a whole bucket over me! Give it to me! That I may wake up! - I'm dreaming! - I have to go to the business! The bitches mess with me. The whole factory stands still and my money goes to waste!

Alwine, bring me water! - I have a forty-degree fever! - I'm burning up! - Good heavens! Come here then, stupid woman! - Can't anyone hear then when someone is dying here!? - Holy God, how do I feel?! - It's all enough to make you cry! But now I'm getting up! No matter what, I have to get out! -

So, now I'm here! - But where is my leather coat then? - It is totally burned! - And it really stinks of fire and smoke, God have mercy! - I am really crazy! - And no man is on the way to help! - My whole suit is burned - and my hands - by heavens, what is this?! - These are - ash hands! - Gray - gray - a pure powder! - And God knows - the whole body! - Yes, I am really bewitched - bewitched and crazy!

That, after all, can't be God and all saints' doing that I am burned to ashes - and still live! I must ask Alwine whether that is possible! She goes to the Spiritist association meeting. She sure must know!

Hey, here she comes at last! - Praise and thanks be to God! Where have you been so long? It is a big thing to leave your husband simply lying, when he almost perishes from the fever! ... I dreamed the engine exploded and everything was ruined.

You and the little one were burned, and I was buried under the rubble of the burning house. It was no pleasure, you can believe me! - And I call and ring for you and you just don't come! That is actually crudeness after all.

... What are you saying there? - You were burned too?! - You and Friedchen - (again Mrs. Loschmann recoiled at this name and Pastor Loschmann grabbed his wet forehead) - our child too? Both of you are dead? - And I - too! - Ha, that's not possible at all! I still breathe, think and talk! And you yourself go back and forth there! Let me still feel you! Is your hand also of ashes? - Christ Jesus! - What is this then!?! - Everything - ashes! - Gray ashes!

... And our Friedchen?! - What about him? - For God's sake, look up! Don't stand there like a statue! My little Friedchen, my little Friedchen - is he burned too?! - Is he also a heap of ashes?

... My God, you are silent and crying! - We are all no longer alive, we are all burned and dead!? That's not at all possible! - Heaps of ashes have no life after all! - And soul, spirit - that's not possible! - Spirit is will. And the will lives in the head. And when the head is burned to ashes, it can't think, talk and will anymore! That is then clear as the sun! - Everything else is drivel! - Your stupid spiritists have twisted your head!

But I'll tell you something: It is anyway not possible for me to go to the business today. I have to go to bed! I really have a fever! - I'm going to have a sound sleep. Yes, yes, sleep once, sleep soundly, then everything will be good again!"

After these words, teacher Liebhardt's writing and speech flow faltered. He put down his pen after a short while of waiting and said: " For today it is finished! - Tomorrow, if God wills, we will continue."

Deeply shaken, all four circle participants sat there. Lydia dried the tears that had streamed copiously down her face with a handkerchief. Mrs. Gertrud Loschmann had completely huddled into her husband and looked with fear and fright into his face, eager to see what he would now say to this horrible, but for them both so instructive revelation.

Teacher Liebhardt, she thought, certainly did not know the cousin's circumstances and the names of his wife and child! - But it is terrible if things happen like that in the hereafter at the death of a person!

Finally, Pastor Loschmann, pressing his forehead between his thumb and hand, regained his speech. Even if still stammering and halting, he turned to Liebhardt and said:

"All of this is, of course, highly peculiar and really sounds - without a doubt - very convincing. And of course I have indeed not the slightest suspicion that all this would consciously come from you yourself and would be a product of your own imagination and narrative art. But are you then also quite sure, dear friend, that this thing does not come from your so-called subconscious, that spiritual reservoir of the soul, in which, unconscious to the waking man, are stored all the impressions, thoughts and sensations which the soul has ever had some time in this world!"

"On that I can only say this much" - Liebhardt replied - "since I have never even remotely thought myself these thoughts that rose up in me and which I have written down and expressed before you.



They do not come from me - neither from the consciousness nor from the subconsciousness of my soul. Impressions and thoughts that have been had can also certainly only rise from the subconscious as quiet, colorful components, as well as be stored in this spiritual reservoir or archives by the registry forces of the soul. But without conscious work of the human spirit, these components will certainly never become a meaningful whole - as here in this description given to us this evening! - And thus I certainly don't believe that this strangely vivid, in itself highly logical and clear representation would be a product of my subconscious."

"Of course not!" - said Mrs. Loschmann briskly - "How then should Mr. Liebhardt have known in his subconscious Alwine and Friedchen's names!"

"After all, you still can't say with complete certainty that it's really our cousin we're talking about!"

"We'll see about that in the future" - concluded teacher Liebhardt the debate in a calm, confident voice. - "That real, invisible, supernatural beings must be involved here, you will convince yourself of completely yet. - A tree never falls with one axe blow, as the proverb says!"

"And especially not such an old, gnarled one!" - said Frau Gertrud jokingly, giving her husband a light tap on the shoulder. - "But we want to leave now for today and not disturb your blessed night's rest any longer. - We will be occupied by what we've heard now today for a long time and it will not let us sleep. For this matter - that I see - is also for my husband a most mysterious secret which we must open up with the Lord's help, no matter the cost!"

"By all means" - said Pastor Loschmann, squeezing the teacher's spouses' hands - "receive our warmest thanks! - And allow us to come back to you tomorrow at this hour and hear more!"

"Very gladly" - Liebhardt replied - "it will be our greatest pleasure to be able to introduce you two dear friends to the kingdom of light and love, in which we ourselves have now been allowed to find so much bliss."

With that, the two couples said goodbye. And the Pastors, deep in thought, set out for their home. "You see" - said Mrs. Gertrud, as they unlocked the parsonage - "it really is as the poet says: there is a great deal more between heaven and earth than you learned gentlemen dream of!"

## Chapter 29

No sooner had the appointed hour arrived the next evening, when Pastor Loschmann and his wife left their house again and walked hurriedly toward the teacher's apartment.

Mrs. Lydia received them on the stairs with great kindness, received the bouquet of asters they brought with them with heartfelt thanks, and led the guests into the dusky living room, where the lamp was already burning.

Since Liebhardt had some errands to run for the church choir that was meeting the next day, Lydia sat down on the sofa with Mrs. Gertrud, while the pastor took a seat in a comfortable leather chair. "What impressions did you take home with you yesterday?" - asked Lydia eagerly.

"What do you think about the matter? - I was a little worried whether you understand and see everything the way we do."

"Oh, if you only knew, Mrs. Lydia" - said Mrs. Loschmann - "how this experience moves us! My husband even almost more than me! He immediately wrote to our cousin this morning - we do not want to tell you his name and place of residence, so that your husband will not be influenced by any knowledge. We are now extremely curious about what kind of news we will receive and are inwardly already prepared for the worst. The location, as far as it was described last night, the engine hall, the neighboring residence, the factory and the nearby forest - all this is true - as well as the name of the wife and the son and the attitude of the cousin. - God in heaven, this is all so very strange and meaningful! - Even my husband is completely dazed and can not explain it at all!

"It's true" - Loschmann said, by slapping both hands lightly on the padded backs of the chairs - "the more you think about this story, the stranger it becomes! But it can't be that a spirit comes from the other world and tells us how he is doing and how he is feeling over there! That is yet purely impossible! There one ought to have already for a long time an exact, scientifically determined picture of it!"

"Now you speak exactly" - his wife exclaimed smilingly with a certain eagerness - "like that unfortunate spirit last night who could not believe that he had already died, since he was alive after all! He also said - "That is then purely impossible, scientifically it can not be that someone still thinks and speaks when his body is ashes!"

"Yes, that is terrible" - said Lydia - "that many deceased people for a long time do not even know and believe that they have departed from the earthly-bodily life! In their excited dream state they still think to live in their old, known environment. And it often takes a lot of effort for the angels of God until they at least convince these unfortunates that they have now died earthly."

"Yes, it is appalling" - confirmed Mrs. Gertrud - "in what delusion people live here as well as there, in the earthly as well as in the otherworldly existence! And one truly has cause to obtain full enlightenment as early as possible about all the circumstances awaiting us after death!"

At these words, the teacher Liebhardt, a newspaper in his hand, stepped out of his study into the living room, greeted those who had arrived warmly and sat down with them. "There I have" - he said, unfolding the newspaper he had brought with him - "just read a newspaper message in the Afternoon daily which is strangely reminiscent of the message received yesterday! - Here it says under 'News': "From Muehlbach: Yesterday evening, as a result of an explosion, the factory and residential building of H.F. Ziegler burned down."

"Heinz!" - exclaimed Mrs. Loschmann and reached for her husband - "You see, it's him - our cousin Hermann!"

"Truly!" said Loschmann and reached now, also quite dismayed, with both hands for the newspaper.

"The owner" - Liebhardt continued to read in a lowered voice - "was buried under the burning debris, along with his wife and child, and met his death with them."

"Horrible!" - stammered the two pastoral spouses, staring at the newspaper sheet - "This is a terrible thing!" The whole, small society was deeply affected. The pastor, however, jumped up from his chair. "Let us now immediately hear further, my friends, what else has happened there" - he said quickly, urging all three present toward the round table with true ardor.

"But you, Gertrud" - he added, turning to his wife - "don't interrupt so much this time! That surely disturbs in the highest degree!"

"Oh" - thought Liebhardt - "that's not so bad! Interjection or questioning, if done with good sense, often yields peculiar and very revealing answers. The otherworlders are not so quickly thrown off their game!"

"Anyhow, anyhow!" - said Loschmann eagerly. "She should stop the unnecessary heckling! Indeed, we now know who we are dealing with and who is talking to us there!"

"Certainly! I will then also pull myself together!" - promised Mrs. Gertrud. And everyone hurried to the table under the lamp.

Liebhardt again took his seat in front of his writing pad. - In deep earnestness they all gathered in their inward and asked the heavenly powers for another quite instructive enlightenment. And in a short time the mediator, immersed in silent inner listening, began to write and speak:

"It is a strange story! I sleep all the time! - But it's not a right sleep. If it continues like this, then it indeed can become right! - Alwine, listen, how is it with the spiritists then? - Has a spirit ever really come and told you that he still lives without a real body? It is yet not scientifically conceivable that a force expresses itself without substance!... If only I had also studied the hocus pocus with you and looked at the foundation of your stuff! - But to prove to you now that I am alive, namely on earth - as a human being, not as a ghost in hell - let me simply get out of bed and stand on my feet!

... Look, here I am! - But what the hell is this then!?! - No ground under me! All around air, nothing but air!?! - Eh, what then is it with me!?! - Believe, I am on the way to the hereafter!?! - What a feeling it is to float in the air like a leaf in the wind without stand and hold! - Ha! Weather! A chair or at least a plank! I'm drowning in nothingness!

Listen, Alwine! - Where are you?! Gone!?! No longer here! - All gone! - God in heaven, how empty it is there! And how dreadfully dark! Nowhere light for a penny! Dark, dark on all sides! - Is there then no help, no more salvation for me?

Oh God, could one pray! But that's no longer possible, it's too late now! - Is there a God at all? - I indeed don't even know, and I've never cared about it. But it would really be too mean to lock me up forever in this dark, horrible hole for my minor offense, for not believing! - A God can't do that after all!

I will once again call for help, in case anyone would come and hear me! - Hey - help! Help! Help! - Is there a God, may He come here and have mercy on me, a wretched sinner! ... I will wait! - Surely something has to show up! -

... Aha, the door opens! - Who is coming then? - An old man! - Upon my soul, that's the deceased old spiritists' uncle! - Oh dear, he'll be happy when he finds me in this cage!

Well, good man, what do you say now about eternal life? - Is that also a state?! - And how are you then? Are you in the hole too? - Or maybe in heaven? - You do not look like that to me right now! You are indeed blue from the cold! - Oh, you poor devil, you are well even worse off than I am! - Just come in to me! In the world, in life, I certainly couldn't stand you. Don't hold it against me! Your ghost stories were too stupid for me and your imagination too great. I'd rather stay with the church than with such conventicles.

But what is then now with the so-called hereafter? - Were you right, or is everything you have been talking about in the spiritualistic circle, humbug?

... So, so, you're fine!? - But why then are you freezing like this? - Because you yourself are also a poor devil in the kingdom of heaven!? - Haha, that's hilarious, such a heaven for the pious - and for the godless such a hell! - Here should then at least burn a fire, that one also sees and feels it to be hell! - And if one comes down from heaven, he should not rattle with cold!... How? What do you say? - It's cold here!? - I feel nothing, I am quite warm and comfortable in this hell! ... So so, you mean that spiritually?! - That's why you are freezing with me - because I lack the right love! - Well, well: Be it lamented to God, in my life I have indeed never been fond of anyone except myself and Friedchen. Not even my wife so properly. She was too pious and too stupid to me. I only loved my machines and, I think, Friedchen, my boy, also only, because I thought that he would continue everything I had started there.

Yes, yes, there you are already a bit right! There wasn't much love in me for the human pack. However, throughout my life, God has not shown me much love either. - I grew up as an orphan in an institution where there was terrible beating and little bread, but hard work and empty slogans from the sanctimonious leaders. Afterwards I was apprenticed to a merchant, who again made me starve and slave. No trace of love here either! And so it went on until I created myself a job for life with my business. There the good God has also not helped me even a little bit. I had to create everything myself with worries and toil day and night! Yes, if a miracle had happened, that would be something else! But nothing of it! One year after the other, only toil and burden!

And here you come, good man, and say that I should have loved Him Who did not care for me? Ah no, He cannot ask that of me! I am not aware of any guilt against such a God! To me a father can get lost who does not care for his child whom he has brought into this world and whom he makes to toil and slave away like an animal!..."

"Wretched man" - spoke another, deeply serious, heavenly-clear voice through the mediator Liebhardt - "what are you talking about so incessantly?! Who has made you and given you the gifts of understanding with which you could rise from abject poverty to prosperity and wealth? You know that you did not give it to yourself! - And who gave you the willpower to wrestle through all difficulties?

Behold, your Creator gave you this too! - And that He made you fight and struggle like that, can you not think for yourself the good reasons for it? Will a will be strong that does not practice itself in battle? And does a mind sharpen itself, which one does not need!?"

- How would you have brought up your son at a mature age, if he had outgrown his mother's care? Did you not often say, that he must go out, completely on his own, and also fight for himself as you had to?

How proudly you spoke so often to your wife about your hard school of life, how it had been good for you in spite of everything, and how you had only matured into a businessman through it. Yes, just look back for once and tell me whether you would like to miss the hard school!? Oh no, you don't want it even today, because it made you a man in the first place!"

"Lord" - now spoke the first, unhappy voice again - "who are you then all of a sudden here in our company? - You indeed talk like a book! - But you are sure right! And I understand now already a bit better the misery in the world. - But tell me also once, who you actually are and what you want from me!"

"Poor friend!" - was the answer - "Wake up at last to eternal life and realize where you are! - This is the realm of souls, spirits and angels. And here you see all spheres united in our three persons! - You, a poor soul, let yourself be enlightened and instructed by this brother, who is known to you from the past and who means it heartily well with you! He is in the light, even if not yet in the highest spheres, and can give you many valuable insights, also tell you what you should and must do to get out of the darkness into the light. - Amen! - So be it! - I leave you here and go back to where I came from." -

"Ah, was that a strange gentleman after all!" - the voice of the departed now continued to speak. - "Melted into nothingness, from which he came! - I just want to know, was it an angel or just a dream?! - He was indeed beautiful like an image of a saint! And curls like light and gold! - Ah, and the eyes - bright as the blue sky! - Oh, I'd like to have him with me all the time, I'd feel better! - Yet I am still here in a miserable, dreary hole ! Of course, he can't like it there! - Listen, you friend, get me out of here, whatever it costs! - What do I have to do that it will get better with me?"

"First, my friend" - the spiritist brother now let himself be heard - "look into your heart, whether it can please the angel who came to you so full of love?"

"Oh no" - replied the departed - „I know well that before this look from such heavenly eyes, I am a miserable heap of dirt! Everything lacks, front and back! I can never measure up to him! Love emanates out of his face like light from the sun! I am just a dark block, not worth to be pissed on by a dog! - Ah, friend! Up, to the angel! He must help me! I must have him! He's my salvation! - Oh, God, what's wrong with me?! I feel so good just thinking about the golden curly one! Oh, now all of a sudden I sure understand something about love! That's wonderful, wonderful, if you can love! - Up, friend, to my high messenger of love! I must go to him, that he may only look at me a little - it becomes warm to me, I am healing!

But God knows, it all still seems so unreal to me! - Should all this then be only a dream? Dear friend, by all that is true and holy on earth and in heaven - I beg you, finally give me proof - actual, tangible proof that I have died and am in the spirit realm and that all this that I see and that you say, is true and real! Listen! Let me see again the world I am supposed to have left and compare with it my present world! Then I may convince myself of the truth of your words. My old home and my factory and my family - let me see again! That could give me light!

... Ei look! - Already I see a burnt building! - It is the engine room and the dwelling house! - The factory is still half standing! - But under the rubble of the house, what do I see there?! - Ah! - A charred skeleton, like the one I saw on my wife in the fever or death dream! - And close by a small, burnt child's skeleton, a heap of ashes! - My Friedchen!

- God, my God, so it is true after all! - But my own corpse, where is it then? - I don't see it anywhere! - Aha, they have probably already taken it out and taken it to the cemetery!?

... Yes - yes, there I see the nearby cemetery and a fresh grave! - I also look at the bottom of the dark earth hole - And there - truly - there lies my mortal part - as a ghastly nothing full of disgusting stench! - Ah! - God! - What is man's earthly splendor!?! - A heap of dust and decay!...

After these words, a small pause ensued in the writing and speaking of the mediator Liebhardt. - Then it continued. And in another, calm-serious tone came the final word:

"Now, dear ones - with this we have arrived at the end of our consideration of the otherworldly destiny of this soul, as far as it has happened up to now. The brother who has passed from the earthly to the spiritual kingdom will now, after he has convinced himself of his bodily death, let himself be led more easily by his spiritual friends to the light, in order to once, after he will have tasted the power and delight of pure heavenly love, become a new citizen of the eternal kingdom of life through profound experiences. - Conclude now herewith this evening and let what you have heard, become a living blessing in you. - Amen for today! Amen."

Again, after this impressive message, a soundless silence lay over the deeply moved people for quite some time. None of the four wanted to destroy the wonderful content of this hour through an earthly word. Any talk about it seemed a desecration. How poor and meager, how stale and empty is - so they all felt - the thinking and activities of the people of the earthly everyday life, who don't want to suspect and know anything about those things of the invisible, spiritual life! How do they live into the day, not caring about the future of their eternal existence - yes, not suspecting anything about the true goals of the temporal toil and struggle.

Liebhardt was the first to find his way back to the earthly world. He rose from the chair, folded his hands and spoke:

"Dear Heavenly Father! We thank You that You have let us have such a deep look into Your holy, heavenly kingdom of love again today! Continue to be with us and in us, so that we now also have the good will and strength to follow Your Divine words and admonitions. Let Your example, which You gave us as Jesus on earth, be a holy, eternally shining example for us! And so let us conclude this day with the petition: "Be gracious and merciful to us also in the future and guide and lead us on Your ways to the high goal set before us by Your eternal love! - Amen."

Everyone joined in this 'Amen' with all their heart. And especially Pastor Loschmann spoke it loudly and solemnly. The spiritual man further did not talk much more that evening. His heart was too full. It surged and stormed in his chest.

But over there in his apartment, in the bedchamber, Pastor Loschmann, before he went to bed, threw himself on his knees in the presence of his wife - something he had never done in his entire life until now - raised his hands and called out loudly: "Dear God! Help me poor sinner and let me also enter into Your kingdom of light of love and eternal, true life!"

Deeply shaken but blissfully happy, the two spouses fell asleep, hand in hand.

### Chapter 30

Now came wonderful times for the parsonage and the teacher's house. They now met more often in the evening - finally once every week - then in the teacher's house, then at the Pastor's house and listened to the words which were transmitted in such a mysterious, blissful way through the dear spiritual friends from the other world.

Over time, the four initiates also brought in to the meetings several other men and women of the village who seemed to be ripe for this light from the higher spheres - people who also understood that these teachings were not suitable for all the world, and who therefore also knew how to keep the necessary silence, which is necessary so that the pearls of heaven are not trampled into the dust under the feet of the ignorant ones.

So in the village in the forest the mission and work of the messengers from the Paradise realms had a significant effect in silence. The people who in this way came into such direct, impressive contact with the Divine truth and with the spiritual world, became completely different in their entire being. They finally knew why and for what purpose one lived on this earth in this laborious existence, often so rich in disappointments and what the meaning and the actual goal of this earthly life is! And they now also knew quite differently what was actually important in order to achieve that high goal set by God, the Father and Heavenly Heart-Builder. Only faithful, humble, selfless love for God and all beings can lead to victory, to the crown of eternal life! Therefore, it is important to set out without delay on this clearly recognized path - not only in words and thoughts - no, also in deeds!

And so the members of the spiritual circle of brothers and sisters in the forest village were eagerly striving to find the true, imperishable happiness and salvation of the soul in a loving, sunny, universally helpful nature towards all fellow human beings.

For Lydia, who had always been the main support of the whole circle as the most intimate heroine of love and the most fervently praying woman, there was now only the one painful feeling that of all her earthly loved ones, one member of the family - the youngest sister Sibylle with her husband - was not in this blessed light, that these two young people were still drifting aimlessly and rudderlessly out in the world, in the perilous soul-dangers of the big city.

The other three siblings who were between Lydia and Sibylle in age, had all died in the last ten years - two brothers from lung consumption and one sister after a very short marriage in the first childbed. Thus - since also the oldest brother Albert, who had once emigrated to America, was already in the hereafter, of all six children of Sauerbrot, except Lydia, only Sibylle was still with her husband in the rough and for her still quite dark earth valley.

Was one allowed to leave these two young people to themselves? Was it not then an urgent duty of love to save also these "neighbors" from perdition into the circle of light, from the land of death into the kingdom of eternal life!?

It gradually did no longer leave Lydia's caring heart at rest by day and by night. And finally she opened up to her husband with the request to travel to the city and to visit her sister and her husband. Perhaps it could be arranged for them to come here to the schoolhouse for a while. The two young, fun-loving people had no children in their "companionate marriage" - as they called the relationship in which they had already been living together for three years now.

Of course, Karl Gotthilf gladly gave Lydia permission to travel in the following days. She packed a small handbag with travel necessities to be able to stay overnight in the city a few days if necessary, and left early one fine day, after having announced herself to the sister and brother-in-law with a card. At the city's train station, Sibylle awaited and welcomed her.

Lydia almost did not recognize her sister anymore. The so beautiful, reddish shimmering chestnut hair was cut short. A boyish, fresh, cheerful face laughed towards her. A short, skimpy dress in light sea green with white lapels, sleeveless despite the autumn chill, showed off and emphasized more the lovely, swelling forms than that it could have offered them protection from the weather and from covetous glances.

"Yes, is it really you!?" said Lydia.

"And you" - replied Sibylle - "are still the same as three years ago!? I think you back there have no new time at all!?" With that, Sibylle laughingly wrapped the older sister in her arms, hugged and kissed her with strength, grabbed the handbag, and pushed and shoved the astonished woman, before she could even come to her senses, out to the station and into a motorcar.

"We do not usually go by car" - she said underway, in a somewhat more subdued tone - "it's too expensive for us, of course. But today is a celebration! And one must enjoy life!"

"Well, and how is your dear husband then?" - asked Lydia, clinging anxiously to Sibylle because of the speed of the ride and the rushing life in the streets. "Is he also as well as you seem to be?!"

"Oh, you don't have to worry about him! He coughs and coughs forever - and will still outlive us all" - Sibylle replied with good humor. "The lead and sulfur fumes in his factory do indeed give him a lot of trouble with his lungs; but they get used to over time, says the doctor. With it already many had become 70 years and even older. Yes, after all, it is supposed to be quite healthy and harden the lungs."

"So, so!? And so you continue without any worries!?"

"Well - what's the use of worrying!? Can we change it!? He must still be happy to have work at all! How many are breadless today! He is actually still brilliantly off! Because he is very punctual and hardworking, the boss thinks much of him and lets him get ahead. He will become a boss one day. He's been told that several times!"

"But won't he be ruined by then by the vile lead fumes? - And what about you then!?"



"Oh, old worry-wart!" - laughed Sibylle - "You are still the same in everything! You already talked like that 20 years ago, when mother died: What will become?! How are we going to be? . . . It goes well if man does not worry too much about the future and also lets God be a good man. He has put us here in life after all! And if there is a God - which I sometimes certainly doubt very much - he must also take care of us! That is a duty of honor! ... So, but now we are already at home!"

With that, Sibylle opened the car door and jumped onto the sidewalk. It was a sober, somewhat gloomy residential street in a better working-class and lower middle-class neighborhood in which they have arrived. Sibylle paid the driver and then walked up while cheerfully chatting through the not very clean hallway and up the lightless stairwell to her small apartment on the third floor.

While she was unlocking the glass door, the neighboring door on the same level opened. A rather obese, older, scruffy woman stepped out and, looking curiously at the arrivals, said: "So, do you have a visitor, Mrs. Eggenhart?!"

"Yes," Sibylle replied shortly, "my sister!" and quickly pushed Lydia into the hallway of the apartment, closing the glass door behind her.

"Yes" - Sibylle replied brusquely - "my sister!" - and quickly pushed Lydia into the hallway of the apartment and closed the glass door behind her. "That is a very wicked witch, that one!" - she said inside in a hushed voice to the somewhat embarrassed sister while putting down their things. "She has the evil eye - and consults the cards. She will still put her husband, a still quite young, decent, dear person, under the ground. And she hates and pursues me like an evil seven. You can't imagine how she lies and slanders! - And we have to live next door to such a witch!"

With these words Sibylle opened the parlor door and led her sister into a bright, with pretty furniture exceedingly homely furnished room.

"Oh!" - exclaimed Lydia quite relieved, brushing away the bad impression of the gloomy house and the next door neighbor. "This is indeed a little paradise! There's even flowers! And here's a fishbowl with lively, gold-shimmering inhabitants!"

A beautiful wicker chair by the window, comfortably moved in front of a pretty little work table, kindly invited one to sit down. Behind the table, against the wall stood an almost opulent divan with huge back cushions. And above the table the beautiful electric lamp with a large, tasteful silk shade! - All this put Lydia in a truly devout amazement. "Dear me! What the young people can afford nowadays - one had not known anything about it in the past at all!"

Sibylle turned on the lights for show and demonstrated that for festive lighting, in addition to the light source under the silk shade, also various other bulbs could be set in action. And now, in this magical glow, Lydia saw the beautiful oak buffet with tasteful, calm decoration. - In the past, such things were only found in castles!

Sibylle laughed. "Thus everyone has it now who thinks something of himself! One buys it and pays it later, as is appropriate; or sometimes not! Then the owner or the bailiff takes it back! - This one is paid and belongs to us! It is really a kind of rarity in this street!"

And now look in there, too - here in the holy of holies" - she continued with a smiling face and pushed with her fine white hand a curtain of Japanese pearl strings away from the doorway leading into the adjoining room - "Here is the bedroom! - Friedbert furnished it so beautifully! It was so important to him!"

"What?" - Lydia almost bounced back from the threshold. "That is your..." the word stuck in her mouth - "there you rest and sleep!? - It is indeed like heaven! - God, God, it's a fairy chamber after all! - These curtains at the windows! Light clouds of lace tulle! And above, two wings of dark green silk! - And these beds - under a veil sky! - How wonderfully harmonious it all is! - And the large wardrobe for clothes and linen next to it, made of light, fine, certainly very expensive wood! Likewise the washstand! And next to it - in a special rack - a man-high, oval, polished mirror!"

"Dear me!" - Lydia could not get over her amazement and, after looking at everything, gladly let Sibylle lead her back into the living room onto the divan. "I thought" - she said at last - "that you still had your parents' living room and bedroom furniture, which you took over after father's death?!"

"Oh, that old stuff! Where are you thinking? We sold it all!" - replied Sibylle cheerfully, while she prepared a pristinely white, patterned blanket on the table and fetched a pretty coffee set from the cupboard. "Nowadays, only the very old-fashioned people have something like the good parents once had! - Should we struggle with it until the end of our blessed lives? - Look, our view is:

To enjoy life is the reason's commandment.

One lives such a short time and is dead for such a long time!

A bright, silvery laugh escaped her throat at these poet's words. Lydia had to look at the pretty young woman with wide eyes. Was that really her sister - this fine, lively, young lady, who set the table with such sure movements and supple hands, set up, filled and operated an electric coffee machine made of bright nickel, brought from the tiny kitchen next door a glass jug with cream and a beautiful white pastry, and now sat down with an obviously good appetite for eating and chatting with her!?

"You know" - said Sibylle, waiting for the coffee water to boil - "I don't like to think about those times of the parents at all anymore! Those were actually horrible times! Father's eternal bickering and mother's sighing! And afterwards, when mother was dead - the eternal misery! - No, no - away with all the memories from those old, dreary days of misery! Away with all the stuff on which the spirit of those evil years hung! I also burned the pictures from the wall. I still have only the one of mother there in the cupboard. And I also look at it from time to time and remember the poorest, whom the father has literally plagued to death!

... Oh, yes" - she said with a sad, sideward inclined face. "Now she lies long since in her grave and has rest! - But I can tell you this - I swore to myself then, when father finally died - I will not lead a similar life as my mother! - Rather none at all! - Is man then only to be plagued in the world!? - No, God forbid!... And you see" - she said while rising and pouring the coffee with slender hands - "so, when I went away with Friedbert, we threw the old behind us as soon as possible and began a whole different, new life after our own fashion."

Well, if one looked around in this friendly home and looked at the pretty young woman, there was apparently not much to object to about this "other life". - And nevertheless - nevertheless - Lydia was not comfortable!

What a deep and wide gulf had grown between her and her sister in the few years since they had not seen each other! Most of all, the staid, serious Lydia was troubled by Sibylle's carefree and, as it seemed, completely faithless nature.

"But how is it with you here with the Savior?" - she asked at last after a pause, in which she had thoughtfully stirred the coffee. "Do you also have Him in your beautiful home and in the life set up according to your ways?"

"Oh dear!" - retorted Sibylle in a high, bell-like tone - "Are you coming with it already!? Do you think then, here with us in this street, in this whole quarter, someone still really believes in a God!? Yes, some people still go to church. At least they pretend. And they also run to the spiritists and into the meetings; but I don't count them. Those like us know their way around and can no longer be led by the nose! - Friedbert left the church with bag and baggage, that is, with me and several of our friends, when they were still demanding church taxes from us poor wretches!"

"What!?" - cried Lydia in shock, pushing the cup from her and leaning back in her seat - "you are without God and faith!?"

"Well, well" - the younger sister replied in an unabashed tone - "that's not so bad after all! Nevertheless, one remains, as best one can, a decent human being! - Anyway, where is the good God then? Has he ever helped us so quite clearly and tangibly? Why has he then taken our dear mother away from us when we were still small, helpless children and left us in the clutches of our father?! And did He look after me when you got married and I had to take over the household for father when I was 15 - or then later when father finally departed and I was on my own!? - I always and everywhere had to help myself and no God and Savior showed up and protected me, to not become bad! And that's exactly how it also went with Friedbert throughout his whole life. After his father had gone bankrupt with his small workshop and jumped into the water and his mother had died of grief, he had to bring himself through alone with tenacious diligence. And no rooster would have crowed after him if he had perished. That's why we then also moved away from the lazy matter of faith and also let the church be - because we have no interest in feeding a Pastor with our pennies, who lets himself be well!"

"Yes, tell once, can you then still be comfortable in your heart?! Mustn't you die of fear and worry?" - Lydia interjected, horrified.

"Nah! - We are doing brilliantly! - I feel like a million bucks, as you can see!" With that, Sibylle already reached for the second slice of cake and also spooned out extensively from the fruit aspic provided. "Why should we grieve? We enjoy life as long as we are young. Later, things will change all by itself! That means, if one is smart and sensible and not just has bad luck, one can also still make pretty good provisions for one's old age. There are all kinds of funds nowadays, and man no longer needs God, as in former times!"

Lydia was rigid and speechless with horror. From Sibylle's letters, she had indeed inferred a similar attitude; but she had not yet suspected such an abyss of godlessness and frivolity. And that her sister was so cheerful and lively at the same time - that still seemed to her the very worst.

Is it not - thought the faithful soul - a horrible trick of darkness and its prince, that he also wraps people in such an apparent well-being! Really, this whole pretty home, the sunny, cozy living room, the charming bedroom now seemed to her in this light like a cunning Satan's trap - like an intoxicant with which the prince of the world wanted to drug these souls and carry them away from the true meaning and purpose of their earthly life.

In deep sorrow, Lydia told this to her sister. But she encountered an almost passionate resistance, which revealed to her a completely different, persistent and evil soul-spark in Sibylle's hitherto so cheerful little person. "In these matters" - Sibylle gushed angrily - "one must let everyone have his freedom! There can and must be no compulsion! Because the one man thinks by nature so, the other so. And anyway, I don't like to talk about it at all! For me, all this is much too - well, how shall I say - too holy, or how can I say it. I feel embarrassed when I just hear the word 'God'. We here do not talk about it at all. And leave me completely alone even with your 'Heavenly Father' - or 'Jesus' or 'Savior'! It just makes me sick to hear something like that nowadays, when everything is so enlightened and when the world is so upside down!"

That was too much for Lydia. "Listen" - she said, rising up, crimson with righteous anger - "please not another word now, Sibylle. Your words are blasphemous!"

"But it is true!" - persisted Sibyl firmly - "And all, all the fuss of the church and the pious is only calculated to keep the poor folk right down - so that one pays his taxes and works for the rich for a paltry dog's wage!"

"The Word of God, the Bible" - Lydia replied with holy fiery zeal - "teaches: 'Love God above all things, and your neighbor as yourself!' This commandment can be clearly read from the Scriptures by anyone who is of good will without any effort. And if people lived according to this true, real and easily recognizable teaching of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, then things would be very different - much better and more heavenly in this world. Then there would be no discontented and bitter, poor people and no unloving, hard rich people - but all men would be brothers!"

"Yes, if - if!" - said Sibylle. "But since it now looks so very different in the world and one plagues and undresses the other - so in my and Friedbert's opinion and in the opinion of the very most awakened people of today, there is nothing to your dear God and all His beautiful teachings. Man is helped by no-one but himself! - And with that, let's end this argument now!" ...

"Look" - she added a little more calmly - "nothing clever comes of it after all, and it is only annoying! - Keep you your good old faith and leave me my modern unbelief! We in the city have to keep up with the times - with you in the country - well - "she said, jokingly tugging at Lydia's rural blouse - "where still such an old flag will do, too!"

With this, the unpleasant intellectual conversation material was cut off by Sibylle and the conversation was changed to the harmless topic of clothing matters and other externals.

Lydia necessarily had to follow the firm will of the lively sister, although her inner self could not rise above what she had heard and could only laboriously recover from this terrible thing.

Towards evening, Sibylle's husband, Friedbert, came home from work. Lydia met him personally for the first time on this occasion. It was a not unsympathetic man, a little older than Sibylle. His narrow, pale face with brown eyes and pleasantly wavy hair revealed a fine, sensitive nature. But what struck Lydia with concern, was his great leanness. Yes, this man was obviously a victim of his unhealthy profession! The chest between the broad shoulders was sunken. His breathing was quick and hollow. A pale pallor covered his face, which was overflowed with an abrupt, fleeting red at the greeting and also otherwise at every excitement. Friedbert was happy to meet Lydia and told the women about his work and the bad course of business, which had already again forced his company to lay off a large number of workers. The specter of breadlessness hovers over everyone and one must be grateful if one also still has even such a health-threatening job.

An anxious trepidation seized Lydia even at this revelation about the living conditions of these two people. How could Sibyl be so carefree and serene in the face of such conditions - under a fate that held their lives in its clutches like a ravaging bird of prey, without a higher, heavenly power in their hearts being able to succor and comfort them!

But Friedbert also seemed to share the unconcerned calm of his spouse. If things went wrong in the business - which was not to be expected so quickly for him, the good foreman - then the state was there with unemployment benefits - and to heal the lungs, there was also an insurance, health resorts and convalescent homes.

All this apparently also made a God and heavenly Father superfluous for him, despite his obviously quite dangerous suffering. It was not allowed to worry too much with thoughts of the future, but to use the moment and what it brought sensibly and enjoy it, then everything was already good.

In Sibylle he had a young, pretty wife who gave him much joy. To look after her, to cherish and care for her was his most beautiful, completely contented purpose in life. Everything that his modest means allowed him at all, he spent on cherishing and decorating this beloved woman and her existence. That is why he also had furnished the apartment and especially the bedroom so carefully and lovingly. And it was a secret, great pride for him to take his wife out on Saturdays or Sundays in a dress that she had always made herself according to his tasteful specifications, of simple but exceptional beauty.

Sibylle herself, of course, was not as completely devoted to him as he was to her. For her, there was still another world besides him, Friedbert. Yes, it sometimes seemed to him that once he was no longer there, she could live just as happily and perhaps even more freely and generously with another man. - Oh, these were bitter drops in his happiness.

And there he had to be careful! - He did not fail to do so. He never let her go anywhere alone. He went along everywhere. And when the festivities and dances in which they participated continued until dawn, which was not at all beneficial to his health, he did not leave her side, watching her argus-eyed.

Thus Friedbert lived in the joyful conviction to be in undivided possession of his young wife. And yet, still that very evening, a terrible revelation and the most horrible end of this sham happiness would befall him.

### Chapter 31

When they had just finished the evening meal of cold cuts and tea in the cozy golden glow of the lamp, they suddenly heard a ringing at the glass door.

Friedbert got up, went out, and immediately came back with that old, slovenly, and unfriendly woman who lived next door on the same stair level and at Lydia's coming had curiously stepped in front of her glass door for a brief greeting.

"Mrs. Diestermann is here" - Friedbert said to Sibylle with obvious displeasure - "and wants to speak to Lydia!"

"What!" - said Sibylle, immediately doused over and over with a glowing red, in a remarkably sharp tone to the woman who had entered the room at the same time as Friedbert - "what do you want then of my sister?!"

"Yes, it is exactly the Mrs. Sister, with whom I would like to speak a few words" - said Mrs. Diestermann - "because this one seems to me a decent woman, and shall be a witness to me before God and man that I am now experiencing such great meanness as prevails within these four walls!"

"What are you saying!?" - Friedbert snapped - "What are you allowing yourself?"

"Will you get out of this apartment immediately!" - cried Sibylle, entirely chalk-white, with large, widened eyes."

"I am here and I am staying here!" - said Mrs. Diestermann calmly and firmly. - "And no ten horses will get me out before I have said what I came for and found my right! You, Mr. Eggenhart" - she turned to Friedbert - "do not need to get upset at all. I only pity you. You are, after all, in your great, blind, childish guilelessness, only the tricked one!"

"What! What!" - Friedbert's face contorted completely. He seems to want to rush towards the woman.

"Throw that insolent woman out!" - screeched Sibylle. "This is outrageous, what she allows herself!"

"Now, be quite fine still and quiet!" - placated Mrs. Diestermann - "You, Mr. Eggenhart, will still thank me on your knees if I tell you now that your wife, whom you carry on your hands and adore - is cheating on you!"

"You miserable, lying, mean woman!" - cried Sibylle now, who had suddenly changed from the youthful, pretty person into a hellish, wrathful, hateful fiend. "Get out immediately, or I'll scratch your eyes out of your face!"

"Here you go!" - said Mrs. Diestermann while swaying in her hips, who, at fifty years of age, was still rather pretty. "You can still be dealt with! And your husband and your sister should finally know how you've been fooling your husband for a long time and most recently, with my own husband!"

Ah - but now that went over the hat string! "You old gypsy woman leave this apartment right now!" - Friedbert shouted. "Or I do not guarantee for your bones! I have never encountered such impudence in my life! What I have to think of my wife, I know better than you! Take care of your husband! That will be more important than minding my business!"

"You won't believe such unfounded meanness after all!?" - whimpered Sibylle, who had thrown herself on the divan with nervous weeping and sobbing, hiding her face in her hands.

"Just calm down, Mr. Eggenhardt!" - said Mrs. Diestermann to Friedbert, who had indeed distorted himself into a truly horrible figure of horror and anger. "I only mean it well with you! You are as miserable as I am. Don't think, because I know more than others about the secret and future things through the spirit and am therefore disreputable, that I therefore lack a sense of honor. - I also have a heart and honor in my body and will not let my husband - even if he is twenty years younger than me - be taken away by such a one" - with that she shook her fist at Sibylle - "if, in your blind trust-stupidity, for which your wife long since repays you with disgrace and shame, you need proof in my case, so look" - with that she pulled a little pink letter out of her skirt pocket - "at this letter which she wrote to him to his business, and which I took out of my husband's pocket!"

"Give me that vile lie, wisp!" - cried Sibylle, who had jumped up and was leaning like a tigress on the woman and her hands, which were spreading the letter on the table. However, Mrs. Diestermann was obviously prepared for this attack. Her broad back and her whole, solidly built figure hindered Sibylle's access.

But Friedbert approached with eerie, bloodshot eyes, grabbed the letter held ready for him, glanced at the lettering, read the few sentences - then he staggered wordlessly forwards, propped himself up against the table, and suddenly collapsed, gasping, while a thick stream of blood rushed from his mouth.

Sibylle made a ghastly scream: "Murderer!" - she yelled. She readily lifted the heavy crystal bowl, which stood on the table with some fruits, to hurl it at the woman's head. Then a younger, blond man with bold, sharp features rushed in through the half-open door, snatched the bowl from her, and said curtly and cuttingly: "Be sensible now - and let the fuss be, Sibylle. Say it straight out and confess it quietly - after it is now once snatched on - that we are fond of each other and that consequently" - at this he looked after the man lying unconscious in his blood on the floor - "this one has as little to say about it as" - and at this he threw a grim look of hatred at his wife, Mrs. Diestermann - "who chained me to herself in my inexperienced youth eight years ago and shall not have me in her damned claws forever!"

"Let here" - he added further, turning to Sibylle - "the doctor rule - and follow me! I'll take you and me to safety! - We are taken care of!"

He already wanted to pull Sibylle, who stood there frozen and pale as wax, staring at Friedbert, away with him by the arm - then Lydia, who had witnessed this whole sudden scene of terror from her corner on the divan as if petrified, finally awoke from her spell. She jumped up, snatched the intruder's hand back from Sibylle's arm, placed herself before the bold robber with all the fiery majesty of a flaming angel, and shouted in a loud, brazen voice:

"You leave my sister in peace and go immediately from this apartment and from the vicinity of this dying one here - to whom you have brought death and whose blood comes over you! - My sister stays here and will not go with you into the hell of perdition!"

Before the firm, sparkling gaze of the strange woman, filled with a Divine glow and heavenly power, the young, defiant man lowered his eyes. Here - this he felt - he could not penetrate. Mrs. Diestermann - who actually could rather have been his mother than his wife - also grabbed him at the same time with both hands at the arms and said:

"And indeed don't you think I'm going to let you free! - Never! Do you hear!? - Even if you would jump to heaven!" A terrible wave of anger and hatred momentarily leapt from her eyes and facial expressions. "Never!" - she repeated - "Not even in hell! - If I liked and took you because of your fresh youth, so you have married me for the money, which I earn with the cards and astrology and which promised you a beautiful life. But you shall not now, after you have stolen my money and I have had this house put on your name, thrust me from you like a mangy dog.

And this one here - who only wants to live jauntily, be it with one or the other - shall not share the robbery with you! - She will take her sister with her and puts her head straight. So it says in the stars and in the cards! And you come with me - or starve on the street! Because the contract of ownership of the house - know! - will tomorrow be justly challenged by the lawyer and reversed!"

This speech, blurted out with masculine strong emphasis, obviously sobered the man even further and, horrified at Sibylle's deathly pallor as he saw her broken on her knees at the seemingly dying Friedbert, he had his wife lead him out of the room and into their apartment.

## Chapter 32

While thus the spouses Diestermann disappeared like evil spirits of darkness into their realm, Lydia hurried into Sibylle's kitchen, looked for and found a vinegar bottle, a basin, water and a cloth and hurried with it back to Friedbert, who was still lying on the floor.

Sibylle, incapable of a word, had straightened him up a bit and leaned his upper body against the divan. The blood still oozed slightly from the half-open mouth. The eyes were closed. Sibylle knelt beside him and clawed her hands into her waxen cheeks: "Friedbert!? Friedbert!?" - she whimpered in a tone of horror that betrayed her entire terrible sense of guilt and her impotent helplessness.

Then Lydia came with the vinegar water. She first washed Friedbert's face. Then she let the motionless one smell the vinegar; also gave him a few drops on his lips.



Then at last the man, physically and spiritually deadly sore, took a deep breath and opened for a moment painfully and dully his eyelids.

"He's alive! - He's coming to himself!" - said Lydia quickly. "Quickly, go and fetch a doctor!" - she added and gave the still quite petrified Sibylle a little shake. Before Sibylle could rise, however, Mrs. Diestermann appeared through the slightly ajar hall and room door and said to Lydia: "Excuse me, dear lady - I have already called the panel doctor by telephone. He will be here in a moment. I just wanted to say that. By the way, see to it that she" - with this she inclined her head toward Sibylle - "together with the man gets out of here as soon as possible - and that he keeps a sharp eye on her in the future! - With that, God commanded!"

When Mrs. Diestermann had gone, Friedbert again opened his eyes and silently fixed his gaze on Sibylle so long and in such deathly grief that she, still crouching on the floor in front of him, slapped her hands before her face and suddenly wept bitterly. It had penetrated her like a stream of acknowledgment. - God, God! What had she done! This silent, painful look of her husband penetrated her like a sword into the innermost part of her soul! How had she been able to step over a human life like that!?

Friedbert closed his eyes again without uttering a word. He probably still couldn't grasp the horror. But Sibylle's guilty features revealed to him the actual truth of the horror and confirmed to him not only the letter, the relationship to the hated, unworthy neighbor, but also many other things which the old woman had only hinted at, but which he had already suspected and feared so many a time.

He was deceived - betrayed - by the one for whom he had done everything, for whom he had gone through the fire and for whose carefree life and well-being he had sacrificed his health, his life every day! Oh - that was a breakdown! That was a fall from the heights and a horrible awakening!

Meanwhile, while Friedbert Eggenhart was swaying in himself back and forth in confused, incoherent thoughts, and the images and feelings of terror, anger, and woe were chasing each other in a wild rush within him, came hurried footsteps down the hall and a middle-aged gentleman entered, who introduced himself as the panel doctor of the neighborhood called by Mrs. Diestermann.

He had the cause of the incident briefly described to him, while he took off his hat and overcoat and fetched his examination tools from his pocket, asked the women to help him to carefully lay the sick man on the bed and undress him, and then briefly and deftly carried out his examination in the usual manner.

The finding was an occupationally ruined lung and a bursting of one of the diseased tissue parts with sudden blood overflowing as a result of excitation. While the doctor was explaining this to the women, he gave the sick man a hemostatic medicine he had brought with him, wrote a prescription and the insurance order, and said that the main thing should be complete rest away from business, spa procedures, and afterwards recreation in good air.

"We want to see and hope that it still helps. Get the medicines against bleeding and fever at the pharmacy right away! I will arrange everything else. - And now good night!"

"I still have several visits!" With that, the busy man said goodbye and was out of the door before the two women could even come fully to their senses.

Sibylle quickly threw a shawl around her shoulders and hurried to the pharmacy. Lydia stayed with the patient and watched his breaths. They were short and uneven, in light puffs. A high fever was obviously on the way. Friedbert had closed his eyes. The medicine given to him by the doctor seemed to induce a stupefying sleep. He lay soundless and motionless - like a deeply mortally wounded deer in the forest thicket.

What a change, what a horrible end to this fair marital dream, thought Lydia, as she sat beside the sick man's bed and surveyed the beautiful bedchamber, furnished with so much care and love, in the dim glow of the bedside lamp.

Yes, life without God - where does it lead to!? When people no longer recognize a higher, Divine power over them, when they no longer reckon with a continued life after death, but only with the short, earthly existence, when they seek the actual, high and blessed goal of life not in the eternal, but in the temporal life - then it is of course no wonder when it comes to such horrific endings. If a person counts only on earthly life and its pleasures, then he will also strive with all the power and strength of his instincts for the most productive savoring of these short opportunities for enjoyment, especially in the days of his youth. And if thereby no watchful, warning and punishing eye of God rests on him, then he will be conscienceless and consider it reason to recklessly step over his neighbor in the pursuit of pleasure.

Here one had yet another example! Externally, everything seemed to be in the best order with these young married couple. Yes, one could have considered this pretty home to be exemplary. Everything also seemed to be quite reasonably designed for long term harmony. - But what could deter the young, vivacious woman from longing for new pleasures in life at the time when her husband became ill and others came along who seemed to offer her new and more pleasures and a more secure livelihood?

"After all, one only lives for such a short time and is dead for such a long time!"

Lydia had to think of this ungodly verse recited by Sibylle. And with that, everything was clear to her.

In the meantime, the sister hurriedly returned from the pharmacy. The women gave the sleep-drunk patient a spoonful of the medicine, made him vinegar water compresses to cool the heat, did whatever else seemed advisable, and then, leaving the door open, retreated into the living room so as not to disturb the slumbering man in his now alone saving rest.

Oh God! Only now did Sibylle come to her senses and was able to grasp with full clarity everything that had happened in all its blatancy. This disgrace and shame before her sister! That was still the worst thing for her. If her sister had not been there and was not a witness, then she would perhaps not have been so upset about what had happened - for all that she was doing behind her husband's back during his working hours had to come to light one day after all. - And better sooner than later - as long as she was still young and could go other, new ways.

For Friedbert, things looked bad - but he could, when he finally left the unhealthy profession and healed himself, finally find a new companion. There were indeed still many pretty girls. She, Sibylle, didn't exactly have to be it! But that now at this very hour Lydia had to come along the way, that this only person in the world, for whom she still care somewhat, had to be there when the mine burst! - Ah, it was a disgusting story, a bottomless shame! – Also with this Peter Diestermann, with whom she had not meant it at all so seriously as with some others whom she liked much better. What should she do now?

Should she just outright deny everything? But that certainly would lead to nothing! The letter was there. And surely the clairvoyant old witch knew even more! And now that Friedbert's distrust was awakened, he would also without a doubt get to the bottom of everything. And then woe if he found that in one case or another he really had cause! She had already read from his looks several times, when Friedbert thought he had reason to be jealous, that his passion would have no limits under such circumstances and perhaps also would not spare her life.

Lydia seemed to suspect these storming thoughts of her sister's soul. She grabbed Sibylle's hands and pulled the again completely stiffened woman next to her onto the divan. "You don't need to tell and confess anything to me" - she said with deep, wistful seriousness - "I already know everything; I can think it from the one point - because you both have no God! That, Sibylle, is where everything comes from - everything! From it came already Cain's fratricide of Abel. And also you have come almost as far as that first murderer! –

Sibylle! Sibylle!" - she suddenly cried in wild pain and yanked the sister to her chest. "If mother knew that you are an ungodly woman, an adulteress and a murderess of your husband! - Sibylle! Sibylle! I will not let you! You are my sister! You must come with me - together with him, the sick one! And you must both get well again - you must awaken! You must find light!

O my God, O dearest Father in Heaven!" - cried the faithful guardian, raising her hands to heaven. "Give me my sister again! Give me her soul, which You already have bound on my heart as a child! I have missed before You that I have not looked after her for so long! Forgive me! Let mercy come before justice! And open up again this once so childlike and pure heart of my sister! O God, let her see and realize how vainly foolish and futile all her hopes and strivings are, and how unholy her life is without God! O Father, give her light! Give her light! And also help the pitiful, poor man!"

While she thus prayed aloud, in the bedroom the sick man, awakening from his stupefied slumber, had slowly straightened up a little. He heard the prayer with a sharpened sense, and suddenly he called out loud and clear: "Lydia, come!"

Quickly, the called woman ran into the bedroom. Sibylle followed behind. There Friedbert sat almost completely erect in bed. The pale pallor of his face had given way to a feverish blush. The large dark eyes glowed and shone. "Lydia" - he said - „do nothing to her! - I - I am to blame for everything - I have made her unbelieving and godless! And I have driven her into this spirit, in which she could do this to me and perhaps - had to! Who knows what powers we poor people are subject to?

"Christ Jesus!" - he suddenly cried, spreading his arms. "I have sinned! I have departed from You! I have forsaken and betrayed You! And now I am punished by You - justly! - Jesus Christ! -

Redeemer! - Forgive us and redeem us too!" With that, the fever glowing one fell back onto the pillows. A glow of transfiguration was suddenly poured over his face and whole being. He lay there with wide, open eyes, as if he were looking into far, bright distances.

"Yes, yes" - he murmured softly. "Yes - yes. There is a God, and He does not let Himself be mocked!" Lydia walked over to the transfigured one, who seemed to be raptured from earthly misery and dirt, and laid her hand on his feverish forehead. "It will be all right, all right, Friedbert. The Father in heaven is merciful and rejoices over everyone who comes to Him!"

When Lydia, after these words, turned to Sibylle, who had stood in rigid amazement on the doorstep and had witnessed what had happened, she could not hold on any longer either. She rushed into Lydia's arms, buried her face in her breast. And at last an inexhaustible stream of tears released the pent-up, hardened feeling of the youthful sinner.

That Friedbert had said: Do nothing to her - it's my fault! - That had hit her in the heart. There something was stirred and called to life in her that she had never, never felt and known before. A very strange glow of the heart - a piece of heaven - a holy spark of fire of true, Divine love had risen in her!

The Savior's, the Redeemer's finger had touched two souls - in night and horror lit a light for them!

### Chapter 33

Who could have seen with the spiritual eye what a fight was fought during these hours for these two souls, Friedbert and Sibylle, also in the invisible realm, he would have recognized only so rightly the deep, heavenly sense of these whole earthly processes.

With Lydia, the spiritual friends of her house and family had moved into the home of the young Mr. and Mrs. Eggenhardt, following the hot urge of her heart. They had found the guardian spirits of the two lost human children deeply grieved and dejected. And an almost impenetrable, black cloud of unholy darkness powers overlaid the whole home of the two people like a steel vault.

Seen through the spiritual eye, it did not look so sunny and friendly as it appeared to the viewer with the physical eye. It was in truth deepest night and desert around the souls of Friedbert and Sibylle. And it was clear that here something could be done only with the highest heavenly power of purest love and with the Father's very own power.

Under fervent prayer of the united good spirits, a battle of wills had begun between this small crowd of light and the army of darkness, which stormed with all its poison-swollen hatred on the closely united but fearless spiritual worshippers.

It was the still young spirit Albert Sauerbrot, the former unfortunate robber-murderer, who had only recently come to light, who was the least afraid here. He was of an unshakable firmness and boldness, when even the most horrible demons came in their fury, to enravish the earthly people acting in the drama - especially Friedbert and Sibylle - to pernicious steps and deeds, and to confuse and put to flight Lydia and the spiritual worshippers. Albert Sauerbrot had experienced the grace, strength and power of the heavenly supreme patron in special glory!

Him, the robber and murderer and godless unbeliever, had been sought, saved and accepted by the Holy Love of the only true God even in the hereafter, yes, led up into the blessed light of paradise, when he had thrown himself in sudden realization and fervent repentance at the feet of the most gentle of all judges, the wonderful Physician and Savior of all sick souls. Oh this experience in that green, refreshing oasis after a long desert journey, he wanted to hold on to forever and bring the blessed message also to the poor, lost sister Sibylle and her pitiful husband!

And therefore then the young Sauerbrot knelt in front in the invisible spiritual crowd, sent up his most ardent prayers to the throne of the Heavenly Father and fearlessly offered the light-shield of his strong will against the storms of the wild demons. He knew only too well from his former life on earth this spirit of rape and destruction and also knew from his experiences that this violence could not harm the innermost, true being of all life - the Divine spirit of love.

So the success was then also mainly due to the steadfast praying of this young guardian spirit to attract the victorious help of the highest heavens. And the face of the Only One bowed in kindness to this band of fighters, fervently united with their earthly relatives.

They succeeded in that the hearts of the people involved did not succumb to the raging powers of hell and their whispers, but listened to the warnings and advice of the powers of light. And so the things we witnessed in the preceding account had come to a happy ending.

That a holy miracle had actually taken place here - with this conversion of Friedbert and the beginning of Sibylle's change of heart - was felt by Lydia in the deepest way. There obviously happened a miraculous answer to prayer! Oh how she wanted to be grateful for that and in the future also full of the most unshakable trust! The Heavenly Father, the Almighty God, was truly able to do everything!

The hearts of the people He directed - with all freedom of their will - by His far-sighted provisions like streams of water. How had He allowed the events of this evening, the actions of the people and their effects to develop and unfold so wonderfully, only here and there with an unnoticed, significant twist influenced from the spiritual - so, that under the powerful impression of this long-prepared catastrophe, the soul of the young man, caught up in self-willed worldliness, was suddenly freed from its false world-shell, that he was able to understand the true light from the heavenly heights of genuine, pure love, and in this new day to recognize and confess his own guilt in the deeply sad course of events!

How wonderful the acquittal of the woman blinded and seduced by the deceitful worldly spirit of the man - and that the penitent could find words to commend the erring one to the guiding care of Divine mercy!

Walter Lutz, Victorious Love

Sibylle, too, had to be shaken in her worldly security by this turn of events and by the fullness of grace that operated in her husband's heart, and to be made more accessible to the working of the Divine Spirit. It was indeed yet almost impossible to do otherwise under the force of such experiences and impressions.

O how wonderfully wise and glorious, and with what irresistible, gentle power, had the holy Heavenly Father, the Master of Life, brought things to pass, and developed one thing from another - as from the hard wood of the tree trunk the branch, the twig, the blossom and the fruit unfolds!

Yes, yes! To Him eternally all thanks, all praise and all our love together with the most steadfast trust in all future hardships of life!

### Chapter 34

Lydia decided not to leave her two loved ones now, of course, but to take over the care of the sick man with Sibylle.

But the next morning, at the instigation of the panel doctor, already an ambulance came and took Friedbert to a hospital located in the city. There he was examined, nursed for a few days, and as soon as he could be transported, he was taken to a distant pulmonary sanatorium of the health insurance fund, situated on a sunny, dust-free mountain height.

Here Friedbert was allowed to stay for almost two months and, removed from the murderous fumes of the factory, recovered surprisingly quickly from the bad manifestations of his malady. Of course, a return to his old profession was out of the question. And at the end of the institutional cure, the attending physician declared a further recuperative stay of several weeks in fragrant, pure country air to be absolutely necessary.

In the meantime, Lydia and Sibylle had left for their home village in the forest immediately after Friedbert had been taken to the sanatorium. The apartment in the city had been closed, and Sibylle now found herself in entirely new circumstances, hitherto completely unknown and unfamiliar to her.

Oh, what a spirit enveloped her here in this house, where father and mother and the four fresh, happy little children clung to each other with a truly heavenly love! Ah, that was a life - an Eden on earth, this mutual serving and rejoicing!

Early in the morning, when the roosters crowed in the village and the rising sun illuminated the nearby, somewhat higher situated forest and then lit up the gables of the friendly houses of the village - the father rose, brought this and that into the house or garden or for his professional work in order.

Then, when it was time to awaken the slumbering loved ones for the day's work, he sat down at the wonderful little house organ in the spacious living room and let sound a song of thanksgiving and praise with a masculine voice and mighty swelling organ sound, so that all the sleepers in the upper rooms blissfully awoke and joined in.

Thus, at the earliest morning hour, the whole blessed house of the teacher shook from the spiritual surges and waves of the Holy Spirit and the joy and glory of a life in God.

At breakfast, which soon united all the members of the family and mostly also any guests seeking comfort and strength in this house, young Bernard said his prayer with fervor and the younger siblings supported him with their stammering words. O how tasted the blessed meal, flavored with joyful speeches and plans of the day!

A beautiful word from a calendar placed in the father's place by the youngest of the little ones, with edifying, profound content from the works of the German seer Jakob Lorber, read by the father at the end of the physical meal as a spiritual dessert, gave all hearts, especially the adults, food for thought and a strengthening nourishment for the whole day.

And now everyone, strengthened and consolidated by invisible, higher powers, went about their day's work; the children and the father to school; the mother in the household; Sibylle and the other guests to the occupation which also came to them and offered itself. Also the midday and evening meals were just such daily family feasts like the breakfasts were. And here in this house one could truly say of its inhabitants: "Their life is love and pleasure!"

How wonderful was also the conclusion which the master of the house could give every evening in the closer circle of the adults to the rich working day with his lecture from the Holy Scriptures or from other serious books pointing to God - or also with other reflections and teachings.

Sibylle's inherently healthy and natural nature, which was only predisposed to a certain coolness by her father, could not close itself off to this spirit. Something oppressive, something ugly and poisonous let go of her. It fell down like chains or shells. Oh how it breathed here so truly light and carefree!

These people really had no such rushing, fearing, trembling and hunting as the poor city people! A dear God and Father ruled and confidently gave each one who did his own duty! There was no need to worry and hunt! Here, everything most necessary and still far, far more beyond request and understanding, fell to everyone by itself. In short, in this house was truly the great, blessed happiness of peace for which she, Sibylle, had searched for in the city among the unbelieving, godless hordes for so long in vain and finally with such terrible failure.

O her Friedbert had to be brought here for a complete cure - that was her burning heart's desire. Lydia and Karl Gotthilf also wished for nothing more. And so one day Sibylle left with the blessing of the whole family to bring the retrieved and restored one home to the place of light and peace.

Friedbert stood under the gate of the sanatorium situated high on the mountain. He was considerably stronger again, and a sun-tanned face looked at the arriving young woman with a questioning, glowing gaze. Friedbert opened his arms, and Sibylle, unable to speak a word, rushed to his chest.

Without saying much, he led her to his room on the second floor, from where one enjoyed an unlimited distant view out into the wide, low-lying countryside. He closed the open window framed with friendly snowy tulle curtains.

And now the two spouses, without mentioning what had passed between them in the turmoil and whirlpools of the world, celebrated a reunion and a union of their hearts such as they had never felt such bliss in spirit in all their lives.

Friedbert, too, had matured further towards God up here in the pure mountain and forest air and in the peace of the sublime, magnificent landscape. The breath of eternity was blowing here. The forests, the mountains and valleys on which he looked down, the moving, shimmering cloud-mountains on the horizon - and in silent nights the stars sparkling down from pure, silent height - this whole, holy jewel of the Divine crown of creation had filled his heart with shivers and had made him suspect, feel and experience the all-powerful, most loving Father.

Now he could only feel a deep, unnamable pity for the woman who had left his side in blind earthly urge. After all, as had become increasingly clear to him, she had not been blinded by the world sense without his fault.

And now, through the immeasurable love and wise guidance of the great God, they had both been allowed to awaken to a better and infinitely more blissful knowledge, and found themselves, through His guidance of grace, on a higher, purer, and more blissful level! Oh, what moments of the most blissful, heavenly delight they were! How staggering was the feeling of now being joined by God Himself to a true marriage, a marriage in the spirit of pure, selfless, Divine love for all eternity!

The two of them could only cry for a long time. And only after a considerable time could they take up again the tasks of the day, pack Friedbert's suitcase, go among people and say gratefully goodbye to the doctors and the employees of the house. Then, in unnamable happiness, they went towards the sweet forest village, the home of the beloved, dear siblings.

## Chapter 35

By this turn of the things, the invisible spiritual friends of the school house had now reached the goal of their efforts! With Friedbert and Sibylle the last worldly sheep of the family moved into the sheltering hut. Therefore, the joy when the two arrived, was great.

Friedbert, too, soon found himself completely at home here in this God-connected home. It was to him as if, after a long, dark odyssey in foreign lands, he had finally returned to the old, bright, in a frivolous sense abandoned home of his soul! - Especially with his brother-in-law Karl Gotthilf, he was soon on the most familiar and intimate terms.

Gladly and with great eagerness he let himself be introduced by this spiritually advanced man to the light of knowledge, which had been transmitted to this house and its closer circle of friends by the otherworldly protectors and advisors. Karl Gotthilf showed him how these spiritual communications to the tender inner cognitive faculty of the human soul take place, as it were, through a mental power-current connecting this world and the hereafter.



And so Friedbert was quite up to date in these matters when one evening the pastor's couple and some other close friends came again to the schoolhouse for the spiritual consecration hour. It was Lydia's, the faithful heroine of love and prayer, thirty-seventh birthday, and the family circle had celebrated this feast since the early morning with an abundant stream of tender and grateful love. When the evening had come and peaceful silence settled down on the rural home, Karl Gotthilf, according to inner request, called the adult housemates and other spirit-friends to crown the day with a communal exchange of thoughts in blissful dialogue with the blessed powers of the spiritual world.

He opened the gathering as always with a deep and lively prayer coming from the heart, in which time he remembered his spouse with gratitude and warmth and recommended her to the love and blessing of the Divine Shepherd. It was she, after all, through whose unshakable intimacy of faith all the darkness and evil had disappeared and heaven had been opened up in this house. It was also thanks to her worrying and praying that the Heavenly Father had finally brought the two missing family members out of the worldly din.

"Rich grace" - said Liebhardt - "may heaven then also pour upon her, Lydia, our good wife, mother, and sister, and give to the longing and work of her heart full success and victory in time and eternity!"

After these words, Karl Gotthilf sat down, took the pen, and after a while of silent, devotional waiting and listening, the following words came through his mouth, which he again spoke and wrote down simultaneously:

"Dearly beloved, we greet you also today with the greeting of peace, deeply happy to see all of you, on whom the Father's eye rests, now together here. Let us keep in our hearts eternal gratitude to the Heavenly Guide for the grace we have so richly experienced! Only from the height of perfection will you fully recognize His love and wisdom, which has led you to the light in this house. And we invisible friends are happy that it was granted to us according to the counsel of the almighty, heavenly Father to contribute to this work, even if it was a small part.

For you, dear ones however, the time has now come, on the basis of the knowledge gained in the light of a firm, living faith, to continue independently on the path shown to eternal life and to strive by your own strength to reach the fervently beloved Fatherheart. We servants of the Lord will therefore, after our task is finished, withdraw more into our world, which is inaccessible to you. And even if we continue to surround you with our loving care, protecting and guiding you, we will no longer speak to you as before through the audible word of the mediator, but for the sake of your highest good of life, your freedom of will and independence, we will only come to each individual in the quiet chamber of your heart with the gentle, unobtrusive voice of the spirit.

After all, you are not to be eternally led as minors on a leash. The great goal of our Creator and Fatherly Perfector is to mature you into independent and self-acting sons and daughters, true images of His own Divine perfection. And so all of you seek Him, the heavenly Father, and His living Word in future in the inward kingdom of God in the heart!

Walter Lutz, Victorious Love

You possess safe guidance in the holy Scriptures of the Bible, which are revealed to you through lightful knowledge, as well as in the marvelous works of that great seer and messenger of God, from whom you enjoy a daily spiritual bread every morning at breakfast. If you walk in an honest sense on the path of selfless love and humility, which has been so clearly and powerfully shown to you here, you will never miss the great, eternal goal.

And your joy, like ours, will always be complete. Receive, you deeply beloved ones, from all of us the most faithful farewell and blessing!

May each one of you soon fully reach the high goal of the Fatherheart through unceasing following in the footsteps of Eternal Love, which awaits with open arms every pilgrim, even the far astray.

But now we want to step back with our little strength. And to strengthen you, an exalted One will speak to your hearts, before Whose face we will not be worthy to kiss the hem of His mantle forever."

After these words, Karl-Gotthilf took a little break. Then he wrote and spoke with a voice quivering softly under the holy force of the impression:

"I, Who was eternally and will be for ever, speak today to you who seek My Fatherheart in love. You marvel to receive from Me, from My height immeasurable to you, a testimony of My love! Have I not promised all those who seek Me and ask Me to come to them, for all the ages of the ages: "Where two or three are together in My name, there am I in their midst"? (Matt 18:20) Why are you in wonder and astonishment now? And why do you hesitate to rush in spirit to My breast, to My heart?!

Behold, the arms which let themselves be beaten on the cross for you by crude executioners and stretched out in fervent, longing pain for all My earthly children - they are still open for all of you today. And He Who gave His blood for you on the cross, stands in your midst to draw the lost life, which found itself in you again to Him, to His breast and to caress it.

O do not delay and come, all of you, all of you whom I have led up from night and trouble to light! Here is the place, the eternal spring of life! And who drinks here, he never thirsts eternally, except only for further bliss from Me.

Never depart from this Source! Do not let yourselves be lured by the world's splendor! It's fine magic deception leads you into erring! - With Me is truth, love, power and strength. And who remains with Me, remains in the rich blessing which surrounds My being like a corona of sunlight.

O come! O come! And let us walk forever on wonderful ways. - It is I! I call you - your Father Jesus."

When these words had faded away in the silent room, not a breath stirred. Only with difficulty did the assembled witnesses find their way back to earthly existence. Had it been reality? - The Highest Himself had inclined Himself towards this small group of human children!?

Walter Lutz, Victorious Love

The indescribable shower of the deepest bliss, which had poured like a fiery wine into all hearts and filled them with a wonderful glow of life, was a holy, unmistakable testimony!

Yes, the love of God had sought and found them all who were gathered here in faith! - And the sheltered wanted to be led further only by Him, this victorious power, which matures even the last sinner to perfection in the free kingdom of light of eternal life with the rod of wisdom and gentlest meekness.

☆ *The End* ☆