LUDWIG TIECK

THE TANNENHÄUSER

About four centuries had elapsed since the death of the Faithful Eckart, when there lived a Lord of the Woods who stood in high reputation as a counsellor at the imperial court. The same lord had a son, one of the handsomest knights in all the land, highly esteemed and beloved by his friends and countrymen. Suddenly, however, he disappeared under very peculiar circumstances, which occurred previous to his departure; and no one could gather any tidings of him whatsoever. But from the time of the Faithful Eckart, a tradition respecting the Venus-berg had become very prevalent among the people, and it was asserted by many that he must have wandered thither, and there been devoted to eternal destruction.

Among the whole of his friends and relatives who lamented the young knight's loss, none grieved so much as Frederick of Wolfsburg. They had been early companions, and their attachment had grown with their years, insomuch that their subsequent attachment appeared rather the result of necessity than of choice. Meanwhile the Lord of the Woods died, having heard no account of his son; and in the course of a few years his friend Frederick married. He had already a playful young circle around him. Years passed away, and still no tidings arrived as to the fate of his friend, whom he was at length reluctantly compelled to number with the dead.

One evening, as he was standing under the tower of his castle, he observed a pilgrim approaching at some distance, in the direction of the castle-gates. The stranger was very singularly dressed; his whole appearance, and particularly his gait, striking the young knight as something odd and unaccountable. As the pilgrim drew nigh, he went to meet him; and, on examining his features, thought he could recognise them. He looked again, and the whole truth burst upon him: it was indeed no other than his long-lost friend—the young Lord of the Fir-woods himself. Yet he shuddered, and uttered an exclamation of surprise, when he contemplated the ravages which time had made in the noblest face and form—the theme of his former admirers,—of which only the ruins were to be traced;—no, he no longer appeared the same being.

The two friends embraced, while they still gazed at each other as upon perfect strangers but newly introduced. Many were the confused questions and answers which passed between them; and Frederick often trembled at the strange wild glances of his friend: the fire seemed to sparkle in his eyes. He agreed, however, to sojourn with him; but when he had remained a few days, he informed Frederick that he was about to go upon a pilgrimage to Rome.

Their acquaintance in a short time grew more familiar, and resumed its former happy

and confidential tone. They recalled the mutual adventures and plans of their early years, though the Lord of the Woods seemed to avoid touching upon any incident which had occurred since his late disappearance from home. This only raised Frederick's curiosity the more; he entreated to be informed, and with yet more earnestness as he found their former regard and confidence increase. Still the stranger long sought, by the most friendly appeals and warnings, to be excused; till at last, upon fresh solicitation, he said, "Now, then, be it so! your wish shall be fully gratified; only never in future reproach me, should my history excite feelings—lasting feelings—of sorrow and dismay."

Frederick took him in the most friendly manner by the arm, and led him into the open air. They turned into a pleasant grove, and seated themselves on a mossy bank; the stranger then giving his hand to his friend, turned away his head among the soft leaves and grass, and, amidst many bitter sighs and sobs, gave way to the sad emotions which the recollection seemed to inspire. His friend, pressing his hand, tried every means to console him; upon which the stranger, again raising his head, began his story in a calmer voice, to the following purport:—

"There goes an ancient tradition, that several hundred years ago there lived a knight known by the name of the Faithful Eckart. It is farther believed that there appeared a mysterious musician at that time from one of the wonderful mountains, whose unearthly music awakened such strange delight and wild wishes in the hearts of his audience, that they would irresistibly follow him, and lose themselves in the labyrinths of the same mountain. At that period, hell is supposed to have kept its portals open there, in order to entrap, by such sweet irresistible airs, unhappy mortals into its abyss. Often have I heard the same account when I was a boy, and sometimes it used to make me shudder. In a short time it seemed as if all nature, every tone and every flower, reminded me, in spite of myself, of that same old fearful saying. Oh, it is impossible for me to convey to you what kind of mournful thought, what strange ineffable longing, one time suddenly seized me, bound me, and led me, as it were, in chains; and particularly when I gazed upon the floating clouds, and the streaks of light ethereal blue seen between them; and what strange recollections the woods and meadows conjured up in my soul. Often did I feel all the love and tenderness of nature in my inmost spirit; often stretched forth my arms, and longed for wings to fly into the embrace of something yet more beautiful; to pour myself, like the spirit of nature, over vale and mountain; to become all present with the grass, the flowers, the trees; and to breathe in the fulness of the mighty sea. When some lovely prospects had delighted me during the day, I was sure to be haunted with dark and threatening images that same night, all of which, seemed busy in closing against me the gates of life. One dream, in particular, made an indelible impression upon my mind, although I was unable to recall its individual features clearly to my memory.

"I thought I could see an immense concourse of people in the streets,—I heard unintelligible words and languages, and I turned away, and went in the dark night to

the house of my parents, where I found only my father, who was unwell. The next morning I threw my arms round both my parents' necks—embracing them tenderly, as if I felt that some evil power were about to separate us for ever. 'Oh, were I to lose you,' I said to my dear father, 'how very lonely and unhappy should I feel in this world without you!' They kissed and consoled me tenderly, but they could not succeed in dispelling that dark foreboding image from my imagination.

"As I grew older, I did not mingle with other children of my own age in their sports. I wandered lonely through the fields; and on one occasion it happened that I missed my way, and got into a gloomy wood, where I wandered about, calling for help. After searching my way back for some time in vain, I all at once found myself standing before a lattice, which opened into a garden. Here I remarked pleasant shady walks, fruit-trees, and flowers, among which were numbers of roses, which shone lovely in the sunbeams. An uncontrollable wish to approach them more nearly seized me; and I eagerly forced my way through the lattice-work, and found myself in that beautiful garden. I bent down and embraced the plants and flowers, kissed the roses over and over, and shed tears. While lost in this strange feeling, half sorrow, half delight, two young maidens came towards me along the walk, one older, and the other about my own years. I was roused from my trance, only to yield myself up to fresh amazement. My eye reeled upon the younger, and at that moment I felt as if I had been suddenly restored to happiness after all my sufferings. They invited me into the house; the parents of the young people inquired my name, and were kind enough to send my father word that I was safe with them; and in the evening he himself came to bring me home.

"From this day forth the uncertain and idle tenour of my life acquired some fixed aim;—my ideas recurred incessantly to the lovely maidens and the garden; thither daily flew my hopes and all my wishes. I abandoned my playmates, and all my usual pastimes, and could not resist again visiting the garden, the castle, and its lovely young inmate. Soon I appeared to become domesticated, and my absence no longer created surprise; while my favourite Emma became hourly more dear to me. My affection continued to increase in warmth and tenderness, though I was myself unconscious of it. I was now happy! I had not a wish to gratify, beyond that of returning, and looking forward again to the hour of meeting.

"About this time a young knight was introduced to the family; he was acquainted likewise with my parents, and he appeared to attach himself in the same manner as I had done to the fair young Emma. From the moment I observed this, I began to hate him as my deadliest enemy. But my feelings were indescribably more bitter when I fancied I saw that Emma preferred his society to mine. I felt as if, from that instant, the music which had hitherto accompanied me, suddenly died away in my breast. My thoughts dwelt incessantly upon hatred and death; strange feelings burned within my breast, in particular whenever I heard Emma sing the well-known song to the lute. I did not even attempt to disguise my enmity; and when my parents reproached me for

my conduct, I turned away from them with an obstinate and wilful air. I wandered for hours together in the woods and among the rocks, indulging evil thoughts, chiefly directed against myself;—I had already determined upon my rival's death.

"In the course of a few months the young knight declared his wishes to Emma's parents, and they were received with pleasure. All that was most sweet and wonderful in nature, all that had ever influenced and delighted me, seemed to have united in my idea of Emma. I knew, I acknowledged, and I wished for no other happiness—nothing more—nothing but her. I had even wilfully predetermined that the loss of her and my own destruction should take place on one and the same day; neither should survive the other a moment.

"My parents were much grieved at witnessing my wildness and rudeness of manner; my mother became ill, but it touched me not; I inquired little after her, and saw her only very seldom. The nuptial-day of my rival ¦was drawing nigh, and my agony proportionably increased: it hurried me through the woods and across the mountains, as if pursued by a grizzly phantom by day and by night. I called down the most frightful maledictions both upon Emma and myself. I had not a single friend to advise with—no one wished to receive me—for all seemed to have given me over for lost. Yes! for the detested fearful eve of the bridal-day was at hand: I had taken refuge among the rocks and cliffs; I was listening to the roaring cataract; I looked into the foaming waters, and started back in horror at myself. On the approach of morning, I saw my abhorred rival descending the hill at a little distance; I drew nigh—provoked him with bitter and jeering words; and when he drew his sword, I flew upon him like lightning, beat down his guard with my hanger, and—he bit the dust.

"I hastened from the spot—I never once looked back at him; but his guide bore the body away. The same night I haunted the neighbourhood of the castle where dwelt my Emma now. A few days afterwards, in passing the convent near at hand, I heard the bells tolling, nuns singing funeral-hymns, and saw death-lights burning in the sanctuary. I inquired into the cause, and was informed that the young lady Emma had died of the shock on hearing that her lover had been killed.

"I was in doubt what to think, and where to remain; I doubted whether I existed; whether all were true. I determined to see my parents; and the night after reached the place where they lived. I found every thing in commotion; the street was filled with horses and carriages; pages and soldiers were all mingled together, and spoke in strange broken words;—it was just as if the emperor were on the eve of undertaking a campaign against his enemies. A single light was dimly burning in my father's house; I felt a strange sensation, like strangulation, within my breast. When I knocked, my father himself came to the door, with slow soft steps; and just then I recollected a strange dream I had in my childhood, and felt, with horrible truth, that it was the same scene which I was then going through. Quite dismayed, I inquired, 'Why are you up so late to-night, father?' He led me in; saying, as he entered,—'I may well be up and

watching, when your mother has only this moment expired.'

"These words shot like lightning through my soul. My father sat himself thoughtfully down; I seated myself at his side; the corpse lay upon a bed, and was appallingly covered over with white fillets and napkins. My heart struggled, but could not burst. 'I myself keep watch,' said the old man, 'for my poor wife always sits near me.' My senses here failed me. I raised my eyes towards one corner, and there I saw something rising up like a mist; it turned and motioned, and soon took the well-known lineaments of my mother, who seemed to regard me with a fixed and serious air. I attempted to escape, but I could not; for the figure motioned to him, and my father held me fast in his arms, while he softly whispered me, 'She died of grief, my son, for you.' I embraced him with the most terrific, soul-cutting emotion. I clung to him for protection like a feeble child,—burning tears ran down my breast; but I uttered no sound. My father kissed me, and I shuddered as I felt his lips, for they were deadly cold—cold as if I had been kissed by the dead. 'How is it with you, dear father?' I murmured in trembling agony; but he seemed to sink and gather into himself, as it were, and replied not a word. I felt him in my arms, growing colder and colder. I felt at his heart, but it was quite still; yet, in the bitterness of my woe, I held the body fast clasped in my embrace.

"By a sudden glimmer, like the first break of morning, which shot through the gloomy chamber, I there saw my father's spirit close to that of my mother; and both gazed upon me with a compassionate expression, as I stood with the dear deceased in my arms. From that moment I saw and heard no more, I lay deprived of consciousness; and I was found by the servants delirious, and yet powerless as a babe, on the ensuing morning.

"The memory of that hour is still as fearfully impressed upon my mind, and I am at a loss to conjecture how I was so unfortunate as to survive it. For it was now, indeed, that this once fair earth, with life, and all that life had to afford, became worse than dead and perished for me;—became a lone waste and wilderness, with all its soft airs, sweet flowers, pure streams, and blue starry skies. I stood like one, the last of a sudden overwhelming wreck, saved only to regret that he had not perished with all that was dearest to him on earth. How I lived on from day to day, I know not; till at last, unable longer to contend with the fiends of remorse that grappled me, I flew to society for relief. I joined a number of dissipated characters, who sought, like me, to lose the sense of their follies and enormities in the most dissolute pleasures. Yes, I sought to propitiate the evil spirit within me by obedience to its worst dictates. My former wildness and impatience revived, and I no longer placed any restraint over my wishes.

"I fell into the hands of an abandoned wretch of the name of Rudolf, who only laughed at my lamentations and remorse. More than a year thus elapsed; my anxiety and horror, in spite of all efforts to control them, daily gaining ground upon me, until I was seized with utter despair. Like all who experience that stage of such a malady, I took

to wandering without any object. I arrived at distant and unknown places—spots unvisited by other feet; and often I could have thrown myself from some airy height into the green sunny meads and vales below, or rushed into the cool streams to quench my soul's fiery and insatiable thirst; yet though I had no fear, something unaccountable always restrained me. I made many attempts towards the close of the day; for I longed to be annihilated: but when the morning returned, with its golden beams, its fresh dews, and odorous flowers, I felt I could destroy nothing; and hope and love of life revived within my breast. A conviction then seized me, that all hell was conspired together to work my utter perdition; that both my pleasures and my pains arose from the same fiendish source; and that a malicious spirit was gradually directing all the powers and influences of my mind to that sole end. I yielded myself up to him, in order to dissipate these alternating raptures and agonies. On one dark and stormy night I went into the mountains; I mounted one of their highest and giddiest peaks, where foot of man never before trod; and there, with my whole strength of heart and soul, I invoked the foe of God and man to appear. I called him in language that I felt he must obey. My words were powerful—the fiend stood at my side, and I felt no alarm. While conversing with him, I could feel my faith in each haunted and wonder-working mountain growing stronger within me; and the base one taught me a song sufficiently potent of itself to shew me the right path into its labyrinths. It was thus I approached the strange mountain: the night was dark and tempestuous; the moon glimmered through a mass of dusky livid clouds; yet boldly and loudly did I sing that song. A giant form arose, and motioned me back with its staff. I drew nigher. 'I am the faithful Eckart,' exclaimed the supernatural form; 'and, praise to the goodness of the blessed God, I am permitted to hold watch here, to deter the unhappy from rushing into the base fiend's power.' I pushed on. In passing, I found my way led through subterraneous passages in the mountain. The path was so narrow as to compel me to force my way: I heard the gushing of the hidden waters, and the noise of the spirits engaged in forging steel, gold, and silver in their caverns, for the temptation and perdition of man. I heard, too, the deep clanging tones and notes in their simple and secret powers, which supply all our earthly music; and the lower I descended, the more there seemed to fall as it were a veil from before my eyes.

"Soon I heard other music, of quite an opposite character to the last; and my spirit within me struggled, as if eager to fly nearer and catch the notes. I came into more open space; and on all sides strange, clear, glowing colours burst upon my eye. This I felt was what I had all along sighed for;—deep in my heart I welcomed the presence of something I had long looked for—the deep-seated master-passion, of which I then felt the ravishing powers playing in their full strength within my breast. A swarm of the mad heathen deities, with the goddess Venus at their head, ran forward to greet me;—all demons, that assumed those ancients' names, and were banished thither by the Almighty, their career being fully run upon earth; though they still continue to work in secret.

"All the delights so familiar to the world I there found and enjoyed in their fullest and

keenest zest. My appetite was as insatiable as the delight was lasting. The long-famed beauties of the ancient world were all there—all that my most ardent wishes required was mine; and each day that world grew brighter, and appeared arrayed in more charming colours. The most costly wines slaked our thirst; the most lovely and delicious forms played and wantoned in the air; a throng of loves hovered invitingly around me, shedding perfumes over my head; and tones of music burst forth from nature's inmost heart, and with their undulating freshness restored the ardour of our desires, while soft mists and dews stole over flowery fields, giving new essence to their ravishing odours.

"How many years thus passed, I am quite unable to state, for here was no time and no divisions; the luscious charm of virgin beauty burned in the flowers, and in the forms of girls bloomed the fragrant charm of the flowers; their colours seemed to enjoy a peculiar language; tones uttered new words; the world of sense was enclosed, as it were, within the glowing bloom of those luxurious flowers—the resident spirits within were ever engaged in celebrating their triumphant delights.

"How this was accomplished, I can neither explain nor comprehend; but soon, amid all this pomp of sin and unlawful pleasure, I began to sigh for repose, for the old innocent earth I had left, with all its virtuous, social endearments; and my desire grew as violent as it had formerly been to leave it for what I had there obtained. I wished to lead the same life as other mortals, with its mixed pains and pleasures. I was satiated with splendour and excess, and turned with thoughts of pleasure towards my native land. Some unaccountable mercy of the Almighty granted me the privilege of returning. I found myself once more in this present world, and still within reach of repentance and salvation; and I now think only of receiving absolution for my sins at the footstool of the Almighty Father, for which purpose I am on the way to Rome; that so I may again be numbered in the rank of other living men."

Here the sad pilgrim became silent; and Frederick fixed his eye upon him, with a searching glance, for some time. At last he took his poor friend's hand, and said: "Although I have not yet recovered from my astonishment, and cannot, in any way, comprehend your narrative; yet I conceive it impossible that all with which you have been thus fearfully haunted can be other than a strong delusion of the mind. For Emma herself is still alive, she is my own wife; we two have never differed, much less engaged with our weapons, during the whole course of our lives. No, we never hated each other, as you seem to think, though you were missing just before my marriage from home. Besides, you never, at the time, gave me a single hint that you loved my Emma."

Then he again took his bewildered friend by the hand, and led him into another apartment to his wife, who had just returned from a visit of some days to one of her sisters.

The pilgrim stood silent and thoughtful in her presence, while he examined the form and features of the lady. Then, shaking his head repeatedly, he said, in a low voice, "By Heavens! this is the most wonderful incident of all!"

Frederick now related to him every thing which had occurred to himself since they parted, and attempted to explain how he must have been labouring under a temporary delirium during many years past.

"Oh! I know right well," answered the pilgrim, "how it is. It is now that I am bewitched and insane; and hell has cast this juggling show before me that I may not go to Rome and seek the pardon of my sins."

Emma tried to withdraw his attention from the subject, by recurring to scenes and incidents of his childhood; but the pilgrim was not to be undeceived. One day he suddenly leaped up, declaring he must instantly set out, and forth he went without even saying farewell.

Frederick and his Emma often discoursed of the strange unhappy pilgrim. A few months had elapsed, when, pale and worn, in tattered attire and barefoot, his poor friend entered Frederick's apartment, while he was yet asleep. He pressed his lips to his, and exclaimed hastily, "The holy father cannot and will not forgive me. I must away and seek my former abode." And with this he went hurriedly away.

Frederick roused himself, and was going into his wife's chamber, when he met her women, who were all running to find him, in an agony of terror and alarm. The Tannenhäuser had been there: he had come early in the morning, and uttering the words, "She shall not stop me in my career!" had despatched her upon the spot.

Frederick had not been able yet to recall his thoughts, when a strange feeling of horror came over him. He could not rest; he ran into the open air, and when they wished to bring him back, he exclaimed, "that the pilgrim had kissed his lips, and that the kiss was burning him until he should meet with him again."

He then ran rapidly in a variety of directions in search of the Tannenhäuser and the mysterious mountain; and he was never afterwards heard of. It is reported by the people, that whoever receives a kiss from one of the dwellers of that mountain is unable to resist the enchantment; which draws him with magic force into its subterraneous depths.