

## The Project Gutenberg eBook of German Moonlight, by Wilhelm Raabe

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**Title:** German Moonlight

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**Release Date:** April 16, 2010 [EBook #32009]

**Language:** English

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Produced by Michael Wooff, with German from the original

text, and his own translation.

German Moonlight

A Story by Wilhelm Raabe (1831-1910)

Let me state my case calmly and without any undue fuss. I am, even by German standards, an uncommonly prudent person and I know how to keep my five senses under control. Apart from that, I am a lawyer and father to three sons. Neither during lilac time nor when there are hibiscus, sunflowers and asters on the ground am I in the habit of laying myself open to sentimental and romantic mood-swings. I do not keep a diary, but my legal appointments books are stored in strict chronological order, year by year, on my library shelves. First of all I have to tell you that, in the year 1867, acting on medical advice, because of the sea air and the salt water, I found myself on the island of Sylt and that, while I was there, I made the acquaintance of someone—a quite extraordinary acquaintance.

It goes without saying that I cannot stop myself by means of an account in writing of my own experiences and feelings from correcting or corroborating things often felt and even more frequently depicted and described in letters or printed matter. The impression made by the lapping of waves, sand dunes and dune grass, the flight of seagulls and, above all, the west wind on everyone who has had to wash off the dust and sweat of German officialdom is a pleasant and invigorating one. These things did not fail to have the same effect on me either given that the efforts that preceded the said invigoration were no less strenuous.

I lived on the periphery of two villages, Tinnum and Westerland, and therefore had a walk of at least half an hour to cover in order to reach the beach and the health-giving briny. A not much shorter walk led from there to the good fellow who took us every day at noon for a consideration back again. As a German civil servant used to moderation I set no great store by domestic bliss or even luxury. As I had taken with me seven of my twenty-one pipes, I could have set up home for myself in a megalithic tomb and not have felt uncomfortable.

Good. I lived with a baker who heated his oven with jetsam wood, that is to say wood bought at beach auctions that came from the spars and timberwork of ships that had foundered on the sand. I helped him from time to time to split this wood and felt pleasantly stimulated here by the task—at home I devote myself to this chore more for health reasons.

At home I saw and split my firewood in my leisure time, whereas here I did things for fun or carefully perused some papers on the House of Brunswick inheritance that I had brought with me in my suitcase. During what would have been my business hours I went for walks along the beach.

When you stay in a place like this to take the waters everything takes that much longer. At home I walk every day and in every weather round the purpose-built walls of the town where I carry out my duties as a public servant. On Sylt I had lunch, lay down on a dune for an hour for an afternoon nap and then ran along the beach towards the north of the island, sometimes getting as far as the Red Cliff, but usually only as far as the bathing huts of Wenningstedt.

As the sea like a washerwoman of both sexes cannot keep things to him or herself, but throws everything back, these runs were never without a certain charm. Even though I am by nature a prosaic person, I can nevertheless feel sadness when I turn a dead seal lying on its back over onto its belly and have thoughts about my own mortality as I do so.

Good—or rather on this occasion: even better! I had been on this long, stretched out from south to north and vice versa, island for three weeks approximately when I had the encounter already mentioned at the start of my narrative.

It was getting on towards evening. The sun had gone down and today I was coming back from the Red Cliff, and no less tired for all that since low tide had made the way to the beach accessible for all those patients on Sylt suffering from abdominal problems to the best of its ability. After walking ten steps over quite tight-packed sand, people sank that much deeper into the sand over the next two hundred steps, and the wife, daughter, cousin or sweetheart of my readers who would have graciously picked their way over this path so uncommonly beneficial to health, I should not have hesitated in fact to commend to the attention of a lyric or epic poet if I could have numbered such a one then, with the later exception of Circuit Judge Löhnefinke, among my colleagues and other friends and enemies.

I said that the sun had gone down and I can put it even more succinctly. It was going down just as I reached the dunes south of Wenningstedt, opposite the great chasm. A fishing boat from Hamburg or Cuxhaven followed the sun in disappearing into the sea mist on the horizon and the pleasing and easy on the eye green colour of the water turned to gloomy grey. Even the orange colouring of the sandhill on the left of the sound but tiring path disappeared, and the colour grey got the upper hand to both left and right. The dune grass started to lisp as the wind got cooler—twilight had fallen and there were cogent reasons for supposing that it would soon be night.

Stumbling and, despite the evening cool, bathed in sweat, I was quickening my gait in the direction of my evening pipe when the unexpected happened and I got to know my colleague Löhnefinke.

Everyone who knows the beach on the west coast of Sylt also knows how steeply the dunes opposite the sandy sanatorium path fall down to the sea, and at one of the places where they were at their steepest my colleague fell out of the sky on top of my head and my journey through life was never the same again so may the estimable reader allow me to continue with my statement of events with my accustomed calm and without exciting myself.

I found myself, as previously stated, opposite the great chasm and the sun had said goodbye five minutes beforehand when, suddenly, at the top of the dune on the left, at approximately seventy feet above my head, a man appeared, running towards the edge of the precipice in a tearing hurry, threw his arms up to heaven, then crouched down and in one fell swoop, to my horror, all the way down the steep, almost vertical sandhill slipped—slid—shot!

Before the cry of total amazement, half of shock, that I then came out with had died away, the man was already sitting at the bottom of the dune in soft sand between a half stove-in barrel that had been washed ashore there and a broken ship's lantern and looking at me, the scurrying passer-by, with his mouth wide open, pale-faced with shock and yet managing to twist his lips into a broad grin. He called out, shouted or perhaps it was more of a howl:

"It's—it's—behind me! I'm very sorry, sir, I'm sure—but it puts me on edge..."

"Who? What? Who is behind you?" I shouted, staring up at the grey mass of the sandhill without spying anything in the least bit threatening. Nothing showed itself to me that could justify the boundless consternation and the daring flight of the individual still sitting up in the sand in front of me, a rather portly individual extremely well-dressed.

"Who is behind you? No-one as far as I can see! So tell me! Who's after you? What prompted you to jump like that? I really can't see anything at all up there!"

"There is! There is! There's the moon—Luna—Selene! No, not Luna and Selene, but that moon, that damnable German moon! It's going up behind the mud flats as we speak and will, in a few minutes time, be up there over the dune behind me! And there's no cover here, no shelter—not even an umbrella—and quarter of an hour to wait for the next omnibus before we can seek refuge. It'll be the death of me!"

I usually carry an umbrella with me and this day was no exception. But the stranger in his distraught state had not noticed it and before I offered it to the aforementioned fool, I naturally gave the matter some consideration.

It was clear to me, juridically clear, that I was in the presence of a madman and, quickly composing myself, I thought over how, under such circumstances, I ought to behave towards him. Should I abandon the man to his fate, unable as I was to change one iota of his idiosyncratic imaginings, and leave it up to his keepers to capture him, or should I strike up a conversation with him and, at the risk of ending up having unpleasant differences of opinion in the process, try to get a better understanding of his situation?

As a human being I should have preferred the former; as a lawyer and a criminologist I opted for the latter. I yielded to temptation and carried on talking to him.

"My dear fellow," I said, "if you believe that being under an umbrella will protect you against your enemy, please make use of mine. Take my arm."

I had already opened up the silk umbrella and the lunatic had jumped up in the air with a joyful shout.

"Heaven, sir, has led me here to you!"

He took hold of my arm and, tipping his hat to me, said:

"Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Löhnefinke, Circuit Judge to the Royal Court of Prussia at Gross-Fauhlenberg in the province of..."

I sprang away from him dumbfounded:

"That isn't possible!"

"Sir?"

"You? You, who to escape the moon rising just dashed headfirst down that sand dune at the risk of breaking your neck, you are Circuit Judge Löhnefinke? It isn't possible!"

"But I am he! If you can call it a pleasure, I do have the pleasure of being the person so named."

I mastered myself with difficulty inasmuch as I now had this to say to myself, namely that it was beyond all doubt now that I was in the presence of a madman with more than one fixed idea. The unfortunate wretch does not just see the moon as his enemy, but sees himself as someone else.

"Yes, my name is Löhnefinke and I would consider it an honour if you would now acquaint me with yours."

What could I do? I introduced myself and gave my name and title. The lunatic immediately tipped his hat to me again, grasped my hand, shook it warmly and said:

"Oh, my dear colleague, see how fate brings people together! Quarter of an hour ago I wouldn't even have dreamt of it, truly. So we've known each other now for a good length of time. Cast your mind back! Did we not in the case of Johann Peter Müller, the self-styled leader of the gypsies from Langensalza, exchange rulings and engage in professional correspondence? You do remember that case, don't you? Oh, how pleased it makes me!"

Was it a dream or was it reality? Was this man crazy or was it me?

This was indeed how things stood and I could remember quite clearly there and then all my correspondence with the Royal Prussian Court of Justice in Gross-Fauhlenberg. And my singular companion (already we were walking next to each other) did not stop at simply stating these facts, no. He immediately immersed himself in all the finer details of the case in point, setting out verbally all the considerations that he had previously put in writing and I answered him as if there were really no more doubt as far as I was concerned that he really was the Royal Prussian court official he claimed to be and really was called Löhnefinke. The full moon had in the meantime climbed up in the sky to the east of us and was shining directly down on our heads without my companion being in the least concerned about it. Strolling towards the bathing beach of Westerland arm in arm we became more and more absorbed in talking shop and let the moon shine down as much as it liked. We had almost reached the men's bathing huts and were nearing the steps that lead up from the beach to the top of the dunes when my colleague, who, despite his earlier exaltation had just shown himself to be an extremely clear and perceptive legal mind, all of a sudden, getting stuck in the sand, looked round, looked up and,

becoming as pale as a ghost, groaned:

"Ye gods, we're back in the middle of it again!"

No doubt about it—we were back in the middle of it again. The fixed idea grabbed hold of the poor man afresh as he hysterically and anxiously pulled my outstretched umbrella down so that it rested on his hat and I could do nothing more for Circuit Judge Löhnefinke than to tighten my grip on his elbow and to speak to the squirming and struggling man in an admonitory tone of voice:

"But my dear sir, please! Compose yourself! Compose yourself! This crackpot behaviour of yours is too much. How has this harmless source of light actually wronged you? Or what have you done to wrong it? Show some sense and convince yourself of this: this innocent satellite shows no sign whatsoever of falling on our heads."

"My head hurts! My head hurts!" groaned the judge, holding the part of the body in question with both hands.

"Come on now. Nobody's chasing you. Nobody's after you. Your reaction is quite unnecessary. Don't take what I say amiss."

"Nobody? Nobody?" groaned Löhnefinke.

"Nobody! I'll tell you what—let's go up there. We'll find people in that restaurant, conviviality, some beverage or other to cheer us up and definitely a paraffin lamp which will put your enemy, male or female, in the shade."

"Paraffin!" Löhnefinke muttered to himself, catching hold of and holding onto the word like a guilty man in the high court a cry of 'Amnesty'?

"Listen. There's still a brass band playing up there. How about we sit down for a while to imbibe a glass of grog and..."

"...wait for the moon to go down? Yes. That would be the right thing to do."

"But we'll have a long wait, I'm afraid. The moon doesn't set until past quarter to seven tomorrow morning, but, if it's any consolation, dark clouds are rising from the sea and we can wait until one of those clouds comes to cover the moon as it surely will."

"Yes. I take your point. I'll willingly, only too willingly, go along with your suggestion. Colleague, I'm entirely under your guardianship. We'll go to this watering hole, wait till a cloud masks that grinning monstrosity and drink the odd grog while we do so!" opined the worked-up Prussian civil servant. And so we ascended the steep steps, arrived, without having broken our necks, at the top of them and turned right through the dune grass towards the illuminated pavilion on the links, loud with blaring music and packed out with spa outpatients.

Just as we went through the door of the round building, however, the brass band suddenly stopped playing. The musicians put away their instruments or tucked them under their arms. They also downed a free schnapps at the buffet counter and left, and most of their audience, strangely enough, followed on their heels without first having digested the pleasure derived from their music. Only a few groups of more discerning people continued to linger over their glasses.

A rather lively wind sprang up over the North Sea. The waves crashed with greater noise and were covered with whiter and more foamy caps. The enlivening and warming drink that we had ordered before we sat down was about to have the most soothing of influences on both our state of mind and our bodily comfort.

Now we were seated and while, at the next table, an animated group chatted merrily, I looked at my new acquaintance and certainly not with stealthy sideways glances, but point blank through the paraffin lamp's glow, and my astonishment grew with my scrutiny.

Circuit Judge Löhnefinke from Gross-Fauhlenberg was a man of approximately fifty years of age, corpulent, as we have already commented, and otherwise without any external distinguishing marks. He had a broad chin and his hair was short and sprinkled with grey. He had the beard of a Prussian official and two clever, grey eyes which took in every object they tacked on to. None of this gave me any reason to suppose that the man was a candidate for a loony bin and yet—I couldn't help it! Laying my hand on his arm and pulling myself up close to him, I said:

"Don't take this the wrong way, Löhnefinke, but right now I don't believe it happened any more."

"What didn't happen?"

"Your appearance just now. Your breakneck fall down the dune, that daredevil slide near Wenningstedt or, to put it in a nutshell, your vision of the moon as your enemy."

Immediately there came an extraordinary change over the whole of this man sitting right next to me. He once more took evasive action and as he had formerly grasped my umbrella, now he grasped the glass in front of him, knocked back the hot, steaming mixture therein in one long swig and hissed through his teeth:

"It's quite true nevertheless. I hate the moon. It's my deadliest enemy and I am eclipsed by it as it is eclipsed itself by that paraffin lamp swinging above us."

I waved to the waitress, who understood my wave and put another steaming glass down right under my colleague's nose.

"Thank you," said the judge. "And I have you to thank as well for, had I not fallen into the arms of yourself and your umbrella, I really don't know what would have become of me on that shadowless beach."

"Colleague," I said, "I am a law-abiding man and have attended to my official duties for many years now to the satisfaction of my official subordinates and the powers that be. I keep my medal for services rendered at home in a filing cabinet and have never knowingly divulged any secret confided in me, scout's honour. Would you take it amiss, colleague, if I asked you to tell me how you came to quarrel with that innocent satellite revolving round our sinful earth?"

"I would certainly not take it amiss," said the colleague. "On the contrary, from time to time I feel the most pressing need to give vent to my hate and anger and my innermost anxieties and inhibitions. Order another glass of grog and listen to the story that I have to tell. Afterwards you can judge and I will abide by your judgement, all the more so as I already know you to be a most capable lawyer from our official correspondence."

"I am most greatly indebted to you," I said, hanging now on his every word, and looked into his eyes as I had not looked into the eyes of my bride when we got married twenty-five years ago. He drank another deep draught of the steaming beverage, smacked his lips and commenced his confession.

"First of all," he said, "I must tell you that my doctor has sent me to this seaside health resort at the instigation of my wife because of my 'condition' as she calls it, or because of my bad nerves as he, the doctor, says. For years now this man, who has known me from my youth, who grew up with me, has laughed at this penchant of mine; only at my wife's insistence did he come to take the matter seriously. For once he came to the conclusion that it was high time to do something to counter this regrettable complex and here I am, taking to the water daily on doctor's orders and, as you have learned tonight, so far without the least success. But I digress! In a word, I'm paying for the sins of my youth."

"Aha!" I murmured, but immediately recognizing my meaning, my colleague shook his head emphatically and sighed:

"No! No! Nothing like that. If only it had been that! For my sins it was quite the opposite of what you have in mind that led to my breakdown. I can assure you that neither women nor wine led me astray in my younger days. I was far too staid for that and regret it today in worry, pain and an island swimming costume. If only I'd gone off the rails in the days of my youth. If only I had curbed my fantasy and the danger of being thrown by it and breaking my neck at the right time! It's a repressed desire for poetry that's sent me off my rocker long after my fortieth year. The light of the good old German moon is taking its revenge on me and I doubt that any kind of bath or water, alkaline or acidic, will help me."

"German moonlight?"

"Yes! Yes! The moon drives me mad with its smirking even though I am Prussian Circuit Judge by Royal Appointment Friedrich Wilhelm Löhnefinke in Gross-Fauhlenberg, and not just for my own sins do I atone, but I have the accumulated debts of untold generations of my forebears to pay back as well to the shining monstrosity. Colleague, I feel at times most unhappy!"

"Colleague, you interest me most mightily as a person for all that. I'm eagerly waiting for you to shed further light on this."

"Which I will. My father was an official by royal appointment and so was my grandfather, and it would be ridiculous for me to doubt that my great-grandfather too fell into the same category, a provincial official, it goes without saying. My mother was a German matriarch as was my grandmother and my

great-grandmother too, of course. They too were the issue of families of provincial officials. They knew nothing of poetry and only paid attention to the moon insofar as it was obliging enough to tell them when it was time to get their hair cut or to have themselves bled. They left it up to me to make amends for their collective neglect! My mother read Clarendon, my grandmother the Bible and the hymn book and my great-grandmother was probably illiterate. My forebears read and wrote their statutes, read the Legal Times and maybe a newspaper and I was, until quite recently, their worthy descendant. Then came the year 1848 and the moon rose for me."

"Aha!" I re-uttered, but my legal colleague shook his head and said:

"No! No! No! That's not it at all! You're just as mistaken as you were before. Do you know what we understand by the words 'old liberal'?"

I nodded with all the energy of a nodding porcelain toy.

"You will therefore admit then that, as an old liberal, one is still quite far removed from hating the moon and running away from it?"

It would have been silly of me not to have made this admission and, in making it, I asked a counter question:

"How old were you in March of 1848?"

"I had just reached the age of the Prussian equivalent of a solicitor's clerk."

"Well done. Carry on."

"In March it came over the rooves and appeared in my room in Berlin and I rubbed my eyes unable to believe what I saw. I still did not have the faintest idea of how dangerous the scamp was, but the year after, 1849, I got more than an inkling of it. Returning home hot-headed from a heated public rally, I slept lying down on the windowsill, and the malicious heavenly body shone down on me for several hours."

"And?"

"And the following day I had not only a headache, but also a definite antipathy for many things and people I had formerly held high in my feeling, thought and estimation. Poetry had broken in and colleague, do you know what it means when poetry breaks into the life of a solicitor's clerk in the Royal Prussian Legal Service?"

"No, thank God. Bear in mind that we have written to each other only across regional borders."

"True enough, but I didn't know either and only today can I speak of it. You've spent the whole night dreaming of Lex Romana and the statute book and then you wake up and try to recall what you've dreamed about. You succeed only too well and then the misery starts. You look from your pillow over to your bookcase and suddenly a desire takes hold of you that you can scarcely master to jump out of bed, take the whole box of tricks in your arms—and—and—and—do unspeakable things to it. But you control yourself because it occurs to you how much money you've invested in this jumble, and you control yourself too fortunately for the furtherance of your career and get on with preparing your morning coffee. While you are doing this the idea comes to you with shattering power that you are at the disposal of the state without receiving an appropriate reward for it and not only does your gall bladder play up because of it, but your coffee too boils over and you eat away at your internal organ and pour the other, not down the drain, but down your throat. You have lost some of your illusions and you create new ones. There you have one of the first effects of our enemy, the moon! Yes, you have strange illusions and the strangest is that you don't blame yourself for them. Afterwards you go to the office, meet your subordinate on the way, greet him politely and now—for the first time—another dream comes to you! You remember the one that you dreamt when you lay down with your head next to the open window and the moon shone on it. You get up and look for the head of chambers, and now, and wholly and solely because of the German moon, it occurs to you that you yourself have read more than your ancestors: not just the paper, but papers, and, apart from that, Schiller and Goethe, Voltaire and Rousseau, Börne and Stahl, Ranke and Raumer and an incommensurable mixture of the latest liberal poets. You remember a lot of the drinking songs you sang at university and the meek and mild moon which just now appears perhaps as a tender sickle above you in the light blue of the morning sky, twists your mouth into a scornful expression and goes on waxing until it is full again while you, day after day, week after week, go about your business. You start to feel immensely uncomfortable. You come over to yourself as unspeakably stupid, silly and tasteless and sniff out stupid things to say, to which purpose your nose is entirely suited. You go home and look at your hair starting to grow long in the mirror and if you should discover thereby a white hair in your beard, your good friend the moon finds this most

opportune, for it is in a position to bind you more tightly and to pursue its ends more easily for that than for anything else. The next time you find yourself once more alone in the night sitting on the windowsill, it makes you think about that hair. You long for a bosom, a sweet, soft, tender bosom into which you can pour all your sadness, to which you can speak your sorrow and with which you can share your frustrations and annoyance. You dream while still awake and the moon laughs at you even more than before..."

"Wait a minute, Löhnefinke!" I cried, pressing both hands to my brow. "Must it always be another person to clarify and be objective about one's own past, present and future circumstances? Colleague, you're absolutely right. Even though you are highly strung, I can still follow your argument! Carry on with what you were saying—truly the moon is a monster!"

"It certainly is and this German moon is especially! It comes up over your roof and you lay your head on your shoulder and stand there blinking at it full in the face and feeling silly and embarrassed. And all of a sudden a field of harvest-ripe wheat sways into your field of vision, a nightingale or some other such songbird chirps in bushes, a pond lights up, a brook babbles and you, colleague, commence to babble too. What do you babble? Some nice-sounding Christian name given at baptism of course ending with an E or an A—Clothilde, Josephine, Maria, Amalia—who knows!? It's all one anyway. The decision has been made for you. It's got you. It's got you with everything you have, that crafty old malicious moon, that German moon! You even feel inclined to call it your friend, to stretch out your arms to it, to shed a tear for it and you are, beyond any further doubt, hopelessly disappointed."

"Yes, I see!" I said, and nothing more. But my colleague went into a silent brown study for a time, until he pulled himself together and went on:

"I was an elected representative of the regional parliament when, during the national argument over how the army should be organised from 1862 to 1866, His Majesty sent his gift of the famous symbolic stick to our prime minister. I voted of course with the majority and now, now in this year of Our Lord 1867, I have written a sonnet—a sonnet, just imagine!—a sonnet in praise of our venerable prime minister and had it published in the advertisement pages of our national daily. Can you understand me and my relationship to that moon of ours?"

"Absolutely!" I said after a pregnant pause.

"Then I can be brief in what I have to say and that's what I'll do. We all know—and so does the moon—a fairly euphonious name that ends in E or A and the bearer of that name or, if not, we immediately search for such a name and its bearer, and that the moon is ready and willing to help us find it and her goes without saying. No go-between in cases of this sort would lend a hand sooner or more deftly. It lights our way to the lyrical poet for whom we suddenly feel more than just an affinity. It manifests itself on the sheet of paper we ourselves make use of to pay court to the muse. It grins at us when we wait for a certain woman on the way out of a ballroom, concert hall or theatre. Later it escorts us home if our mother has no objection to us bringing her home with us. Who understands better than it does how to light the way home for a donkey or a person? It's neither here nor there, but a question well worth asking nevertheless, whether the blame can also be laid at its door when our father one fine day gives his permission. Are you married too, my dear colleague?"

The question bored into my brain so abruptly that I nearly fell off my chair and I had to collect my thoughts for a minute before I could answer yes.

"Good! Then we have talked of this theme at its true worth and no further talk is called for. Is it responsible for that alliteration as well? Look, there it is, looking in at the window—the clouds that you put me off with earlier have also been incapable of hiding it. The meadows are lit up for miles—such beauty! How wonderful! My dear colleague, how truly charming the world is, how splendid both in war and peacetime! Poetry drips down from above and springs up from below! Listen—listen to the music of the everlasting sea! The waves dance their immortal dance in the German moonlight—why should we not dance too? My soul is a drop in the harmonious flow of the world, a shining, light-filled drop. Colleague, let us partake of the sweetness of nature. It's a sin to sit here in this dull room while the elements of earth and water outside are looking so extraordinarily fine in the German moonlight. Come on. Drink up. Let's go..."

"You're no longer afraid...?"

"Why should I be afraid? My dear, dear friend, that's the point! It beats us all and by its light we win all our victories."

"Even the battle of Königgrätz?"

"Even that one, whatever objections one may have to it. And all future great and remarkable

battlefield victories as well! Ah, this air, this light! Let's climb to the top of that dune once again to take one more look at the holy briny."

"And afterwards, standing in the moonlight, will you tell me some more of your life story?"

"Willingly, with pleasure, immediately, although, in my opinion, it really isn't necessary any more. You see, dear friend, the fact stands as frightening as it is comfortable to live with that the moon from time to time overwhelms the Royal Prussian legal civil servant Löhnefinke and the latter, ultimately, has not the least objection to raise against the intoxication and dizziness it inspires. Yes, I too found a German girl, wandering in the German moonlight as I did, got engaged to her with the consent of her parents and later married her. And now today I find myself in undisputed possession of an eighteen year old daughter to boot and perhaps afterwards I can introduce both of those ladies to you."

"So you're not running around by yourself here? You haven't been left to your own devices on Sylt?"

"Not at all. I live with my wife and daughter in Westerland and have come here to the spa under their supervision. What do you think of my invitation?"

"Forgive me for asking a silly question, colleague. This is such a wonderful evening, such a pleasing encounter and such an extremely interesting conversation that anything is forgivable."

"Calm down. We understand each other perfectly. Unbeknown to you I have had an eye on you all day. You appealed to me as a person and the lawyer in me immediately recognized you as a kindred spirit and fate allowed me to bump into you literally not without a purpose and with total justification. We had to speak out to each other tonight—it's part of the cure and is in large part due to the salt water. But the moon—I always have to draw your attention back to that splendid moon. Yes, I am bound to it and will need to remain in its bonds until death us do part..."

"Colleague, because of it and with the help of the present moment and the current state of world affairs, I have become the poet in my family. Hold on to that idea and you grasp me in my entirety, both in my mood when we met on the beach and in my present frame of mind."

Löhnefinke the poet in his family! I took several steps backwards. Even though this crazy man stood before me in the moonlight as clear as the island of Sylt itself, the notion struck me forcibly. It was like the crack from a cannon that you observed through an eye-glass as the artillery man blew on the fuse, which is also as if you had received an actual blow.

"I, heir to such an endless stream of prose," my colleague continued, "am defeated by my foe and by him led astray each time he peeps over the horizon despite all my efforts to resist him. I am an idealist in politics and a poet in the conduct of my household affairs. I can see the time coming when I'll be keeping my books of account in hexameters and ottave rime. I'm a stickler for sentiment and cosiness in the course of an hour, and—colleague! colleague!— my women, my ladies don't understand me, don't latch on to me. That's the reason that my nerves are so shattered and the reason why at their instigation (the instigation of my wife and daughter, I mean) I have been brought here to Westerland, and now please do me the honour of coming home with me. It's gradually starting to get very cool."

He had linked me—with delicacy—and we walked arm in arm over the moonlit heathland of Sylt. Never in my life had I with such a poetic Prussian circuit judge strode out hip to hip. He, my exalted colleague, declaimed poetry in an ever louder voice. He showed a truly staggering well-readness in both German and foreign lyricism. Poems addressed to the moon gave way to hymns to freedom and songs of battle against all kinds of enemies both thinkable and unthinkable. Tropical landscapes and mood pictures gave way to stanzas taken from familiar and unfamiliar ballads and romances of every historical and non-historical type of content. Löhnefinke was sublime and his enemy, the moon, could really take pleasure in him. But, being in this state, he would have aroused in more than one of his and my superiors not only moral but also physical disgust. In the distance to the north the revolving light of the lighthouse at Kampen blinked like the eye of a mocker, who draws the attention of those around him to something hilarious. The sheep out on the heath, over whose leashes or retaining ropes we stumbled, stood up and looked after us astonished and amazed.

In this way we got nearer and nearer to the village of Westerland, but before we reached it we were called to and, to all appearances visible and audible, were torn in the nicest possible way out of our dreamy moonlight wandering by night back to reality. Fortunately neither of us fell off the roof.

As if made out of moonbeams there stood before us on a knoll of the heath an uncommonly dainty and graceful female form and a quite charming female face bowed to us in the moonlight and looked phenomenally pretty. Whether Circuit Judge Löhnefinke from Gross-Fauhlenberg had a charming face I cannot say, but he possessed a modest, in a way quite jovial face and his enthusiasm of the last few hours had embellished it. So I was all the more surprised by the expression with which he looked at his



lovely daughter. Instead of becoming happier and even more cheerful, his features suddenly went slack and immediately transformed themselves into a cross between sullen and peevish.

"Is that finally you, papa? Well, you're late I must say!" the elfish phantom cried while coming towards us.

"Yes, it's finally me," grunted my colleague, "and here..."

He did not complete his sentence for the young lady interrupted him:

"We've been waiting for you a long time, papa, and mother is very angry with you!"

"Hm!" grunted my colleague and "hm!" was also what I said in the depths of my soul.

"Come, Helene, let's go home," said Löhnefinke soothingly, but the moonlit elf retorted even more brusquely:

"Thank you, papa, but I'll go with mother. She's coming now and will tell you herself how she's waited for you. Mother, here's father finally!"

He was indeed here, the paterfamilias Löhnefinke, and at this moment in time he quoted no more German verse and no more foreign either. Mother stepped forward through the moonlight, quite quickly and energetically in fact. I would not have been averse to taking my leave before she reached us, but my colleague held my arm fast with the grip of a Prussian dragoon and whispered:

"I want to introduce you. Where are you going? Colleague, allow me to present to you my wife!"

What could I express other than the greatest desire to make the acquaintance of his wife?

Walking between the first houses of the hamlet of Westerland this worthy lady had already caught up with us and taken the arm of her daughter. She overlooked me completely to begin with of course to dedicate herself wholeheartedly to family matters.

"So you've finally turned up, Löhnefinke?! Your usual lack of consideration for others as is your wont! Let me tell you, Löhnefinke..."

"My dear Johanna, look who's here! My friend and correspondent..."

It doesn't happen very often that one is shoved as a folding screen between a cold draught and the armchair of a rheumatic! The introductions took place and I adapted myself with my inherent good nature to the role meted out to me. After a few polite exchanges the four of us pushed on together to the collection of modest, low, peaceful, Frisian huts and if there was still one last dark spot for me in the soul of my colleague, it vanished completely on this short trek.

How the moon, that German moon, looked down and laughed at the two women and the Royal Prussian Circuit Judge! It knows how to take its revenge alright. It has its means, it knows the means at its disposal and it knows how to use them. My friend Löhnefinke is quite right—it's a terrible thing to have to inherit the legacy of generations, of centuries past without being permitted beforehand to make use of the privilege in law to limit the amounts owing to one's creditors. It's a crying shame first of all not to pay attention to that pallid, waxing and waning companion, then to despise it and finally to be given over to its influence without any great resistance on your part and to surrender oneself!

One needs to be a man—a German man and a civil servant—to be able to experience the full horror of something like this. Mrs Johanna and Miss Helene Löhnefinke, without ever having considered the claims of the moon on people, had sided totally with the moon and were exacting its revenge on him who had despised it. It was not foreseeable how far down they might bring their husband and father—they had brought him down enough as it was.

Late that night, when I was back with my baker, I smoked half a dozen pipes musing over the lessons and experiences of the previous day and decided around midnight to send my son, currently studying mathematics in Göttingen, a copy of the complete works of Jean Paul Friedrich Richter\* for his next birthday.

\*Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1763-1825) was born Johann Paul Friedrich Richter and was a German romantic writer of humorous novels and stories. He changed his name to Jean in honour of the French romantic, Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

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