



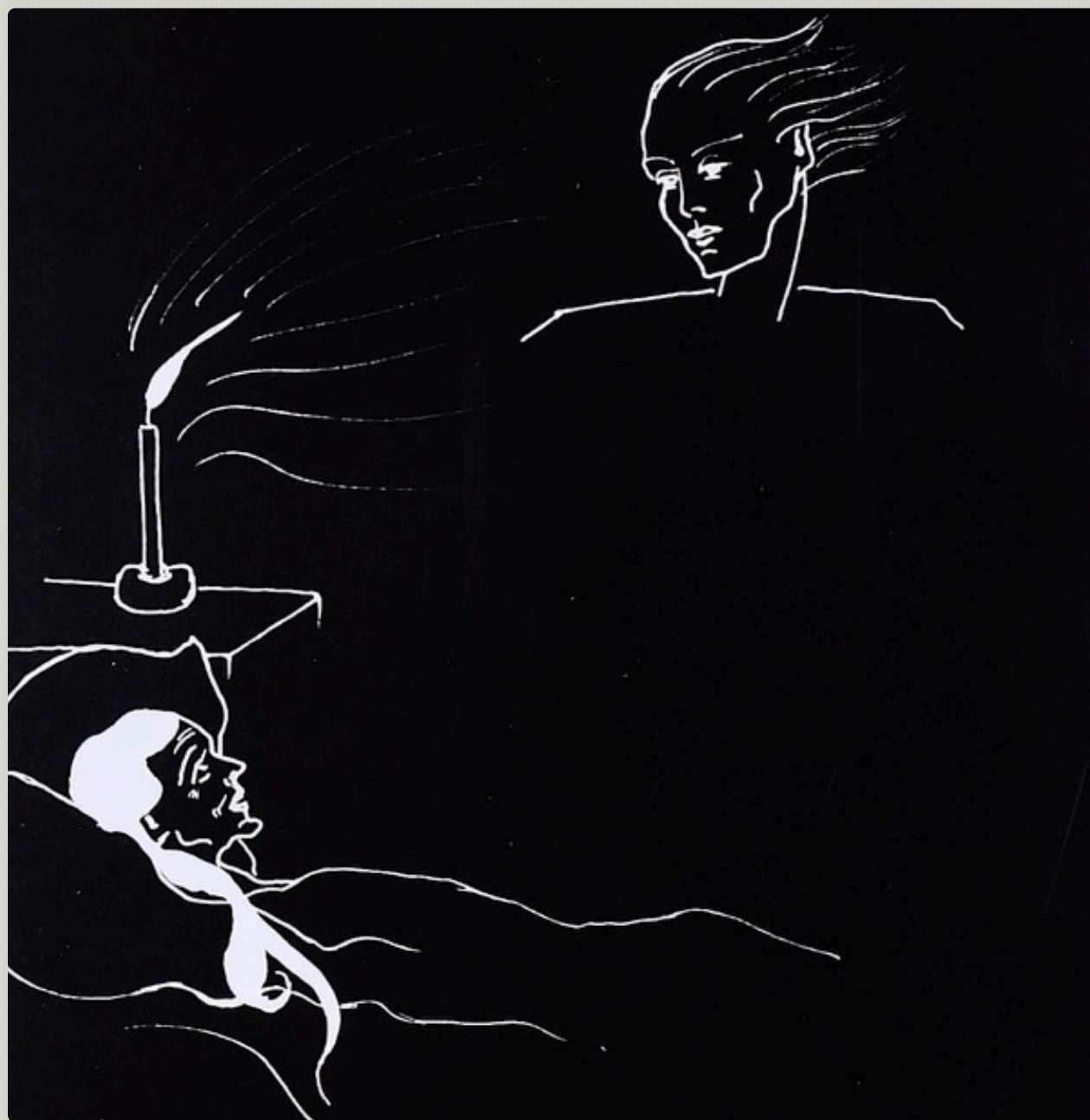
Of Heaven, Hell & Hollywood



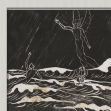
“Of all my brain children, this is my favorite,” wrote Lotte Lehmann of her Satirical Fantasy, *Of Heaven, Hell and Hollywood*. She’d begun it in her native German, returned to write it in English, and ‘finished’ in 1950 by having Frances Holden improve the English when necessary. As far as I can tell, this 162 page manuscript along with the drawings that Lehmann intended should accompany the whole thing, has never before been made available to the public. You’ll find two galleries of the drawings that you will need to insert where appropriate.

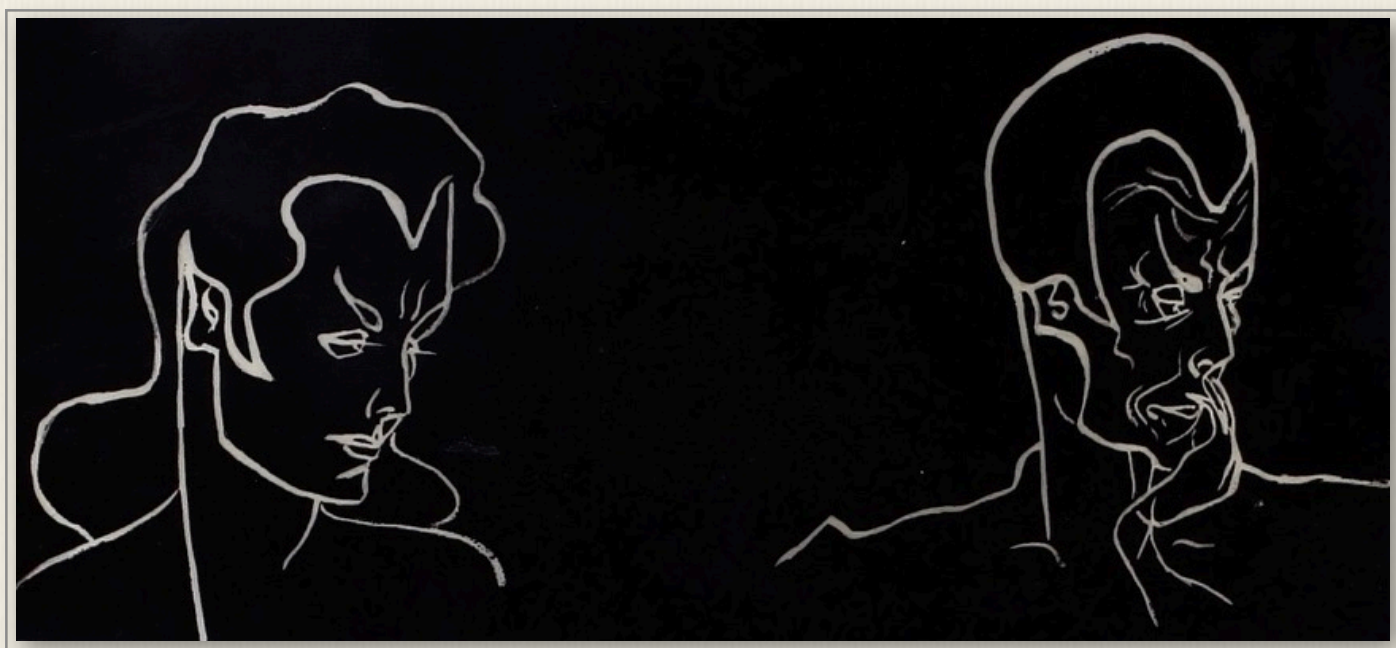
There's no indication from any source as to where Lehmann wanted to place her drawings. Some are obvious, but others are certainly open to speculation. So in a creative way, you the reader will become the co-author with Lehmann, mentally placing the drawings where you think they best reflect the text. Enjoy!

Drawings for *Of Heaven, Hell and Hollywood*



Lehmann's Drawings for *Of Heaven, Hell and Hollywood*





OF HEAVEN, HELL AND HOLLYWOOD

A Satirical Fantasy

by

Lotte Lehmann

hutte read

Preface

Of all my brain children, this is my favorite. I send it out into the world with my especial love and good wishes.

It is perhaps quite natural that I should have a special affection for it: When she has several children who are quite average and normal, a mother often loves most the one who is a little queer. That is the case with this child of mine, this story..

It has been born, so to speak, a number of times - and each birth was a lot of fun. I first wrote the story years ago in German and completely forgot about it. Then I found the manuscript, read it, liked parts of it and rewrote it - quite boldly, in English. Since English is not my mother tongue this was quite an adventure, but a very exciting and satisfying one.

Reading the English manuscript I was impressed by my English more than by the story itself. I am grateful to my friend Robert Nathan who urged me to rewrite it as I had the most fun of all doing the final version. So here it is and all I ask for is that it may give you pleasure and make you smile.

At least I hope you will smile.

It is certainly a strange story. It roams through the Universe with considerable boldness. Incidentally that reminds me of how I happened to come upon the title: Some friends asked me what this story which had so possessed me that I had written and rewritten it, was about. I said:"That is really very difficult to explain. It would sound ridiculous if I should say:

'It is just of Heaven,Hell and Hollywood.' And everyone shrieked:
"That's the title!"

Finding the title - as you see - was the least of my
difficulties....

It is better to prepare you: The whole story is a dream.
Please keep this in mind and forgive the seemingly impossible
situations. I shouldn't like to think that you might consider
my description of heaven for instance as my own conception of
this desired place. May all its angels forgive me! And may the
spirits of great men such as Dante,Shakespeare and others forgive
me for putting into their mouths words which they never uttered,
as well as those which they did, and may they also forgive me
for applying their own words to situations which would certainly
have made them gasp...

I have carefully put all the quotations in Italics. I hope
I have not overstepped poetic license in applying these quotations
at my own discretion....

And my apologies to Hollywood. I sharpened my pen in describ-
ing it - but it is all in good fun and should be taken in fun...

The only thing which really disturbed me was the desperation
with which my friend Frances Holden edited this story. She had
until now translated my manuscript from the German - but this
time she had the difficult task of changing my sometimes confused
English into plain English. She did it with ungracious groans I
must say.*And she often hurt my feelings by asking!"For heaven's
sake what do you mean by this?" My English does not seem to be

entirely convincing.

I will put her to shame:

I dedicate this book to her - who is not alone a companion of my life but also of my fancies and delicious flights into the realm of unreality... I am quite sure: if we should roam through eternity after our departure from earth I shall find her up above in the clouds - and will that be a joyful meeting!...

Santa Barbara, California,

March 1950

* This is gross exaggeration! F.H. Ed.

Prologue

Ever since my old friend Reinhold Wilbrecht became seriously ill I have felt strangely restless and distracted without any apparent reason for being so. Of course I am distressed and worried about him - but nothing that could happen to him would alter my life in any way. He is just one of many friends, not one who is really close to me.

Yet something drives me to turn away from everything which I would ordinarily enjoy doing in these wonderful days of leisure, and draws me to my desk.

Through the open windows drifts the song of the mocking bird, almost delirious in its ecstasy, but I do not listen, I hear only a voice which says again and again:

"WRITE - WRITE - WRITE !"

This is absolutely ridiculous. I have not the slightest intention of writing anything - neither letters nor articles - and certainly not a book. But I sit down feeling slightly dizzy and confused.

The song of the mocking bird fades into the distance - the world about me loses its reality and I become the tool of a power which possesses me and forces me to write what this voice dictates - the voice of Reinhold Wilbrecht.

Chapter I.

Tenor in Space

How can this be? For centuries, for thousands of human years, I have been freed of pain ... I have been dead for such a long, long time! How is it possible that my head can ache?

This pain is dull and heavy. I cannot raise myself, cannot open my eyes - I am too weak.

Was it a dream?

Oh it can't be only a dream... I could not bear to lose that deep happiness of being dead and awakening from an earthly life to a much better existence. If it were just a dream I could not imagine so clearly and unforgettably all that I have experienced. One does not see Heaven and Hell as I have seen them - one cannot just imagine the wide blue hall of paradise where I lived so long - learning to deserve the last blissful oblivion, to lose myself in the soft light which even now still shimmers through my closed lids...

I dare not open my eyes.

I do not want to find myself enclosed again between the ~~the~~ four walls of my old bedroom - comfortable as I used to find it, with its lace covered window overlooking Central Park and a tiny bit of sky.... A tiny bit of that eternal blue through which we floated, Asrael and I....

Asrael!....

Help me, my friend, help me to realize that this was not just an illusion.

Don't give me back to life and to the endless struggle which it meant to me. The struggle to keep up my name, my famous name...

In the timeless eternities through which I lived I knew that I was no longer remembered. Earthly time was like the surf sweeping over sand - time had obliterated all that remained of a once beloved name - even I myself had almost forgotten....

I do not want to go back. I do not want to realize that I was ill - and must now return to life. To be again that being from I had thought I had parted forever: Reinhold Wilbrecht, the famous Tenor. The great star of the Metropolitan.

But I must face it....

Lisa is bending over me, her anxious eyes filled with tears, her smile trembling and radiant. I try to smile.... But it is difficult.

Some time seems to have passed since my first awakening - perhaps I lost consciousness again when I realized that I was alive - what they call "alive" on earth....

Now it seems to be night again. A tiny light burns beside my bed - and through the open window I can see a star. Tears roll slowly down my cheek....

I must try to remember: I must send my thoughts far, far back.... Once upon a time....

Once upon a time there was a little planet called the Earth.

The people who lived on this planet had a system called "time." They had years and centuries and decenniums. They had yesterday and to-day and tomorrow.

If I were to count in earthly terms I would say:decenniums ago this planet was alive and people lived on it, And I was one of them.

In the timeless eternities through which I lived I knew that I was no longer remembered. Earthly time was like the surf sweeping over sand - time had obliterated all that remained of a once beloved name - even I myself had almost forgotten....

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Since I died this earth has gone through changes. First the people themselves destroyed it. With vicious bombs and gas they killed every living thing. For a long, long time afterward the earth continued to spin on its destined course, a ball of fire. Slowly the fire died, the poisonous gas vanished. Cold swept over the planet. Fire gave way to ice. And there it continues on its way - a ball of ice, sun and moon concealed, clouds of frozen air hang around the ~~swaying~~ stars like cloaks of shimmering dust ... Perhaps they will dissolve one day. Perhaps they will vanish from the mechanism which we call the universe as balls fall from weary hands, the hands of giants who have tired of cosmic play. Who knows?

But there - once upon a time - I lived.

And there I died.

I was born in Budapest. I lost my parents when I was an infant - and a sister of my father's educated me and became for me mother, father, home, and everything which is good and noble. She was an opera singer, a member of the Vienna State Opera and I grew up in Vienna in an atmosphere of music and charming gaiety and when my aunt discovered my voice there was no question but that I would also become a singer. She taught me. For all I ever ~~new~~ or accomplished I have her to thank. When, after I had sung for some years in Vienna, America called me, she did not accompany me. She did not like the ocean and she wanted to live only in Vienna which she loved fervently. But when I said goodbye to her, she embraced me saying: "If ever you should really need me - you know that I would

come to the end of the earth. You are my son! "

It was good for me to live alone. I had become too dependent upon aunt Lisa. I enjoyed my freedom but I did two foolish things: I married twice and was twice divorced... My wives were both beautiful and I had every intention of making each marriage succeed.

My first wife was fiery and untamed and I was quite mad about her. The short period of our married life was full of tears and kisses. We forgot each other as quickly as we had fallen in love. My second wife was quiet, cold, and utterly boring.

When I was again free I wired aunt Lisa: "Protect me from any more senseless stupidities. Please come and live with me. I would be eternally grateful. You promised if I ever needed you, you would come. I do. Will you?" She wired back just two words: "Of course."

Happy years! Increasing success ! A great and spectacular career! I had become the world's most renowned Wagnerian tenor. There was no competition for me. My homelife was peaceful. I had no wish which remained unfulfilled.

The years passed. I was a sworn bachelor and always managed to escape the intriguing women who tried to ~~me~~^{get} of me - a glamorous catch.

Slowly I realized that I was growing older. Oh - I was a man in his best years - I always told myself. A man isn't really old in his late fifties... But sometimes singing was not quite the child's play it had been for me. I had to work harder - and young tenors stood in the wings discussing how soon old Wilbrecht would retire and leave the way free for them. There was that fellow Richard Warren. A very beautiful voice and talent but I did not

dream of really giving him a chance. I said jokingly (but how I meant it!!!): "Wait a bit, Dick. I'm still going strong. Don't stand there thinking this old boy should shut up. I shall not, my dear Dick. I certainly shall not...."

But it was increasingly hard work.

One day - that heart attack. It was not really a bad one. Just a bit of dizziness and a strange feeling of going away from everything... But it passed and the doctor just said: "Take it easy, Reinhold. You can live to be a hundred, but it would be a good idea to take it easy."

"Take it easy!..."

I was a real artist. I could not fake when I sang. It was funny how desperately I hung on. Singing had never meant so much to me as it did now. And all the joys of life were suddenly doubly precious... That silly little girl, Joan... Until now she had been a nice thing to play with. Stupid in her twofold ambition: to become a singer and to marry me... Both very ridiculous. She had no voice at all - and she would never have been a wife for me. I had to take myself in hand not to succumb to her subtle suggestions. I took the idea of marriage out of her silly head. There was always aunt Lisa - no one else could ever take such good care of me. Then she wanted a career for herself in Hollywood - of all places. I could not help her there. I had no contact with Hollywood. I was only a world famous tenor - what does that mean to Hollywood?

Then she wanted to meet aunt Lisa. Knowing that aunt Lisa would not have the faintest interest in meeting any mistress of mine, I said "no." I was adamant. Until now the last evening of

my earthly life...

I took her home for dinner. It was a great triumph for her and she enjoyed her victory to the fullest. I must say: she looked absolutely enchanting with her silky hair falling in a heavy straight bang , and all her lines quite visible beneath her thin and deeply cut gown. The emerald which I had given her hanging from her lovely neck....Looking at her I thought:"Why not? Why should I not marry her and have her around me forever, young and beautiful and somehow quite angelic..."

Aunt Lisa did not like her - I saw that at once. She went out of her way to be pleasant and stood there like a queen, looking her up and down. In comparison to aunt Lisa she looked rather cheap - but then almost everyone did. Aunt Lisa was quite a wonderful personality who by the way rather enjoyed a little subtle intrigue very much. To-night she was determined to play the gracious queen, perhaps partly because of her annoyance at having to meet Joan and partly because she had at her other side my publicity agent Bridget Collier whom she rather disliked. "Too much brain," she always said of her. I am sure she would have said of Joan:"Not enough brain," but I avoided hearing her opinion on this subject....

Dinner was a gloomy affair.

Joan had made up her mind to "conquer" aunt Lisa. She was in one of her silliest states of wide eyed innocence and answered every remark of aunt Lisa's with a radiant "Oh, reeeally? Isn't that just too marvelous!" Not that she made any impression on Her Majesty the Queen. Lisa merely found her stupid; I knew that and was nervous

and ate and drank too much. Bridget also behaved dreadfully. She watched Joan through narrow lids with a smile both cruel and satisfied. She was thoroughly delighted by the cold doom expressed in aunt Lisa's glance.

I felt as though I were sitting between three cats who eyed one another with extended claws. Nice dinner, I must say. Nervously I stroked the beautiful curly head of Cheri, my poodle, and whispered to him: "Let's stick together, old boy!"

Aunt Lisa was accustomed to my bad habit of feeding Cheri at the table but Joan was horrified.

"Oh darling," she said with disgust, "you shouldn't do that. You shouldn't feed a dog in the diningroom - look his paws are very dirty." Why she said that God alone knows. She should have known better for I am absolutely insane in my love for animals and especially dogs and quite especially Cheri. So she should have realized that I would be annoyed by any such remark. Perhaps she wanted to show aunt Lisa that she was a good "Hausfrau" - in any case I am not much good at reading the minds of silly women.

Aunt Lisa who really hated to have me feed Cheri at the table smiled a smile which would have immediately turned a hot toddy to ice.

"We love to spoil Cheri, don't we, Reinhold?" she said sweetly and I almost dropped my wineglass on the floor. Being too well educated for that I just gulped down my wine as I caught a warning glance from aunt Lisa. She really looked worried and tried to start a normal conversation.

But the two cats were not yet satisfied.

"Any contract for Hollywood yet, dear?" said Bridget to Joan.

I knew it: like a gushing torrent a long and confused tale tumbled from Joan's pretty mouth. Oh, there were so many possibilities, so many wonderful offers. She just couldn't tell us of all the sweet producers who were so eager to get her if only she would accept their offers! That to a shrewd publicity woman well acquainted with all the ropes... I was rude enough to hit Joan under the table and must have wrecked a nylon for she shrieked and looked as if she wanted to kill me.

Aunt Lisa's fork fell with a bang- and Bridget remarked: "How nice that you are so pursued. Perhaps someday you will take me as your publicity agent, but actually perhaps you won't need me- for you will always get enough publicity for yourself. There will soon be a nice little scandal here or there I am sure. No, you really won't need me..."

God, these shameless females!

Fortunately Joan did not take this all in. She was rather flattered, being sure that Bridget had believed all her nonsense, and promised as from a mountain peak to poor little Bridget looking for a job: "I will keep you in mind."

To end this dinner on a perfect tune aunt Lisa proposed that Joan should sing for us. That was the last straw. I could not stand it. I almost said: "Look, Joan, if you will promise never to open your mouth again I will marry you" - but I could not because Joan was already half out of her mind with delight at having an audience, as she put it.

"I will get drunk, absolutely drunk," I said with finality.

"I loathe drunkards," hissed Joan. "Be careful," said aunt Lisa. "Don't overact," whispered Bridget. My only idea was to escape this ordeal.

"There is no accompanist. You can't play for yourself, Joan."

Oh, certainly she could! And with a coquettish turn of her head that set her lovely bang bobbing up and down, she said "You'll just have to forgive me if the accompaniment isn't quite up to my singing."

Not quite up to her singing! How humble!

I felt strangely hot and tried to stretch my collar as I struggled for breath. My hand trembled as I mixed a very stiff drink to strengthen me for what lay ahead.

I am sure aunt Lisa had watched me. She was anxious to bring this charming party to an end. But neither Joan or Bridget would let her. They insisted that she had promised to listen to Joan and she should keep her promise. I saw that Bridget was enjoying herself hugely. She knew what aunt Lisa in her almost perverse honesty would say to Joan. Her honesty sometimes made me shiver. For instance she had written a biography of me and wanted to publish this book in which she showed me as I am and not as publicity has glorified me. I never wanted to know what I really was and neither did my public. So what? But that was aunt Lisa: straightforward and honest. What would she say to Joan? Joan of Ark before the Jury...Joan of Ark at the stake....

My thoughts ran like frightened mice. Suddenly something happened to me, something strange and uncanny: the room started to sway and great black shadows raced before my eyes. I could not seem to breathe

and groped around; then I must have fallen because I only remember aunt Lisa, her face full of fear and love, holding a glass of water to my lips. I wanted to say, "don't worry," but I could not get it out.

Because I died.

* _ * _ * _ * _ * _ * _ *

A great glaring light radiated through my whole being. I felt a terrific change without realizing what it was that was changing. I saw myself, my own form, lying on the ground, stretched out in a rather ridiculous fashion - not at all in the way I used to die on the stage: gracefully draped over some steps with the beautiful folds of my impressive cloak spread about me. No, this man here, this corpse, looked very repulsive to me. I could not possibly be my body. I was a rather handsome man. Or was I? But now I seemed to be dead. And yet --- alive? I was standing against the mantelpiece, watching the three women who behaved just as I would have expected them to: Joan in a faint (no one paid any attention to her, by the way); Bridget at the telephone, efficient as always; aunt Lisa broken hearted and quite unable to believe it. And Cheri? He did not look at the body which had been I - he looked straight at me before the mantelpiece wagging his tail in a strangely shy way and uttering little moans of distress. I wanted to say, "Cheri, come here," but could I? Would he hear me? He seemed to see me.

I called him but he did not listen. He went to the body, put his head on the feet which had been mine, and howled, long and piteously.

They took me away.

There was a dreadful to-do with much telephoning and coming and going. I think they put me to bed - soon the undertaker would arrive to embellish the shell which had once been I...

So I was dead...

I had always been afraid of dying. Afraid and never quite convinced that it could ever happen to me. Death was something without any reality. People were ill, they suddenly ceased to exist. One sat at breakfast and aunt Lisa would say: "Oh - Mr. So-and-So is dead." I would say: "Isn't that too bad. What was the matter with him?" and I would take another roll and butter it and spread it thickly with orange marmalade in spite of knowing that it would be better not to gain weight. But it was so good to exist and enjoy the simple pleasures of life - beautiful, exciting, never, never ending life ...

Aunt Lisa would say: "It was that or that. It was his heart." And that would give me a little pang.

His heart!

I would remember that my heart wasn't so good either. The other day I had had a slight attack. Oh, nothing to be afraid of, to be sure. But aunt Lisa had made me see the doctor. He had examined me all over, talked about the last Lohengrin performance and how wonderful I was, and then had said quite casually, that I should take life easier in the future.

I hadn't liked that.

I said that I wanted the truth. He looked serious and said there was absolutely nothing to worry about. But -- and there were quite a number of unpleasant "buts." I took it all in. I promised everything.

I felt very insecure and frightened. But as I started out the door I turned and said very nonchallantly: " You don't think I will die soon, do you, doctor? Not I ! I don't want to, you know."

He smiles^g and said: "Don't be silly. Certainly not. You will live for quite a while if you do as I say. Now run along and sing beautifully to-morrow. I will be there, and I love your Tristan."

I tried to look unconcerned: "So long, charming murderer!" We parted jokingly but I went away with fear in my heart....

Death?

Only because I had had an unpleasant evening? Only because I had had more to drink than I should?

One can't do that to me. Not to me. One can't snatch me away from a life which I loved, from a world which adored me, from a public which had been at my feet for so many years.

I don't know how long I stood there, feeling desolate and utterly helpless. My eyes were blurred as if from tears - but it was only a haze which surrounded me. I think I had to grow accustomed to seeing the world with new eyes. Everything above me seemed distorted - through the supposedly solid roof of the apartment building I saw the sky filled with stars. It looked so queer and made me dizzy. Turning my head from side to side I realized that all the walls were transparent. I looked right through them. How uncanny! How horribly uncanny!

Before me shone a penetrating light . It was like a cloud strangely spun of gold and stars. Slowly I began to see more clearly.

I was not alone as I had thought. Before me stood a tall form. Eyes burned into mine with a luminous warmth - emerging from light and haze I saw a very beautiful face.

Who could it be? The creature frightened me. Was it Death? I should have hated it if it were Death. But I could not feel any hatred. On the contrary: I felt strangely drawn to this beautiful creature and it cost me much effort to look at it severely and say: "You should not have done that. I didn't want to pass away. I was happy and I should have had a lot of time before me. It isn't right of you to take my life."

The creature smiled.

"I did not take your life, Reinhold. I am not Death. I am your guardian angel who has always been with you, who loves and understands you as no one else. Loving and understanding you is my duty. My name is Asrael."

Asrael.

How romantic! I would love to tell aunt Lisa. Of course she would not believe me. She would wrinkle her nose at me and give me a little push and say: "You with your stories. Tell them to your adoring public. An angel! Asrael, indeed...."

But there he was. He was more distinct now. How could I ever have thought that he could be cruel Death! He looked very kind and quite, quite angelic. He even had wings. Shimmering golden wings and a radiant halo which played about his beautiful head. I was proud to have such an impressive guardian angel.

We looked at each other for quite a while ; and then Asrael stretched out his delicate hands and said:"Follow me."

What did he mean? Follow him? Away from here ? I would never do that. This is my apartment - Fifth Avenue - this is my city, this is my life, my home. I shall never go away from here. If I must be dead, then I shall remain dead, but here; here, where I belong. I have to see aunt Lisa. I have to see my friends, even silly little Joan; my clever Bridget; my darling Cheri....Nobody can drag me away. I stood there trembling, ready to fight, to do anything but go away.

Asrael looked at me sadly.

"It is the destiny of mankind to leave the earth and follow the road up to the stars. You will forget. You will soon be yourself: a soul without the fetters of earthly attachments. Come,Reinhold, follow me."

No one could ever talk me out of something which I considered my right... Not even an angel from heaven could do that. Not even Director Jonas of the Metropolitan had ever been able to persuade me to do something I did not want to do. Asrael did not make a stronger impression on me.

"Look,Asrael," I said with a security which was not quite honest, "give up this silly idea. I stay here. That's final; I want to see what is going to happen. I have to see who will take my place at the opera, who will make my faithful public forget that I was once alive and wonderful. If you are bored here - that's o.k. with me. You can go; but I stay."

Asrael did not answer me; but a force such as I had never felt

before drew me up - and I saw myself soaring high over the roofs of New York City - soaring through the luminous deep blue of the night. Far below me glimmered the lights of my beloved city. The whole world below me, a glamorous, radiant world, spread out in a confusion of bright shining starlike electric lights. Above me the real stars seemed comparatively unreal and lacking in Splendor..

I was furious. I struggled desperately. But I don't really know what I struggled against.... It was as if I were swept on the wings of a hurricane. I wanted to shout, I wanted to weep. I could do neither... Oh - I was dead! I had no longer any human strength, no human means to fight or to protest....

"All right," I said weakly. "All right. You win. But please, Asrael, don't rush me away from everything I love quite so quickly

We swooped down in a graceful curve and there we sat under the stars - on the roof of Radio City where I had so often sung in broadcasts.

What a situation!

I think I panted a bit, not being accustomed to flying around like an angel. Then Asrael had wings at least whereas I just soared - God knows how. Asrael looked at me very kindly.

"You know you don't have to leave for good yet," he said in a soft and caressing voice. But soft or no- I knew better now. Asrael could be very strong and determined. He had shown that. He was the master - and there was nothing for me to do from now on but get accustomed to this unpleasant way of living.

"What do you mean - I don't have to leave for good?" I asked eagerly. "You just said that it is our destiny to be swept away by some brutality which I don't like at all."

"Not immediately, Reinhold." Asrael ignored my viciousness. "We can remain near the earth for a while. Tell me what you want to do and we shall see whether your wishes can be fulfilled."

That sounded a lot better.

An idea occurred to me: "Isn't today Saturday? Toscanini broadcast! I would like to hear that. I seldom missed it and I don't see why I should miss it now. Let's go down."

Graciously Asrael agreed. We swooped through the roof and several stories and glided into the Concert hall. The music had already begun. I slid through the musicians and sat at the Maestro's feet, dangerously close to him and afraid lest he might see me - in spite of knowing that it was quite impossible.

I looked with emotion into the marvellous face of the great conductor. Here was a man who had scorned time, who in a sense was timeless. old in years but ever young in his art and heart.

Much to my astonishment, I saw sitting at his feet two forms - a lovely angel and the other, without question, a devil. It seemed to me strange that they sat hand in hand swinging their bodies to the rythm of the music.

"How is it possible, Asrael, that they seem to be so friendly?"

"Oh, they both live in the Maestro," Asrael answered, "They are his geni. Don't you hear it in his music? When he was born, angel and devil fought to possess him, but they are equally strong

and they live together within him and have made him what he is."

Oh, I see! So that is what makes him so soft and sweet and yet so devilish terrible! I understand now; he cannot help it. It is just the angel and the devil fighting as to whom he really belongs...

I am sorry to say that the devil generally wins ...The little angel looks rather subdued and has grown increasingly shy - but one can imagine that the devil often feels overworked - and then there is a big feast for the angel - and also for the musicians who follow the Maestro's baton which is not only the greatest of artistic experiences but also a terrible trial for the nervous system.

I sat beside the Maestro, looking up into his fierce eyes which glowed tonight with a threatening fire. Even though I was not scheduled to sing with him, I trembled a bit in spite of being quite dead....

The music was incredibly beautiful - but suddenly the oboe did something dreadful, something inexcusable, committing the deadly sin: a wrong note, a spoiled phrase.

Involuntarily I covered my eyes with my hands. Then I glanced up, very cautiously. The Maestro was pale, his eyes flashed, his teeth clicked with fury and the glance he shot at the poor man was a death sentence... "I better get out of here," I thought. But curiosity drove me later into the crowd of admirers and worshippers who thronged about the door of his artist's room. A strange and terrifying silence hung over the crowd. They all listened horrified. Inside the green room something terrible was going on.

I am sure that everyone thought the oboist was being strangled. Italian curses mixed with sobs and groans came through the door to the bewildered and anxious audience beyond. It seems as though someone was throwing stones at the dying man and then a heavy body was apparently hurled against the door. One could scarcely hear a breath, there was only the ecstatic whisper of a woman who seemed to find murder delightfully exciting: "Isn't he marvellous?" But she was hushed.

Suddenly the door was flung open; but instead of having the sensation of a corpse thrown at our trembling feet, the Maestro appeared alone, white and spent, his hair a silvery halo about his angel-devil face. He looked around irritably and said hoarsely "Dove e questo pazzo?" and lo and behold , a little man emerged slowly and shyly through the crowd with tears in his eyes, his oboe under his arm, trembling and shivering. The Maestro stared at him from under his sinister brows; then he smiled disarmingly and said: "Go home and do it better next time."

Everybody breathed again. The little lady who would have found such satisfaction in a sweet little murder said with a long drawn sigh: "He didn't kill him after all - but could you tell me why he shrieked so?"

"Certainly," they all said laughingly. "He was just furious and so he hollered at himself. The musicians all know that - and look how clever that oboe player was. He got a smile instead of a knife."

The Maestro sat in his room exhausted. He was completely spent. Exhausted from music, from ecstasy, from fury. Now he sat there,

angelic, sweet, and completely charming. I saw that his devil looked out of the window quite bored. He knew he was now on vacation. But the angel was having the time of his life. He practically sat in the Maestro's lap, and I wondered how many women would have envied the sleek little angel looking so smug and satisfied cuddling up against the fiery heart of the great Arturo.... Because it is strange: He is old, any average person his age would be finished and done with and young women would look upon him only with childlike devotion. But the Maestro! They all adore him, and he knows it - oh yes, he knows it! A young singer came to him, stars in her eyes: "Oh, Maestro, I am going to sing for you to-morrow. You were so wonderful to grant me this audition. Oh, thank you!"

The Maestro looked irritated for a moment. "I didn't grant you any audition," he said hoarsely; but his manager bent down to him and said: "She is the one who is to sing the solo part in the Ninth Symphony, Maestro. She is a newcomer, quite excellent. Of course it all depends on whether you consider her good enough."

But if the girl thought: "Oh fine, he likes me and will take me," she was mistaken, for whether or not she has beautiful eyes or a lovely mouth - he will only engage her if she is a good singer. No favors, my dear child, not in music! So you had better stop smiling triumphantly in your innocence. Smile only if he says "Bene!" That is your moment. Not a second earlier....

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Asrael touched my shoulder with his golden finger: "I thought you wanted to visit the Metropolitan. Come, now you may find out what your directors think of you."

We swooped down upon the Metropolitan, and were just in time: I heard aunt Lisa's voice over the telephone, shocked with tears, and Director Jones' mixed emotions in reply to her startling news. He made clucking sounds with his tongue - apparently as an expression of deepest sympathy; but his eyes were already on the calendar, flying over the week's repertory....

"He is figuring out who will sing Tristan for me on Thursday," I thought with amusement. As if I did not know who would sing! Who but Richard Warren, the young singer whom I had never given a chance. Suddenly I felt so far away from all the petty intrigues of competition that I could scarcely understand my earlier resentment. The boy really had a beautiful voice. For heaven's sake let him have his chance! He will be wonderful as Tristan and he will be young and convincing, which I ceased to be long ago. I realized this for the first time with astonishment....

Director Jones had found soothing words of comfort. (How would, oh, he would!) His voice over the telephone was smooth and glib, and good old aunt Lisa who had never believed a word of his seemed quite overcome and grateful. God bless her dear old heart! She was so grieved that she even believed him!

With a thoughtful "click" Director Jones laid down the receiver. For a moment he stared at his desk, his brow furrowed and this was the moment at which he gave me a kind of blessing. Then a smile lit his face and with a subdued voice he summoned the other directors to a conference.

What fun this would be!

What fun to be in one of those conferences at last. Now all the masks would fall - and how I looked forward to that!

Seven directors of the Metropolitan sat side by side discussing my death. Six heads shook sympathetically when Director Jones announced the sad news. Six pairs of eyes hung expectantly on Mr. Jones' smiling lips. "You know, my dear friends," he said in his usual smooth manner, "how deeply the world mourns today, and what a loss this untimely death is for every lover of music."

I must admit that pleased me very much.

"However," he continued, "the king is dead, long live the king - this is an old and true saying. Our repertory must go on and we must make our decision regarding next Thursday's performance of Tristan. For a long time Richard Warren has wanted to sing this role but you know we could not hurt poor old Wilbrecht's feelings."

Poor old Wilbrecht! What a nerve. So that is how they thought of me: Poor old Wilbrecht! Strangely enough I was not hurt, it only seemed ridiculous that what they thought had never mattered to me.

His smile deepened - "Now the way is free for Warren and we should do everything to build him up for a spectacular success. Let's give the next Tristan as a memorial performance for Wilbrecht - and give Warren his chance - at last!"

Seven pairs of eyes twinkled smilingly at each other. For seven directors I was not only dead but out of the way at last....

Asrael watching me laid his hand upon my shoulder and said: "Reinhold, don't be distressed. That would be beneath you, you will soon forget the earth and come to long for the time of utter peace - and you will only find this by dissolving into light and nothingness."

I was terrified by this idea of dissolving. Oh no, I want to soar over the earth, visiting every corner, listening to everybody and everything in eternity. Amen.

" I want you to be happy," said Asrael sadly."So please tell me your wishes."

Good,good! That sounded better to me than the idea of becoming light and air and cloud and wind. I have time - haven't I ? Lots of time...

First we went back to aunt Lisa. I was really anxious to see how she who had been like a mother to me through my whole life, would take my death. I hoped that I might find a way to tell her not to worry about me.

Certainly I should have known that my apartment would be filled with reporters, photographers taking snapshots of my body as I lay in state in great pomp and glamor...Anna,our Viennese maid was trying to persuade aunt Lisa to see the reporters.

"You should see them,Madame," she said,wiping away her tears. "Mr.Wilbrecht always said:' Be nice to the reporters,aunt Lisa', didn't he? He would be very angry if you should spoil his whole death by not talking to the reporters. Please come - they are all there,all of them."

Aunt Lisa sighed deeply."Yes,perhaps you are right, I should do what he would have liked me to do even though I detest this whole business of publicity. But God knows I can't give them a story to-day...They can all go to hell as far as I am concerned."

And with this pious wish she opened the door. There they were, all of them(I counted them and felt quite gratified that there was not one missing.)

Naturally Bridget was also there (what an opportunity for publicity - but for whom,may I ask???) She looked very smart in her black dress - she would be dressed appropriately for the occasion! One could be sure of that. She was in the middle of a very touching story about Cheri,my sweet poodle,when aunt Lisa entered. Aunt Lisa did not like her very much, but to-day they embraced each other silently - and in a way which I cannot explain this moved me so much that I would have loved to break into tears. But unfortunately a ghost cannot weep.

"Now,boys," said aunt Lisa," I cannot give you any story. There is none. He ate too much for dinner, he smoked a tremendous cigar which the doctor had forbidden and drank the blackest coffee you have ever seen. He just forgot that he was no longer a young man and had to be careful. And that is all. Don't ask me what his last words were. He just died..." And here she broke down. For the first time I saw her lose her self control and give way to unbearable grief. I stood beside her,and my hands - thin and airy like a whiff of cloud - stroked her dear old head and my lips brushed her forehead gently as I tried to look into her weeping eyes.It was as if she felt my presence: she was suddenly quiet and tried to smile. The photographers were busy catching her dear expression of dignity,catching her last half dried tears...

Bridget blew her pretty nose."She wasn't much of a help, was she," she remarked half humorously to the reporters when

aunt Lisa had left. "These Europeans never can understand the value of publicity. Funny - in her time she was really a first rate singer in Vienna. I checked up on that. Yet she seems quite incapable of catching on to our ways. Imagine telling you such a story! Ate too much, drank too much, smoked a cigar! I was there too. I saw it all. It was quite different. We had a lot of fun at dinner, he, aunt Lisa and I."

"What about that young and devastatingly beautiful woman?" someone asked. "Joan what's her name? Did you forget her? You are not the only one to check up on facts. She was there too. Perhaps too much excitement for the old boy?"

"Skip her," Bridget almost shouted. "Skip her for heaven's sake! You had better stick to that story about the dog. You know of course that Mr. Wilbrecht had found this precious poodle half dead on the street and took him home. Since that day they were inseparable. Now, when he died, this dog - put down his name: Cheri, behave amazingly. He scarcely looked at the body on the floor but stared upward with a very anxious concentrated expressing, wagging his tail violently. Then it was as though whatever he had seen disappeared because suddenly he let out a desolate howl and put his head down between his paws."

Bridget looked around with a triumphant expression. "Isn't that something? Can't you do something wonderful with that story?"

For a moment the reporters were quiet, then they all burst out laughing.

"Bridget, you're slipping," said Jimmy Smith of the "Times," "what an idiotic story! Don't tell us that good old Wilbrecht turned into an angel and floated away on golden wings. I feel a bit sick. Can't someone produce a highball?"

I must confess that I looked at Bridget with mingled respect and horror. She had invented a story which was actually true. I remember clearly that when Asrael took me away, my last impression was of the anxious eyes of Cheri which seemed to follow me with understanding and awe as I flew off into eternity. Bridget had made a publicity story out of the animal's sixth sense. Surprising and clever - and rather sad....

I saw that she was furious. With a violent gesture she opened her purse and started to powder her nose, a sure sign of inner turmoil.

"Jimmy, you have no imagination," she said with a flashing smile, "but you can believe me that this dog is in a state of absolute desperation. That at least you can see. We really fear for his life."

Roaring laughter interrupted her. Anna just coming in with a tray of highballs (understanding the need for alcohol even before it had been ordered) looked around indignantly but the reporters paid no attention to her reproachful glances. Charlie Thompson of the "Sun" said laughingly: "Bridget, you are priceless. First of all I know that this dog was not found starving in a street corner. Wilbrecht bought him from a pet shop for an incredible sum of money, and this tale of the soft hearted generosity of our great star is believed by nobody, at least not in this city. By the way

Cheri seems to love anyone who comes to this house, not only Wilbrecht, and I am sure would welcome any murderer who spoke to him kindly. So don't make my heart bleed with pity for that dog."

Bridget never gave up. She opened the door and in a rather impatient tone called Cheri.

I laughed - I laughed so loud that I thought everyone must hear me (needless to say, no one did) because it was just the very worst moment to call Cheri. In the hope of consoling him in his grief, Anna had given him a bone and he now appeared in the doorway radiant with it protruding from each side of his mouth.

It was a perfect climax: everyone became hysterical and Bridget had every reason to powder her nose. Her purse snapped shut with a vicious click. "Boys," she said in a stern voice, "if any of you dares to mention this bone, I will pursue you with my hatred to the end of my days. I leave it to you and your decency to build up this story as I have told it. And also don't mention anything aunt Lisa said; neither the heavy dinner, the cigar, or the coffee. Be good, boys, and keep up the legend of the noble, poetical soul!"

I knew that at least one of them would not be able to resist the story of the bone. It was much too good....

The mood of the crowd was now very gay, and knowing that nothing else would happen which could interest me I preferred to leave.

Where would I go now? To Joan! How strange that I should have to consider who was closest to my heart when she had been my mistress for the last year of my earthly existence.

There have been many women in my life but I have taken all

my experiences as pleasures to which I was entitled. The victories were so easy, they were as if brought to me on a silver platter from which I only had to choose...Love had always been a passionate fire of my senses - but I am afraid my heart was always cool and detached. I gave all that was good and real and noble to my art - all the deep feeling of my soul flowed through my voice - coming to life only in those few hours of creative abandon. On the stage love was fateful, was fatal and eternal. In life love was an enchanting play with a fire which seared me with the brilliant glow of fireworks, the passing savagery of flashing storm - raging through my being with the force of a hurricane - but leaving behind no destruction, only a clear and cloudless sky... In my later years the thunder had moderated to a distant rumble, the lightning to a tame and comfortable blaze which warmed me. And then I met Joan - I met her on the threshold of resigned old age. I clung with all my senses to this last flicker of fading passion. I am sure that I made myself ridiculous and not only aunt Lisa looked at me with subtle disgust even though it remained unspoken. Even Joan may have thought me absurd. It is quite probable. Noe/I might have the chance to find out what she really thought.

We entered her apartment and found her as I had supposed - in bed. As usual she was telephoning:

"I am quite sure that that beast Bridget Collier is behind it. Otherwise why should the press overlook the fact that I was with him when he died? I am absolutely boiling. It would have been such

good publicity for me. At last I had managed to meet his aunt. What a dreadful woman! Hard as nails. She looked at me as though I were his mistress. What did you say? O.k., of course I was - but what for I'd like to know. First he acted as though he liked my voice. He found it 'promising' and talked a lot about all he was going to do for me. The hell he did! I had thought: if not a career, at least a marriage; but I was barking up the wrong tree. Now just these last weeks he had seemed a little more receptive to my subtle suggestions and I really think he would have come around to marrying me eventually. Now he dies, damn it! And picture it, I just bought a red hat, very chic, I assure you: La Madeleine is the only place - hats like dreams, I tell you. I hoped to get him to pay for it, now I have to do it myself. What do you say? Yes, black is very becoming. Perhaps La Madeleine will exchange it for a black one. I'd better get at it first thing in the morning. Bye, darling, see you at the funeral!"

Well! That's that! Lovely maiden, I must say! And to think I almost - almost- married her....

For escaping such a fate it seems almost as though I had Asrael to thank. I threw him a loving glance. Nice to have a protecting angel. He certainly saved me a lot of trouble in this case..."See you at the funeral," she said. That's an idea. ~~Let's~~ go to the funeral! I need some distraction after the shock of my death, and what could be more amusing than watching one's own funeral?

In spite of Asrael's sad glances - he found me absolutely

unworthy of being a ghost - he flew with me to the cemetery. It was very gratifying to see the size of the crowd. Oh of course I realized that most of the people came just out of curiosity but it did my heart good to imagine that I had been so beloved. My dear public! They wanted to see the dead lion, see him as he lay in glory, look at the lips which had been the bridge for my singing, closed forever, and caress with a last kind thought, the empty shell of what once had been the great tenor. This tenor was now floating in space - far beyond their understanding.

Aunt Lisa! There **she** was! Pale and dignified as befitted the situation. At her side - I might have expected that - the publisher who had pestered her for the memoirs she had written about me, and would now pester her more than ever. As long as I am remebered ... The book must be published now!!!

I flew down as I wanted to hear what they were saying.

"No," said aunt Lisa, "no, I cannot do it. I half promised Reinhold that I would never publish it. How could I break my word to him? And please- please stop. Don't disturb me now, don't ask me now."

But how clever Mr. Foster was! He knew that this was just the right moment for him, a moment in which she was weak and confused.

"You know," he said soothingly and gently, "Reinhold was very mistaken in thinking that this book would do him harm. We both know that there is no truer or greater story of an artist than this which you have written. Publish it in his honor. You would be doing a wonderful thing to him."

"Perhaps," she sighed and bowed her head. "I will think it over, I promise, but now give me peace. Please!"

Dear old soul! I wished I might say to her: "Whatever you do is right. It always is. Your understanding love will never do anything wrong." But I could only stand beside her mute and invisible and my hands could only play with her long black veil as a gentle breeze which softly dried her tears....

For heaven's sake: I came here to be amused, not to get sentimental. It would be better to see what Bridget Collier is up to, something lively will be going on there, I am sure. It was. I saw her looking speculatively at my dear colleague and rival, Richard Warren ... Quite natural. I am dead - she does not have to consider me in doing publicity for the one man whom I had secretly feared these last few years. What should she? This funeral gives her a wonderful opportunity to get on with business.

She cleverly made her way to him through the crowd. He smiled faintly when he recognized her; he was a little embarrassed because in doing publicity for me she had known how to, subtly and scarcely recognizably, tear him down. For instance : Reinhold Wilbrecht is so interested in the young tenor Warren. He would like him to have a chance to sing Tristan - but the Met will not permit it. Warren is very talented. But he has a lot to learn - and the Met is not the place to develop artists for they must have stars at the top of their lists. Stars like Reinhold Wilbrecht."

I must say I never approved of this kind of thing but what could I do? Warren was a dark cloud in my life and if I could summon

the wind to blow him away, I would. Anybody would. At least I think so. I was no exception. I was just a tenor, sure of himself but very unsure of his position.

Bridget smiled sadly at the young tenor. "Such an unhappy occasion to meet you! But for a long time I have wanted to tell you how much I admire you both as an artist and as a person. Your courage in standing up against so much intrigue - how wonderful you have been. The world thinks well of you, someday it will be at your feet."

Warren looked extremely uncomfortable.

"But that time is a long way off for me, isn't it? Haven't you said so whenever you mentioned my name, Miss Collier? I wonder why you talk so differently to-day?"

"Idiot", thought Bridget; I knew that was what she was thinking but she smiled sweetly.

"But don't you understand? I am so touched by seeing you here as a mourning friend, that I have changed my mind. Please go nearer to the coffin and bend over it, won't you? I assure you this is just what the world expects from you: to see you paying homage to Wilbrecht. So - that's fine!" And with a nod to the photographers: "Quick, boys, get that shot! Now turn your head a little to the side, you have a good profile. That's it. Thank you. This picture will make the morning papers: the young Tristan mourning at the coffin of the old lion. Good, don't you think so?" Warren - I must say this in his honor - did not like this at all. He was a straightforward nice fellow who had not as yet the faintest notion what it means to be caught in the clutches of publicity. He blushed deeply and wanted to protest but he had not counted on Bridget's energy.

"Call me tomorrow at 11 sharp" ,she smiled at him, and I knew he would and also knew that she would get her contract shortly after that....

Sitting down on my coffin I looked around with pleasure. What a pity that I could not materialize just for this moment! Wouldn't that have been a sensation for the morning papers to show Wilbrecht sitting on his own coffin, in a happy mood? There is no real fun on earth...

Director Jones did not seem to be enjoying himself either. He tried to yawn inconspicuously and looked at his watch. I wondered what he was saying under his breath to one of the seven directors - they were all there - and flew nearer.

"...at 10 o'clock for Tristan. I must say that I look forward tremendously to hearing this new one in this role. To be sure Wilbrecht was quite remarkable yet, but that's it: yet...He was an old story. Let's be honest. We knew every gesture, every detail. Now this new one will bring fresh new life and we..."

I did not want to hear any more. I felt a little sick and looked around for Asrael. There he was - floating through the light silvery air of the radiant day, high above a beautiful dark pine tree. It was very strange: he seemed the only one who was really alive amidst them all...I had suddenly a great longing to go to him and fly away from this earth - upward to where the brilliant stars swing in their eternal rhythm.

Someone touched my arm very shyly. Turning I saw a strange figure: obviously a ghost - to be sure he was a ghost just as I ... Thin air, just nothing at all and yet a form. How uncanny! I did not like this. I was always horrified by ghosts - and here was one, clear

in the daylight- and he was not identical with me? I shuddered.

"In heaven's name, who are you?" I was not too friendly.

The ghost made a deep bow before me.

"My name is Fabian. I am your neighbor - in the next grave.

Very honored that your famous bones will rest beside me. You are famous, aren't you? This is the nicest funeral I have ever seen here. So much excitement! I went to the office and listened when they talked about you. Dear, dear! You are so famous. A great singer they said. I am so glad. I always wanted to meet an artist and now you will lie here beside me. Isn't it exciting?"

"I don't think so," I said. "I don't see anything exciting about it. What have we to do with these miserable bones? They are not our real selves. I don't intend to remain here a moment longer."

Fabian fluttered about me in anxious little circles.

"Oh please do!" he pleaded, "please don't go away! I am so lonely. Even my protecting angel left me, he almost had a nervous breakdown because he could not persuade me to leave this cemetery. For twenty years now I have been quite alone. Nobody wants to stay here. But you see: I always liked to stay just where I was. It is so cozy. I never liked this endless running around which everyone else seems to enjoy. I like to be comfortable. And I am here. It is just lovely in this cemetery, so green and quiet and everyday there is at least one newcomer. That makes it so exciting. One meets the strangest people - people whom I would have never met on earth because I was just a simple shoemaker. You know - the kind who repairs shoes. But you can believe me, I was good. If ever you have trouble

with your feet in eternity - please let me know. I can fix you up. And your angel! Oh what lovely feet! I would like to make shoes for him. Would you please tell him. I need recommendations. One cannot get ahead without the recommendation of an important person. That's another reason why I stay here; we even had a Senator buried here some years ago. Such a fine man. He wore marvellous shoes in his coffin. But it's a shame they all go right away. All of them. I hoped you would stay...Please!"

He was utterly ridiculous but rather disarming in his eagerness.

"You could make shoes for both of us," I said with a twinkle , "we will need them very much as we intend to go around a great deal. Shoes would be just the right thing for us,wouldn't they,Asrael?"

Asrael had no use for my jokes.He looked bored and impatient. Perhaps this fellow here would appreciate a little gaiety. One cannot always be serious and dignified. I would not like that at all. So perhaps he would be the right companion for me ; he should come along for a while. I was sure I could persuade him to follow us. "I'll bet that you don't know a thing about this earth of ours; how about coming with us to Paris? Vienna? London? Rome? The North Pole? Tibet? Wherever we feel an urge to go. Come with us!"

Fabian trembled. "Could I?"he asked humbly."Could I go with such a famous man as you? And - to Hollywood?"

To Hollywood!

Even such a simple man as this wants to get into the movies. I was delighted and asked Asrael to take him along.

I must admit that I burdened Asrael with quite some responsibility

He did not know what to do. This was really not his affair at all. We should at least ask the permission of Fabian's protecting angel... Asrael formed his hand like a trumpet before his golden mouth and uttered a long and weird tone, and behold! - there descended from the sky another angel, very much like Asrael. But I liked my angel better. I don't know why, but perhaps it was because he looked more sophisticated, more accustomed to going around. Marius, Fabian's angel, seemed a bit small-townish, but he was also very nice and lovable, just not quite what I used to prefer and continued to prefer in eternity...

The two angels whispered together and looked worried.

"What are we waiting for? Let's go!" I called impatiently.

Asrael turned his beautiful face toward me. "So be it," he said with a trace of a smile.

One really could lose one's patience watching Fabian's ceremonious departure. He looked around with a confused expression as though he had to consider how many suitcases he should take with him... As he slowly ascended he kept throwing affectionate glances down on his grave so that I thought at any moment that he would turn and go back...

I myself had practically lost all interest in my funeral. They sang a hymn at the open grave and everyone seemed to make a great fuss as my body was lowered into the earth. Good aunt Lisa! May she be consoled! I loved her as a real son. I shall see her again in heaven - or will I? After all everything may be true: God with a long white beard ..waiting there to judge me for my sins. I felt rather uneasy... This was not exactly a pleasant thought!

"How is that,Asrael, is it all true? Do I have to go to heaven and meet God and have him judge my sins? I hope not, oh God, I hope not..."

Asrael's face was a white blur before me. Only two stars seemed to shine where I knew his eyes must be.

But he did not answer.

I looked down and forgot all about the final judgment,because there was Hollywood right at our feet.

II.

Hollywood

A strange town, by Jove, a strange town!

When I had come to Hollywood in my early days I had always rather liked it. Its houses painted green or blue or pink as in a child's picturebook, with the luxurious palms, the feathery pepper trees. The "unusual climate" - which means that one never knows what will happen next ...Will the sun burn fiercely and suffocatingly or will a thick fog cover everything? At the moment the city was smothered in fog mixed with the fumes of chemical factories - they call it "smog." It stings the eyes and burns the tongue. It is just the usual unusual climate.

Fabian was beside himself.

He loved the crazy houses which looked as if they would all blow down in the next wind. Houses hanging over abysses, the walls blinking with glass and steel, violent red flowers seeming to burst from nowhere - blue swimming pools between stones, and blossom covered walls. It looked unreal as always - and Fabian just loved it.

"Where are the movie stars?" He asked in a ringing voice and his eyes sent rays of sparkling fire at Asrael and me." I want to see Greer Garson and Betty Grable , and Esther Williams. Perhaps we can see her swim?There are so many pools - see if she is in one of them. And where is Bing Crosby? I want to see them all....!"

He was quite demanding and had lost all his shyness. One can

see what Hollywood does to a person - even to a harmless little shoemaker, quite dead.

"Don't tell me you want to be a movie star!" I said with amazement and he just replied, "Why not?"

He was quite right - why not?

We must find the right manager and interest a producer. I don't really know how one does that, and Asrael looked at a loss when I asked him. Good old Asrael! He certainly is not modern enough. Old school, I suppose. Then I had an idea: we just went down to one of the renowned movie studios, Non Sense Inc., and slid into the salon (or whatever you call it) of one of the great producers. His name was Peppertree. Very famous, very important. Just the right man for us. We sat around but being ghosts that did not help us much. But fortunately Asrael knew how to handle the situation.

"Look, Fabian," he said, "you were granted some time - your angel told me that you might have an adventure before he came back for you. You have the choice: do you want to go to all the big cities Reinhold told you about? Or, for a short time, do you want to be a movie star? For a very short time, please," he added, with a desperate smile.

Fabian answered so quickly there was not even time to count three: "A movie star. I want to be a movie star!"

So that settled it. But how?

"You may materialize," Asrael assented graciously.

Out he came from the fog and smog and there he sat - Mr. Johnny Fabian, from Idaho, looking quite alive, but - I do not know how to say it - a little unreal and gleaming with a kind of green light. It

disturbed me and I was afraid for him, but Asrael whispered in my ear:"They will like that, I am sure he will make a career."

In came Mr.Peppertree.

He entered with short energetic steps and one could see quite plainly how important he felt,Napoleon in miniature. I even looked to see if he was wearing the well known tricorn but to my surprise he was not. However, Hollywood is just the place for surprises.

He threw a dark glance at Fabian.

"Who are you?"he said, and then immediately forgot that he had asked such an unimportant question. He looked closely at Fabian and I saw that he seemed amazed. "Why are you so green?"he asked and Fabian answered very humbly:"I am really dead,Mr.Peppertree. I am a ghost.I am sorry."

"You don't have to be sorry. We need you. You are a great artist I am sure. At least I can make you one. Take some lessons from our famous coach; he will coach you until you won't know your own name anymore. What's your name? Never mind, we will give you a new one. I will send you the script.Where are you staying? Which hotel? You may have some interviews to-morrow. I will send our publicity manager to you. Can you sing? NO? Then you shall have a part in my latest great Musical. That's fine. That's wonderful. You are just what I need."

Fabian looked quite dazed,.The idea that he would have to sing made him quite uneasy.

"But I assure you I cannot sing," he insisted with all the emphasis he could produce."I never thought a movie actor would have to do something which he just does not understand. I don't

know how to sing. I was really a shoemaker - and there is an old saying: shoemaker, stick to your job! That's what I want to do now. Please let me make shoes for the stars, I would like that. The main thing is to meet them. I always wanted to meet artists. You have nice feet too. I could do something fine for you. But I cannot sing.."

Peppertree laughed - a hearty and encouraging laugh.

"That does not matter at all," he said. We always do things like that: if we engage a singer then he or she plays the role of a deafmute and if we engage a dancer she must skate and a skater must swim. And a shoemaker has to sing - you see that, don't you? It is our way of making the most sensational movies in the world. At least 80 million people in the United States love our movies, not to mention the aborigines in countries which you have probably never heard of. But these people are our best and most understanding public. They will love you. You are so wonderfully green."

Peppertree was right: green he was. And that's something, isn't it? Peppertree summoned a guide or whatever the man was who stood looking at Fabian with a harrassed expression.

"This is Mr. What's-his-name", Peppertree told him, "build him up. The story must be re-written, you know: "Kisses in the Dark." Call it perhaps "The Green Corpse" or something like that. This Mr. What's-his-name shall have the star part. He sings. He sings," he repeated with a dirty look at Fabian who was about to protest; "call someone for singing lessons. It would also be a good idea if he dances a bit with this new child star, Lucinda Protopeck. By the way, change her name. That's impossible. Protopeck. Change it. Now take him along. To-morrow is the test. Arrange everything."

He made a gesture with his hand which meant:"Get out of here now," and we departed. When poor little Fabian closed the door we heard Peppertree at the telephone calling the publicity department.

Fabian sank against the wall; he had never looked as green as he did now. "I can't do that," he said with desperation,"believe me: I cannot sing. I am quite sure I cannot act. I thought I wanted to be a movie star but I never imagined it could be so complicated.Please get me out of this!"

But the sad looking man took him by the wrists and dragged him down the long marble hall whispering:"Just forget about it, see? You'll be surprised when you wake up in the morning and find you are world famous. They do it just like that. Never mind whether you can sing or not. Who cares? By the way, you look so green. What's the matter with you? Are you sick?"

"No," said Fabian."I am dead." We saw immediately that no one would ever believe it.

"We should play up that gag.That will be quite a stunt! You're not as dumb as you look.You'll do!"

A strange and exciting time now began for Fabian and with him for me too. I cannot say that Asrael enjoyed any of it, but as I did say before,he had no humor. (And how can anyone bear Hollywood who has not a sense of humor?)

N.S.arranged for a room in the big Beverly Hills Hotel, and Fabian even forgot to ask what it would cost, he was so dazed. In any case,somebody would have to pay for him,and this somebody being N.S.,made him feel quite confident.

N.S. sent all the reporters to interview him. Before they arrived

their publicity man attempted to instruct Fabian as to what he should say to them. But by this time Fabian had quite understood that he was something of a sensation and said with a quiet dignity which made me laugh uproariously: "I know exactly what you want. I just have to say the truth and I will be the greatest sensation ever. Nobody will ever really believe the actual truth - that I am a ghost. Or do you?"

Mack, the publicity man just smiled and said: "Perhaps you are right. You seem to be quite clever. Tell them what you have cooked up in your own mind. Maybe it will be original. Go ahead then. But if I cough, please stop, that will be the sign that you are overdoing it. Understand?"

When the reporters arrived they all looked amazed and said: "You look funny - what's the matter with you?"

The pencils ran like mad when Fabian answered their questions; he said the truth. He told them that they were not alone in the room: that his companions whom he had met at the cemetery were right there with him, and he was glad that they were. One is an angel and the other the famous tenor Reinhold Wilbrecht. The reporters looked at each other and Mack coughed. But Fabian continued to tell them that he had been dead for twenty years, that he had been a shoemaker and that they now wanted him to sing and dance which seemed to him utterly ridiculous. But that he would try to do everything they asked of him because since he is dead anyway what could happen to him? If he cannot do what they want him to do he can just dissolve.

"Can't I?" he asked Asrael who seemed lost in a state of complete boredom.

Mack coughed.

The reporters did not know what to say at this point.

"That's a tough one," they finally agreed and started to photograph Fabian, hoping that they might be able to catch some of that green effect.

"Play up his color, boys," said Mack. "God knows how he does it, but I never saw anything that green in my whole life. He'll be marvellous in Technicolor."

"How was his test?" they asked and Mack assured them that it was wonderful, just wonderful. This was of course a lie since he had not had any test as yet. Fabian told them that and Mack had a bad fit of choking. The reporters roared with laughter and their pencils flew over the pads.

These should really be wonderful interviews. Fabian could not have done better if he had been trained for years. Imagine just telling the simple truth! No one had ever had such a bright idea.

Before the test Fabian was sent to the coach. He was a young man with flaming red hair which looked rather suspicious to me. His tie was flamboyantly colorful with tiny little lambs against a background of poisonously yellow meadows. His shirt, open at the neck in spite of the tie, was of satin printed with flowers. What an outfit to work in! He looked at Fabian with wrinkled brow.

"You are the one who says he is dead?" he asked in a hoarse voice. Perhaps he had to shout the whole day, trying to make actors out of people like Fabian....

"What gives you that weird color?"

Poor Fabian, he had to repeat his story. But Putzi, the coach, was much too impatient to listen. "I know, I know," he said crossly, "this is quite a new stunt. Very good. You will be a sensation. Now let's see what you can do. Here read these lines from 'The Green Corpse.'"

Fabian, poor devil, took the script. He tried to read, but stopped almost immediately rather dazed. "But this is nonsense. This does not mean anything. Or do I just not understand? Look, Asrael" - he really trembled a little - "can you make any sense out of this? I can't. How can I read it when I don't understand it?"

Putzi was definitely annoyed.

"Since when does one have to make sense out of a movie script, I ask you!" he said, passing his hand nervously through his glowing hair. "Just go ahead, we'll tell you later what it is all about. You just go on."

"This is meant to be a song," said Fabian timidly, "what shall I do now? I told you I cannot sing."

"Oh yes you can. It's in your contract, sweetie pie. You just sing. We fix that afterwards. We'll skip it now and you just go on reading your lines."

They did finally make him sing. It was not quite as bad as I had thought it would be. On the contrary: the microphone did wonders, and I was quite amazed at how alluring and voluminous his tiny voice sounded on the record. They really do incredible things. I understood better now, and started to be quite proud of little Fabian, our new movie star.

The newspapers all carried weird stories about him. The

photographs showed a kind of sheen around his body - and there was a color photograph which was the greatest sensation yet in this town of sensational happenings: his green color seemed to radiate all through him - and he looked enchantingly uncanny. This was all very helpful for his career.

However life in the movies is never easy, quite the contrary, and I had the impression that Fabian very soon regretted having unwittingly thrown himself into this grinding mill of publicity and false glamor. However he had made up his mind to stick it out. He said stubbornly: "I brought this on myself and I must go through with it. At least you must admit there is never a dull moment..."

There wasn't. The early morning started off with excitement. First he had to go to the makeup man, Jim, our special friend. It was very amusing to start the day with him as he had a wonderful sense of humor and was the only one who realized that Fabian was not a fake. Nevertheless he wasn't the least surprised by having to make up a ghost, a real one.

"Nothing surprises me any more," he said, only turning a little pale when he discovered that Fabian was really dead. "But it may be a little difficult to make you up decently. See? The makeup won't stick to your skin. In my opinion you are green enough - but what is my opinion? Mr. Peppertree thinks we should build up the green tone until it blinds the eyes. I don't know how to do it. How about you helping me? Perhaps if you start to perspire you'll get greener."

"Don't you worry," said Fabian - and I was surprised that he had so much wit, "I'll perspire when I read the script... It's too difficult to act if one doesn't understand what it is all about."

"Understand!" laughed Jim. "That isn't necessary at all. No one ever does. That's the reason that N.S. movies are so good."

The hairdresser shook his head sadly when he saw the thin and stringy hair of our good friend. He covered it with a lot of sticky stuff and soon curl after curl decked Fabian's brow. He seemed embarrassed when he realized how pretty they had made him. He looked unhappily into the mirror turning his head from side to side.

"Don't do that!" cried the hairdresser, "don't move. There must not be a hair out of place, that is our main purpose. See? That's why the movies are so good. No stray hair. No, sir. Everything smooth."

Fabian was forced to drive in a big Cadillac from the hairdresser's to the set, even though there were only a few feet apart. But it seemed that a hair might go astray and no one could take such a chance; so in spite of Fabian's protests he was pushed into the car and sank back exhausted on the soft cushions. In stepping out of the car he had the misfortune to knock his head against the door with the result that one curl, one strangely revolutionary curl, stole out from the grease and dangled over his green nose...

No one could imagine how furious the director was! And all the assistant directors. It was a dreadful and unheard of crime. Poor Fabian was quite intimidated and stammered in his attempts to excuse himself. He wanted to put the stubborn strand of hair in order but his green gloves were very much in the way- so he shyly asked a wardrobe girl if she would push the hair under his green cap. The girl looked at him as though he had lost his mind.

"Mr. Greeny, I am here for the wardrobe. I am not allowed to

touch your hair. What an idea! You will have to call the hairdresser."

"But I don't need a hairdresser," Fabian answered desperately, "I just ask you as a favor to push this one bit of hair under my cap. It's such a small thing. Why don't you do it?"

Everyone gasped. The girl even broke into tears of humiliation.

"I am the wardrobe girl," she cried, "Who do you think you are? The Union would never allow such a thing. Never! No one has ever dared to ask me before to break so obviously the rules of the holy union. Shame on you."

"Shame on you, shame on you," everyone murmured. "The Union will never allow this."

So Fabian took off his gloves and started to arrange his hair himself. Apparently that was just as bad and not to be permitted. The Union would not stand for it. The hairdresser alone could touch his hair and everything must wait until he arrived. At last the hair was in order and work could proceed.

Fabian was then very much amazed to find that the scene for which his hair must be so perfectly in order was an under water scene.

Except for being a little frightened he was so delighted to have a scene with Betty Eaton that his eyes shone like stars. He said quite boldly to the first assistant director: "Relax ! My hair certainly doesn't have to be perfect now. Coming out of the water I cannot imagine that hair would look as though it had just been done by a hairdresser; it should look natural, shouldn't it?"

Everyone stared at him, even the cameraman who never paid the slightest attention to anyone, turned his head and put on his glasses to get a better look at this man who had the fantastic notion that he should look natural.

The assistant director was breathing very hard. He looked at the director; but he was lying in a dead faint. So the assistant had to cope with this incredible remark.

"Look, Greeny," he said, his voice trembling, "we do entertainment for the public. See? The public wants glamor. They like curls; they like something exciting. If you're natural you're not exciting. See that, Smarty? So you have to have curls. And if you do a scene where you hang in a snowstorm upside down for twenty four hours from a rock over the Atlantic Ocean - you still have curls."

He wanted to go on but Peppertree interrupted him. He had come in for one of his short and noisy visits and had listened to the conversation with amusement but a kind of artistic horror. Horror, that there should be anybody in one of his productions who wanted to look - of all things - natural!

"What did you say about that scene hanging over the Atlantic? Sounds good to me. We could put that in. Let the ocean into the pool and put some large boulders around it. Get me the writer - what's his name. Get him!"

"Here he is" said a deep and melancholic voice, "here I am. I expected you to tell me that I should rewrite the story. Look, some moments ago I would have done it. Now I don't. For the first time in all my years here as a writer I've heard someone say a true word. Look at that green fellow. He said that one should look natural. One should - that is the amazing truth! I had really almost forgotten that. No, no, let me talk" he said with much energy, very much for one

connected so long with movies - "I have to say what I want to say. You wanted something outstanding this time. You want it each time I write a story. But I tried again. I wrote a Greek tragedy. You did not find it funny enough so I rewrote it and it was a modern comedy. You wanted romance - so it turned into one of your famous musicals God forbid. Then this fellow came along - something new with his green aura, so I had to rewrite the whole thing and make it a mystery story. That was not enough: it must have a real drawing card - for instance a swimming star; so in came Betty Eaton with a lovely blue lake and water lilies with little rhinestones in the center...God how cute! Now you want it rewritten again as a drama on the waterfront with our dangerous ocean in the courtyard and rocks and manmade hurricanes and beautiful curls and a shipwreck, I suppose. No, sir. I'm through. I don't do it." Peppertree was quite honestly shocked. So much so, that he even remembered the famous writer's name.

"Look, Mr. Matson," he said to Tom Matson who was looking at him with an expression of utter despair, "what do you really want? You get a tremendous fee but do you want a raise? Don't be silly enough not to ask for one if you are dissatisfied. I promise you a substantial increase but don't leave me suddenly in the lurch."

"Leave you in the lurch! Don't make me laugh because I have forgotten how one does that...What does it matter who writes your stupid stories? Anyone can do that - even better than I because unfortunately I am a real writer. A raise! What good would a raise do me? Would it give me back my self respect? Would it even really help financially? We all live beyond our income no matter what we

earn - how can we help it with taxes what they are and all the unavoidable expenses. A raise! You should know better. I have been here for seven years. For seven years I have sold my brain, my peace, my soul. And what do I have to show for it? A house in Beverly Hills, a swimming pool and a stray dog which turns out to be pregnant. Do you want a nice mongrel pup? You can have one. That's all I have to leave the world when I die. And that's what I am going to do now. Goodbye, Mr. Peppertree. I hope not to meet you in hell."

From his trouser pocket he pulled out a gun and bang! That was that...

I have never seen a spirit get away as fast as his did. He did not even greet us but just flew away with tremendous leaps. One only felt his eagerness to be rid of this world....

Nobody seemed at all excited about his suicide. Peppertree said absentmindedly: "Take this fool away, I don't know what he wanted, he got four thousand a week. What more could he want? We could have given him a raise. Now we'll have to have someone else step in. How annoying to have to go all over it again." He looked thoughtful for a moment and then said: "By the way, where is Mack? Tell him to play up this suicide. Very good publicity for Greeny. Writer shoots himself because Greeny wants to look natural. That's excellent. We should have some more interviews."

He was quite happy, and seeing great possibilities for him he looked at Fabian with an almost affectionate smile...

It was a pity that Fabian's contract had been signed before all this happened. They had him now comparatively cheaply - only five thousand a week - a ridiculous fee for an artist like him! Now he could

have demanded a fortune, a fortune really worthy of him.

But what for?

He was dead anyway and could not have used the money for himself. I wondered what would happen to him at the end of his movie career.

As a matter of fact: he never finished the movie. It was perhaps the only wrong he ever committed, but he went back on his contract and just ran away.

The trouble was that Mack tried to bring some romance into the stories of Fabian, the new star; and he was absolutely horrified by this idea.

"Silly, you don't have to do a thing," said Mack nervously, "you just go out with one of the gals here and they'll photograph you at Ciro's or somewhere. Just look as if you were in love with her."

Fabian was strongly opposed to any such thing.

"No woman will like me, I'm much too green," he said stubbornly.

"You leave that to me."

Mack was right.

Why not leave the love interest problem to him too. N.S. would certainly supply him with some lovely virginal maiden who would be willing to pose beside the embarrassed Fabian. This idea didn't amuse him as it did me, and when we three were sitting together in his bedroom that night, he said almost fiercely: "They can't make me do everything they want to. I have my dignity. My wife may look down from heaven and see me making love to a young girl. She wouldn't like that. When I meet her in eternity I don't want her to have anything to reproach me for. I just don't do it."

We tried in vain to persuade him. Even Asrael thought he was silly

not to do it."Look," he said, " you wanted to be a movie star. Now you are, and you have to do what they tell you - even marry someone. You just separate later on. It's all very conveniently arranged. Don't be afraid. I'll be at your side when you meet your wife in heaven. I'm sure she understands."

Fabian didn't answer. But I found his silence rather suspicious.

The next night we went to a well known nightclub - Fabian looking very impressive in a new green suit - his skin shining with an uncanny green gleam and his eyes so green that it was thrilling to look at him. Everyone did. I looked and gasped: the beautiful blonde beside him (who is not a beautiful blonde in Hollywood?) was Joan - Joan, believe it or not! What a meeting! So here she was, her dream fulfilled. She looked somehow different. Her honey colored hair had become rather unconvincingly lemon yellow. Her face was a mask of heavy make-up - in any case a beautiful mask...

She gave Fabian a flashing smile with what seemed at least a hundred and fifty teeth(which reminded me of Bridget) and whispered:"Don't look so bored. You love me, see? That's the idea. It's important. We're both newcomers here. We need a lot of publicity. The public likes romance. Romance it shall be with us. For heaven's sake look at me with dreamy eyes. I must get that part in "The Devil's own Bride", and I never will unless I can convince them that I have a lot of sex appeal. My God, to try that out on you is a cute idea! I hope I can manage not to yawn...Can't you try to be a little more alive? You really look as if you were dead.How do you do it?"

"But I am," he said quite desperately, "I am. Nobody will believe

it, but I have been dead for twenty years - and this is all ridiculous. I can't make love to you. I wouldn't even know how. I've forgotten all that."

"Look, sweetheart," she whispered, "Don't hand me this story. Put your arms around me and look into my eyes with as much fire as you can fake. But don't look scared. I'm not poisonous. On the contrary: I'm the latest bombshell at N.S., and don't ruin this nice story about me by behaving as if I were poison to you."

With this she leaned her romantic yellow head against his shoulder - and even Fabian's green paled a little. He pushed her away, got up and shouted to Asrael who was sitting with me in a far corner, watching the whole performance with anxiety: "Take me away, Asrael, please take me away!" Asrael looked troubled only for a moment. Then he formed his golden hands as a trumpet - and out of the smoke emerged Marius, Fabian's angel. He flew right to the table where the anguished little shoemaker was sitting. He touched his green eyes - and suddenly his place was empty... The bombshell fainted with a shriek - that was the last we saw of the night club. Everyone shouted and ran around wildly - but we flew straight upward, away from Hollywood and all its glamor - up into the blue of a star-studded sky - far away from all the famous stars, from publicity, and from a great and sensational career...

All was quiet around us - and Fabian said almost in tears: "I've had enough. I want to go away. I want to enter heaven or hell - but never again Hollywood!"

III.

Tenor Versus Whale

Fabian flew with such speed that we could scarcely keep up with him. He gave the impression of being quite drunk, poor old soul. He swayed so from side to side that I was quite worried. Asmael called several times: "Be careful, Fabian," but he might as well have saved his breath. Fabian neither heard nor saw.

Spreading his wings Asrael overtook him and started to lead the way.

We were suddenly high above Mount Everest - and that did not seem at all astonishing. It was just as if one were to fly from Los Angeles to lovely Santa Barbara, though it seemed to take even less time. We soared down upon the highest peak and sat there resting amidst the snow and ice - in solitude and perfect silence. After a while Fabian said: "Thank you, Asrael. This is just what I needed - clear mountain air and clean white snow. Thank you."

We were silent again.

When Asrael glanced upward with a searching expression I knew he was looking for Marius, Fabian's guardian angel. This seemed rather lacking in consideration: poor Fabian had just been through such a disappointing experience - it seemed to me that he should have a little fun so that his last impression of the earth would not be quite so harrowing. When I said this to Asrael he looked rather startled.

"You may be right," he said thoughtfully. "Perhaps it would be better to let him have another happier experience before he is delivered to his angel."

There was a deep silence.

" I have a marvellous idea," I said suddenly to Asrael and Fabian, and both looked rather alarmed -"We should go through the earth, I mean: through the center of the earth. You said,didn't you,Asrael? - that we could go wherever we wanted to,now? All right - I think Fabian would like very much to pass through the center of the earth,beginning with the depth of the ocean. How do you like that?"

"I don't," said Asrael sadly. "I don't at all. Of course we could do it. But in order to pass through fiery stones your astral body has to take the form of a sieve and it isn't pleasant to be split into thousands of little pieces, just to go through the globe."

He could not discourage me. I suspect that he only made this whole process of being split into pieces seem unpleasant in order to make me give up the idea. But he underestimated my lust for adventure.

"What a delightful idea," I exclaimed. "Since I am dead already, nothing can really happen to me. Why shouldn't we be split into pieces? I am rather looking forward to this novel experience..."

In spite of Asrael's and Fabian's weak protests I started to fly toward an ocean - so what could they do but follow me?

Asrael seemed to be a little breathless when we sank through the quiet blue water of the Pacific Ocean somewhere off the California Coast. He was obviously angry and for the first time seemed rather unfriendly to me.

"I don't like this silly adventure," he said in a determined voice. "I can't let this go on any longer. You don't become a spirit to indulge in immature and unworthy behavior. After we have gone through this stupid phase here, I must go to Heaven and tell the Authorities about

you. I am sorry, I have no choice, I must make my report. Nothing like this has ever happened to me before. I might have known that there would be trouble when I was sent to be the guardian angel of an Artist! For a while it was quite charming but I don't find it so any longer. Make the most of this adventure, Reinhold, for there won't be any more."

I laughed. This took me back to my human days. How often good old aunt Lisa had scolded me for behaving like a silly boy and in a way "unworthy of my position..." I liked that. I felt very much at home with Asrael when he seemed to worry about me. And after all, the poor fellow had no feeling for adventure.

But Fabian was shocked. He felt, I suppose, that Asrael was quite right and would leave us after this last experience. On the whole, while I rather liked him, I would not miss him too much. He was really rather dull - quite average and while he did not say much, he did not seem to have any ideas at all.

"Relax, Asrael," I said heartlessly, "do as you please. If you go back to Heaven nothing would interest me more than going with you."

He turned toward me with astonishment.

"How could you imagine that you could go there with me? You would have to wait at the gate. You are not worthy yet - and God alone knows whether you ever will be," he added with a sigh.

But I did not pay any attention to Asrael. I was far more interested in our way down. We were in the lowest depths of the ocean now - and around us was an uncanny darkness lightened only by the radiance of Asrael's eyes. Strange fish swam silently about, watching us with

large protruding eyes and following us in a long silver train. On the bottom of the ocean lay a big ship. One of the passenger boats which go from continent to continent, like floating hotels, with all the luxury civilization can afford. It seemed to be a tremendous ship. Perhaps the "Titanic."

Fabian and Asrael and I sat in its big saloon. It was no longer a nice place and rather uncanny even for ghosts.

I seemed to be the least sensitive, I whistled an old sea chanty and a lot of fish came and directed their little lanterns at us. All the fish at the bottom of the sea have lanterns at the tip of their flat noses. They apparently liked my singing because they seemed quite excited and waved their fins and put their heads together. And - believe it or not! - they talked. By Jove, they really talked. I had always thought that fish were mute. What a mistake! They had very low deep voices, perhaps because they lived so deep under the water...I was curious as to whether they could sing(if so, they would certainly be deep basses) - so I sang again myself just to inspire them. They listened as though they were paralyzed.

How I would have loved to know whether they liked it! But something happened which put an end to my singing so I will never find out whether they were an enthusiastic public or just plain dumb: the body of a big whale suddenly descended with tremendous commotion. My fascinating presence was just nothing in comparison to this repulsive dead fish. They all left me to hurl themselves at the evil-smelling body, digging into the fat flesh with hungry jaws. We departed disgusted. It angered me to feel that I could not hold their interest. What a situation! Singer versus dead whale. This was at least something

new in competition...

I had now lost interest in the depths of the ocean, so we went deeper toward the center of the globe. We had to go through stone hot like fire, and just as Asrael had told us, our astral bodies slipped through the rocks as through a sieve, split into thousands of pieces. It did not hurt, how could it? But it was not a pleasant sensation and I was glad to be one piece again when we reached the center. It was a rather small pool of lava. We swam a bit in the molten boiling liquid, quite happy to get some exercise again. But when we ascended I must say that I preferred the beautiful forests of coral, the glowing sea anemones, the little seahorses. And very near the surface the swarms of flying fish fluttering about nervously, shrieking with tiny shrill voices as if insane.

We sat under huge palm trees, and Fabian looked upwards with an expression of strange rapture. Suddenly he raised his thin transparent arms in a gesture which seemed almost theatrical- it gave me quite a pang - as if we were on a big stage and I were seeing a lovely performance.

A silvercolored gull came out of the blue, soaring in a wide circle above our heads. Slowly the gull descended, the wings broadening, and Marius, Fabian's angel, floated above us. His eyes were very radiant, his long beautiful hands stretched out toward Fabian who, with a happy sigh, flew up to the white creature of the heavens.

Fabian was so overcome he even forgot to say Goodbye - he just grasped Marius' hand and up they soared in a lovely sweep.

Strangely glowing circles of light appeared in the sky -they

seemed to lead straight into the sun. There they flew - and soon were consumed by the silvery ether, becoming one with the morning's blue mist.

We sat for a long time in silence.

Asrael looked sad and rather lonely - I felt sorry for him without really knowing why.

He turned his beautiful head toward me: "Reinhold, don't you see that you are wasting your time? Fabian, that simple little soul, understands so much better than you do. Must you continue this mad flight through space? Won't you return with me to the last haven?"

But I was stubborn. My mind could not yet appreciate the real joy of being freed from human existence. I was sorry to disappoint my lovely companion, but I wanted the boundless pleasure of seeing the whole universe in all its immensity. So I shook my head and said with determination: "You said that you had to go to heaven. I will go with you as far as I am allowed to."

Asrael spread his wings with an impatient gesture and flew even more quickly than usual, up toward the sun.

* * * * *

Heat and light, glorious and glowing, engulfed us. From out of the rosy clouds appeared a tremendous door, and I realized immediately: this is the gateway to heaven. So near us! Only a moment's flight. How strange! But perhaps the door to heaven is always near us and we just cannot see it. We only have to believe it is there and its golden portals will swing open...

A tall angel stood in the door, his eyes, as he looked at me, like balls of fire. His face had a stern and terrible beauty, a beauty which seemed to force me to my knees - but I just stood there and tried

not to show my fear.

"Asrael," he said in a deep resounding voice, "what is this human soul doing at the gate of heaven? He is not ready yet. He must go away." My boldness had embarrassed Asrael deeply. It was certainly not pleasant for him to be the guardian angel of anyone so wild and disobedient.

"Wait for me," he said with as much severity as he could summon - poor darling. I sat down - quite far from the shimmering steps which led straight into heaven.

A long row of souls was waiting to be admitted. At first I had not noticed the long swaying grey cloud which seemed to stretch from out of nowhere right up to the very doorstep. As my eyes grew accustomed to the light I saw the cloud more clearly. Forms and faces were swinging slowly to the rythm of a strange song whispered almost inaudibly. It was very weird , almost frightening. All the faces seemed totally unaware of their surroundings. With blind expressions they all gazed forward - their slowly swaying forms directed toward their one and only goal.

Two angels, lovely little cherubs with rosy cheeks and golden locks, ran back and forth keeping them in a straight line - God knows why! They were not very successful because the souls in their exaltation swung from side to side. The little cherubs were very busy, and it made me quite boil to see how overworked they were. When one ran past me quite breathlessly, I grasped his little silver wing and drew him toward me. He was so amazed by my strange behavior that he did not say a word, only looking at me with startked eyes - eyes as blue as the sky above the ocean - at home, on the earth....

"Don't work so hard, little one," I whispered to him, "take it easy! These souls will get into heaven even if they aren't in a straight line. Why don't you sit down beside me and tell me how it looks in there ? If you'll do that I'll sing for you, I was a singer in my earthly life, and I would like to sing just for you."

The little cherub blushed with pleasure. He looked about anxiously and then tiptoed away begging me to follow him.

I was pleased but astonished to find victory so easy in this place where everyone was supposed to be unendingly obedient and good.

So, alas- even an angel tries from time to time to eat from the forbidden fruit! This idea made heaven seem so much more "homelike" and attractive. What I had feared most of all was the idea of having to pray the whole time and be so good and abedient that one would lose one's whole personality. I wouldn't have liked that at all!

I followed the little angel on tiptoe, just as he had shown me, and looked back nervously but the door already seemed very far away, much farther than was actually possible. Everything about this place was very strange.

My little friend climbed onto a big white cloud and motioned to me to follow him. There we sat ,rather breathless from the hurried flight - and he looked at me, his blue eyes full of expectation. I sang to him, quite softly while he listened with an expression of rapture. As I sang Brahms' Lullaby it seemed to me as if harps were playing the accompaniment, and a faraway choir of boys' voices sang with me. The little angel had tears of joy in his eyes. "I know that song," he said a little choked by emotion. "I have often heard it in Vienna where I was stationed in the Cathedral which they call Stefansdom. I often flew

away and went to concerts and to the Opera - perhaps I heard you too. What was your name?"

Will you believe me? When I told him who I had been, he said he had heard me as Tristan! The universe is certainly a small place. Who could have imagine that- it made me feel very proud that my fame had reached here too.....

I would have loved to sing a great deal for my little friend but he had to go back to his duties as usher. He started to wriggle nervously beside me but I was too curious and selfish to pay much attention.

"Look, little one," I said reproachfully, "we made a pact didn't we? I sang for you and now you have to tell me how heaven looks inside. My Asrael will never do that. He is the finest angel you can imagine but there are things which he keeps absolutely to himself. Unfortunately they are just the things I want most to know. For instance: Will I meet people who have been dear to me on earth?"

The little angel looked very uncomfortable.

"But your earthly life is just a beginning," he said, looking around with the air of a conspirator. "Imagine meeting all the people in all the lives you will live! I don't know, I really don't know. I am only a very small angel, no one takes the trouble to inform me. You have to wait. But perhaps I can be of some use to you? Did you know a fellow by the name of Mozart? He came from Vienna too, I think. Perhaps you knew him?"

No wonder he mixed up the centuries. What is a few hundred years in the wide and timeless range of eternity?

"I did not know him personally, but I knew of him. For heaven's sake,

tell me what you know about him. Have you actually seen him?"

"Seen him! Why of course! I am a kind of servant to him. You see, he always composes. He sits in the window looking out on the stars and writes heavenly music. I am allowed to sit at his feet. I arrange the sheets as he throws them down. He is quite wonderful. He still loves the old clothes he wore on earth - I wish you could see him sitting between the clouds at the window sill in his neat frock coat with lace at his wrists, and his little powdered pigtail hanging over his high velvet collar. All the angels love him and pass him on tiptoe because they know he does not like to be disturbed when he is working."

Please let me go now, Mr. Wilbrecht, I am so afraid they will punish me and will say I am unworthy sitting beside the holy Wolfgang Amadeo because I have neglected my duties. But Mozart will understand: he will know that it was your singing which made me so naughty."

"What is your name?" I asked. He blushed and smiled.

"Mozart gave me a name which I like. He said one day: you are really the most charming cherub I have ever seen. I shall call you Cherubino. And that's my name now."

"Cherubino!" The enchanting page in "The Marriage of Figaro!" How homesick that made me for a moment - homesick for the stage, the old excitement, the old agony and ecstasy of being transformed into another person, sublime and exalted.... I felt tears in my eyes - or did I imagine them? I don't believe ghosts can weep....

I wanted to tell my new little friend Cherubino all that I was thinking but he wriggled away very energetically. He was nervous about neglecting his duties and I had to follow him as he fluttered on before me - flapping his little silver wings like a happy butterfly.

And there we were again at the door of heaven. The tall angel looked at me with fiery eyes but avoiding his glance I tried to get a glimpse through the wide open door. I could see just a wonderful old man sitting at a big desk - his grey eyes, half hidden under shaggy brows, looked at me with great kindness. He looked familiar to me as if I had known him for a long time. Then I realized that if my friend Noel had a long white beard he would look exactly like St. Peter - soft eyed, gentle and dreaming ... St. Peter stretched out his hand in a gesture of welcome, but I shivered and turned back, saying hastily: "Thank you, I don't want to enter heaven yet."

It was as if lightning had struck them all. The long cloud of souls ceased swaying in their ecstatic song and dance of joy - St. Peter no longer looked like Noel, oh no, he now looked like a statue of vengeance - extending higher and higher into the light...

The angel at the door burned my whole being to ashes - I felt as if I had ceased to exist, as if I had been swallowed by fire and emptiness... He touched me with his fiery sword - and I fell away from the gates of paradise.

IV.

Hell

I fell slowly into a vast dark pit of obscurity.

All light was extinguished - and I slid down, deeper and deeper. I was like a shadow, like a being snuffed out and sucked into the bottomless depth of an unknown chasm in which all I could sense was horror...

Slowly from out of the darkness emerged a wide door.

It seemed to be carved from a deep red wood, colored by fire and blood and had the form of soaring flames. The work was overwhelmingly beautiful, the wood shimmered like satin and from out of its folds and curves flashed the brilliant play of thousands of diamonds... I had never seen anything like it and flew slowly toward the doorstep. Now I could move again of my own volition and it made me laugh to think that the gliding down had seemed so dreadful and the goal so sinister.

This doorway led into something exquisitely beautiful - only a soul who loved beauty in an exalted way could have built this entrance, I thought. The form of a tall and slender man appeared in the frame of the door. He was clad in dark red satin, his black hair, shining and smooth, hung down to his shoulders. His face was very lovely, pale and strange perhaps- his eyes seemed to be bottomless and it made me tremble to gaze into the depths of these burning eyes...

He smiled and said with a gracious gesture: "Come in, my friend, we are waiting for you."

That made me suspicious. He seemed too eager to get me inside- and why? So I hesitated and said: "Who are you if I may ask? I'm not

given to entering houses without knowing what is inside...This seems to be a very strange place indeed. What is it?"

The young man looked at me - and somehow I felt acutely uncomfortable.

"You have no choice, my friend," he said with a smile which certainly did not inspire confidence. "You did something terrible at the entrance to that boring place they call Heaven - now you will never be able to get in there. You know that, don't you? So don't be coy and come in before I have to get you in a less charming way..."

I must say I felt rather uneasy. Grinning faces peered around every corner - little creatures with black, black hair and brilliant eyes and very white teeth. They giggled as though they found me rather ridiculous and beckoned to me. I stood there like a statue.

"But couldn't you let me take a look at this strange establishment before I go in? Just through a window? I have a rather cautious nature and don't like to be taken by surprise. Please let me look."

How uncannily he smiled! All the little creatures around him started to laugh and dance as though they had lost their minds. They drew back the heavy curtains and beckoned me to look through the shining glass. What a sight! Beautiful! The walls were of gold, set with sparkling stones which flickered restlessly as if reflecting the fiery splendor of towering flames. A beautiful woman slowly approached the window. I must admit that I was a little embarrassed when I realized that she was quite nude. Perhaps I am just oldfashioned.... She smiled at me and opened the window. As she leaned toward me there was a fragrance of sultry perfume. Then - strangely enough - she yawned quite uninhibitedly and said between her teeth:

"I must get away from here; I need a vacation. This is too boring.

Always the same story- agonized souls, fire and torture. Fun? Not for me. I want blood - human blood, warm and fresh, right from the veins. Don't look so horrified. Don't you recognize me? I am Lilith, the first woman on earth. Remember? Adam did not want me, he apparently preferred to wait for clumsy old Eve. What's the matter with you? Don't you know my story? I roam over the earth and drink human blood. I am a vampire - is that clear to you? God - I'm thirsty. It's time for me to go back to the earth."

Perhaps she got a sign from the guard at the entrance but in any case she let out a devilish shriek of joy, swung onto the window sill and tearing away the drapery swirled it around her naked body like a great black cloak. It made her look like a tremendous bat. Giving me a friendly push she said "See you later," and hurriedly flew away.

I knew one thing: I did not like this! I said so. The guard shrugged his shoulders impatiently, making fiery rays of lightning glimmer through the fold of his garment.

He put two fingers in his mouth and whistled in a vulgar way, and lo and behold : out of the darkness appeared a man of terrifying beauty. Tall and slender, black and white. Around him was a greenish and uncanny sheen which reminded me of good old Fabian - and almost made me go in for it seemed familiar to me and put me in a dreamy mood. Or perhaps it was his ^{glance} which did that - the shimmering dark eyes of that strange creature. His whole being had an exquisite grandeur - a grandeur which made me feel small and insignificant.

My mind was a whirlpool - I stumbled forward, toward this strange and alluring being who at once attracted and repulsed me.

Suddenly I felt drawn back by a powerful hand and found myself in Asrael's arms. I think I must have lost consciousness for a moment because when I came to, the whole picture was changed around me: the door was still there, glowing red, but it was not of wood but searing flames. The forms were there too but their beauty was destroyed. They were now ugly, hairy devils - and the wonderful one gazed at me with the burning eyes of sin personified...It was the devil! Satan himself ! Distorted, loathsome, deformed. He looked at Asrael - and his eyes blinked as if they could not withstand the quiet light of his gaze... As the other devils looked at him they began to sneeze and roll moaning on the ground. It all seemed so ridiculous I almost laughed. Almost! Because I had not yet recovered from the shock of realizing that if it had not been for Asrael I should now be in Hell....

Asrael folded his wings about my shoulders like a shimmering cloak. I felt safe now and quite unafraid. But at this moment I certainly needed his protection more than ever because Satan's eyes pierced through me as if I were a tiny butterfly caught hanging from a rose bud, honeydrunk and pinned to a slab of wood....

"Look at this miserable soul," snarled Satan with scorn and contempt. "Look at this nincompoop who thought he was a hero on the earth. He tries to hide under your wings, shivering with fright...What a sight! What a sight for his adoring public! You know, Asrael, I have no interest in getting any soul, why should I? They throng about my entrance - often I want to push them back and shout: go to Heaven...but it wouldn't help - they would be right back. That old idiot Saint Peter has it all written down in his book and would never allow anyone to enter there unless he

is listed as worthy. Worthy! What hypocrisy! Can you explain to me how this one here can make any claim to being worthy? How? I have watched him - you know I have to watch them all no matter how exhausted I am. I hate them all, but none so much as so-called artists. They always escape me and find a way to enter Heaven...The Old Man up there gets weak. I don't mean St.Peter. I mean the Master, the Great Light or whatever you call Him. He has endless patience with these favorite children of his. Artists! They just do as they want and then look innocent and say: ' but don't you see?This is the artist's privilege... ' They explain their delightful sins very convincingly and The Old Man listens and nods His head telling them they are forgiven and may enter. Can you beat that? I know you're not allowed to agree with me - but don't tell me you don't."

He leaned wearily against a searing flame and sighed so piteously that I almost sympathized with him. But no - I could not do that. He is the devil. One cannot pity Satan.I seem to be too kind hearted..

"You know,Asrael," he continued gloomily,"One day just I could not stand it any longer. I tried to get an audition with The Old Man. Needless to say they would not let me in. The inferior officials are always the worst. They stopped me at the door and so I had to talk with St.Peter. By golly, he has grown old. He looked rather senile to me and somehow like a big grey moth. I had the feeling that if one shook him,ashed would fly from his veins....I tried to tell him my troubles about those artists. You should have seen him smile. Damn him! He looked at the long row of souls who were waiting at the entrance. He motioned to one of them to come before him. Wouldn't you know it

was an artist! He looked bold and shy at the same time. Convinced of himself yet hesitant. Exultant and depressed...

Saint Peter said to him: "You were a great musician but you did not always live up to your gifts. You were utterly selfish." Then Saint Peter, looking very strict and stern, took an old-fashioned scale with two pans. I saw that he wanted to balance good and evil with it and I looked forward to the result eagerly.

"You were ruthless." Clink. A weight fell into the pan and down it went - to my delight.

"You took your pleasure wherever you found it without considering the consequences." Clink. "You forgot God and believed your art was God." Clink, clink, clink.

I must say I was already rubbing my hands with satisfaction - quite convinced that I would get this frightened soul and rob The Old Man of one of His favorites. Then old Saint Peter suddenly smiled and said: "You very often lifted Mankind from its misery through your art." The other pan went down with a bang outweighing all the evil and clearing the way for that miserable soul ... How can one cope with such injustice? Since that time I have been very eager to get hold of artists. To get them away from that cursed door and bring them here for my own special treatment, Hypocrites! Devil's Food! Sons of Hell!"

It was too much for Satan. The memory of it made him sick.

"Get out of here," he shouted, "Get out of here, both of you or you will see what I will do..."

All the little devils began again with their mad dance. They whistled and shrieked, making the most hellish noise.

Satan climbed on a kind of throne - and throwing his cloak over his

shoulder with a gesture which would have done credit to the greatest of actors, sang in a high shrill voice: "Lucifer- Lucifer, I was once Lucifer the beautiful, sitting at the feet of God. Now I reign, I don't serve. I don't adore. Hell's glorious palace is my dwelling, I reign as Master of Darkness - I am Satan. I am the powerful one, the only one whom the worlds will worship, forgetting the Lord in Heaven. I shall see to that. The worlds are progressing. Soon the universe will be mine!"

The smile on his lips was like fire. It made me tremble.

Asrael said not a word. He held me fast and warm in his embrace - and rising slowly, hell sank into nothingness. My last impression was the glowing gaze of Satan's terrible eyes. They burned into my being, but as we soared upward I felt the searing fire within me dissipated - and the infinite beauty of the universe flowed through me again.

We flew silently for a long time and I waited in a kind of amused suspense for Asrael to start to scold me. But he didn't.

After a while we seated ourselves on a little crescent moon which swayed gently like a swinging branch. We just sat there without saying a word. This made me nervous, it was so unlike Asrael...

"For heaven's sake, say it," I burst out impatiently, "tell me that I am an unworthy creature, that my behavior has been scandalous, that I don't deserve to enter heaven and should have gone to hell..."

Asrael smiled.

"I shall never take anything you may say or do, seriously, Reinhold. God taught me to look at you with different eyes. If God is able to smile at your antics then I certainly should be too... I will tell you about my visit - about the great and wonderful experience of seeing God the Lord amused.

When I entered Heaven, St. Peter told me that the Lord was very busy

and there would be little chance of my seeing Him immediately. It was just the hour when the list of souls who had arrived the day before was presented to the Lord for His approval. You know the Lord likes to know exactly what is going on in Heaven. He likes to keep track of each of the million souls who are admitted every day. Sometimes He calls some of them before Him and there is always great excitement as one never knows how this interview will end. I waited patiently until it seemed time to approach the holiest door. The nearer I came the more beautiful was the light around me. Big angels floated silently through the hall and a lot of little cherubs were playing with a fluffy white cloud. They were not allowed to do this, you know. The cloud may have had a destiny. Perhaps it should have brought rain to a thirsty planet or have just passed through a blue sky in all its loveliness. But the little cherubs were very naughty and had caught the cloud and chased it all over the golden floor. They shrieked with pleasure quite shamelessly and I looked at the tall angel who stood guarding the holiest entrance. It was Gabriel. He stood leaning against his trumpet as he watched the naughty cherubs with a smile... 'What lack of discipline,' I thought, but Gabriel gazed at me penetratingly and said, 'I know what you are thinking, Asrael, but I love to watch these little rascals. They have so much fun. What is more beautiful than to see these children play? They came to heaven innocent and untouched by the vulgarity of human existence and they will remain children in eternity. What is more touching? I love them. I shut my eyes to their naughtiness and before I report them I had better report myself.... But what brings you, my dear Asrael, to this holiest of doors? I don't think

that you may see the Lord. He is lost in thought - and you know that His thoughts are creation. So I don't like to disturb Him. Oh, Asrael, the Lord is sad - these times are filled with sorrow for Him. You know those planets which He in His Grace created have been filled with people unworthy of their origin. They are increasingly vile and have become more and more the slaves of the Satan, the cursed one He lures them with smooth words, with silk and diamonds...He gives them power which will some day destroy them all and deliver them into his evil hands...There is the earth for instance. They discovered the atom bomb and instead of using their knowledge to bring good to the world they only use it to destroy and kill. Someday they will do this so successfully that the earth will be a lifeless sphere roaming through space ...Then there is one planet on which the people have developed technique to a perfection which is sinful. Their goal makes me shudder. They want to conquer the universe. They have the machines to do so if they wish. The whole universe trembles in fear... But I am sure the Lord will deliver His "No" to them and they will be scattered in the wind like dust...They have ---' but he could not continue because three little cherubs pushed a silver cloud under my feet and I was borne away, and when I dared to raise my eyes, I looked into the face of God the Lord."

Asrael started to tremble and I was afraid that he would not be able to tell me what happened next. But he calmed down and said very softly: "I wish I could paint. I would paint for you the picture which I saw. But I am only a humble angel and must leave this vision to great souls like Michel Angelo or Lionarda da Vinci. To them has

been granted the blessing to paint the Lord in His eternal Heaven.

God looked at me and said with great kindness: 'I know why you have come to Me. Is the unruly spirit whom you guard too restless for your taste? Do you want him to find peace and the everlasting sleep? That may not come to him so soon. You see: he is one of the souls touched by My hand as he was created. I gave this earthly spirit a ray of My own thought and so he became one of the chosen. He shall not sleep, he has a mission to fulfill. Going from one human life to another he shall be reborn again and again, bringing to the worlds art and wisdom, elation and consolation. He shall continue to do so until the time comes when I shall call him back to Me.'

I was very touched that you, Reinhold, are one of the chosen ones. I really never thought so highly of you I must confess; but now I was quite proud to be your guardian angel and hoped that God would grant me the favor of being so as long as you live.

God read my thoughts and smiled and said: 'So be it.'

You see there are rings in the heavenly sphere through which you must pass. Rings like wreaths of shining stars. You will enter the long row of radiant rings and will sleep for a thousand years or as long as the Lord wants you to sleep. You will circle about within this ring - around you will be myriads of souls, sleeping and dreaming like you, swinging in the rhythm of the stars. Then one day you will glide out of this glowing wreath and be reborn upon a planet. So you will be born and reborn until the time comes for you to enter the entrance hall of heaven...Are you happy, Reinhold?"

I was not.

To sleep for thousands of human years! To be amidst myriads of souls, not knowing, not seeing, not finding those whom I had loved on

- 79 -

earth. To wait and wait for a thousand years...Time seemed a dreadful thing which closed its cruel hand inescapably about me...It closed my eyes, it clouded my brain and extinguished my thoughts....

V.

Rebirth

Timeless time received me into its embrace. For hours - for centuries? How should I know?

Asrael's hands, warm and strong, were guiding me, and looking up with drowsy eyes I saw rings of shining stars swinging before me in wide and swaying circles. They seemed to lead into a light - far away and strong.

I felt myself gliding into the radiant ring and saw Asrael beneath me, standing white and flowerlike as if in a meadow of silvery green. His face, transparent and full of an inner light, was raised toward me and his eyes were soft and filled with love and understanding. Yet my heart was not sad at this parting: we would find each other again I knew...I swung slowly to a strange and rhythmic music such as I had never heard before. Music sweet and glowing. The song of stars Eons were singing within me - softly humming their lovely melody. I wanted to fall asleep.

Something disturbed me.

Someone was singing beside me, softly, almost in a whisper - but the disturbing thing was that it was not in rhythm. The voice sang almost with syncopation and made me so nervous that I awakened and could turn my head without effort in the direction of the singing voice.

Lo and behold: the spirit smiled at me and said: "I am so glad that you will be my neighbor for some eternities. I know who you are - exciting news like that get around here too. You were a great singer - a tenor." She fluttered her lashes - I knew it was a female - without

any question. " I was a singer too," she said with pride, "I was with the Opera House on Mars - or was it Venus? I really have forgotten, it seems so unimportant now; but I was very famous, a great coloratura soprano, but there was one thing which I never did right: I didn't feel the syncopes in the music - and when I had to sing something with syncopation I just could not do it. I was a flat failure. Too silly, isn't it? So I made up my mind that if I could remember how to do it at all, I would practice syncopation as long as I continued to swing here in the first ring. You know it isn't easy. I had to battle against fatigue. Then I had to listen carefully to the rythm of the star song. But now I have it - I really mastered it quite a while ago - maybe a hundred years or so - I have forgotten, time doesn't mean anything here. I hope my odd rythm won't disturb you. I am so happy you will be my neighbor. We can exchange such lovely memories. I really don't like the kind of artists who only talk about themselves, but I can tell you a lot about myself because I was very outstanding, and I, personally, never tire of telling about my successes on Mars or Venus or wherever it was. I hope you will enjoy listening to me....

This would be a fine eternity!!!

This woman would drive me crazy, a coloratura of all things who would never tire of telling me of her successes! No thank you, not for me. I don't stay here no matter who commands me. I will just get out of here as fast as possible...

And out I went.

I climbed over the rim of the radiant ring and hung between the stars not quite knowing what was going to happen next.

After all: What can happen to me? I am dead. I am a spirit. I cannot die. So: "Here goes" I thought and left the ring, plunging down... But of course you know what happened. I don't have to tell you that it was Asrael's duty to be with me in a moment of danger. And danger it was. Asrael gasped as he caught me in his arms. Falling out of the eternal ring I had no place anywhere. I belonged neither to earth nor heaven, nor hell nor any universe. I was just a speck of nothing. "Never before," said Asrael reproachfully, "has anyone dared to do what you have done. I should report you - but what can I do? Even God will smile at your impudence!" He seemed quite disturbed to think that God would only smile at me instead of punishing the daring devil which I seemed to be...

"What now," asked Asrael looking at me in as sinister and unfriendly a way as he was capable of. "Where do we go from here? I can't put you back, it would be against all the rules. I wouldn't even have the power to do it if I wanted to. But what are we going to do?"

"Let's see where I could be reborn," I said quite confidently and was rather taken aback when Asrael told me that this was entirely out of the question because one cannot just choose to be reborn, one has to wait until one's number appears and that would never happen now for me because what I had done could not have been recorded. No record, no rebirth. Asrael tried desperately to explain all this to me, but I hardly listened. I was quite convinced that something would turn up and solve the dilemma.... Asrael was not so confident... Yet he followed me as I flew on expecting to find some planet that would offer me an opportunity. "The world belongs to the courageous ones..." That is an old saying which was again proven correct! A bright star lay before us - inviting

and as lovely as any I might hope for for my next rebirth...

As we descended, Asrael said: "This is Venus - just the right place for you, but now that we are here just what do you think you are going to do?"

By this time I was accustomed to unusual experiences and Venus did not excite me as it would have some time before. I just went around admiring the strange but lovely houses and gardens and tried to see what the people were like to whom I would soon belong if fate was kind and forgave my sin...

Fate was kind.

We flew over a big hospital and I was especially interested in the maternity ward. In spite of Asrael's weak protests I glided down with him and arrived just in time to be present at the birth of a lovely Venusian - who by the way seemed to be born without any effort on the part of the mother who chatted gaily the whole time with the doctor and nurse. From time to time someone gave her a kind of perfume which she inhaled with visible pleasure - and this perfume apparently did the trick.

Asrael looked at me with a gleam in his eyes. He realized what I was going to do: wait until the baby was born and then quick as lightning slip into the new body before any other soul could do so.

That was the way I had figured it out but it was not quite as easy as I had thought. Suddenly there stood before me the lithe figure of a spirit who looked at me with great surprise and threw anxious glances at the guardian angel who stood beside him - or was it her? The spirit looked definitely female.

"Do you want to enter this infant, glorious one," I asked drawing

the spirit aside. "Look at the mother. These are rather poor people - I cannot quite imagine how you would fit into their home. You have seen better days. I am sure that in your earlier life you were someone quite outstanding and extraordinary. Who were you?"

The spirit looked flattered.

"To tell you the truth I don't want at all to be reborn on Venus. I have been here several times and am fed up with the whole planet. I want very much to go to Jupiter - there I will find again my lover's soul. I have been with him in many lives but he has escaped me for three incarnations. The last time we were together he said that he did not believe any more that we were destined for one another and that he was bored with always finding me again...He even tried to go to remote places where we are very seldom sent. But I am a good friend of the angel who keeps the books of rebirth and I managed to get a look at the book. There it is clearly written that he will be reborn the next time on Jupiter and here I am on Venus! So- if you don't object couldn't we just exchange our positions? I see that our angels are deep in conversation - they aren't watching us at all - please do me the favor of taking this baby. What difference will it make to you? But if I have to be reborn here I shall lose track of my beloved. Will you do me this great favor and slip into the body of this child?"

If I would do her the favor!

I only trembled lest Asrael should come between me and this marvellous spirit who had not the faintest notion of the favor she was doing me... But Asrael talked and talked with the other angel - I am quite sure that he knew what was going on and only wanted to distract him. Adorable Asrael

To think that he could even neglect his duty for my sake! That was a proof of his devotion.

I threw him a kiss and at this moment the baby was born. It lay quite still without uttering a sound in the arm of the nurse who shook him violently-But since no soul had as yet entered it, it did not react at all. I had no experience in being reborn - and Asrael could not help me openly - so precious moments went by. The nurse looked baffled, she could not understand what was the matter. I must admit I behaved rather stupidly - and who knows what might have happened if the experienced spirit who wanted to go to Jupiter had not given me a push. Suddenly I ceased to think. I was born, a tiny, helpless baby...A being born on Venus - and all my previous life was extinguished. It was just beginning, new and unknown. I did not know about Asrael - I was just a breathing, whining little thing which had to learn and to grow and to begin and end as one always does - without knowing what it is all about.

Now I know that Asrael almost had a fight with the other angel and they had to make a petition which was even carried before the throne of God. But I think and sincerely hope that my Jupiter spirit found her beloved and that he was as happy as she this time. And I knew that Asrael was always with me, protecting me and waiting for the moment when I should die again - I always found him at my side when I awakened from death to a better and increasingly elevated life in eternity.

VI.

Heaven

And so I was born and reborn, and born and reborn, until the time finally came when I was ready to enter the gates of Heaven.

Asrael, ever faithful, took my hand and led me through the wide open gate past St. Peter who smiled but asked no questions. Asrael had arranged everything for me so there would be no doubt about my qualifications. We stood in the entrance way and I glanced around me in wonder and delight. How can one describe Heaven? It would be impossible to find words for it, but the feeling that I would now live in this soft light, in this sweet warmth, amidst the fragrance of myriads of unknown flowers, overwhelmed me. It took me quite a time to become used to the heavenly beauty of Heaven... And without Asrael I would never have found my way around; but he showed me the unending ways of the blue ether, the flowering pathways between snow white clouds - the glorious views from silver mountain peaks. It was all mine - just as it also belonged to the sacred spirits who moved silently around me. I looked at each of them hoping to find some of those who had been close to me. But who knows where they might be roaming! Perhaps they were still being reborn to human existences. I must wait. But waiting was not difficult, it was sweet and without sorrow.

Of course I looked around to see if I could find Wagner. In my life on earth I had sung all his tenor roles and would be very happy to say hello to him.

Asrael looked at me with a worried expression. "Perhaps I should prepare you," he said thoughtfully. "You must not expect too much when

you meet the great composers whose operas you have impersonated, whose songs you have sung. They may seem rather petty and disappointing. But you must realize: artists are children. Children like to play - so do artists. They devoted their creative imagination to whatever planet they might have roamed upon during their human lives and they entered Heaven tired. Tired of the very works of art which made them great and gave them the fleeting fame which humans call eternal. Realize, Reinhold, that it is as if they had exhausted their inspiration and have come to Heaven burning with a desire to find new creative outlets through which they may express themselves. Look for instance at Wagner: there he sits, and instead of writing the new opera which is expected of him, he devotes himself to building projects."

My heart beat faster as I caught sight of him. There he was with his friend King Ludwig beside him. Great sheets of paper covered a tremendous table. Wagner sketched one Walhalla after another on them and then looking up continued to sketch them in the blue air. It was breathtaking to see how mountains appeared in the silvery ether - how valleys and chasms spread out deep below. You know God has given him the grace to build these Walhallas forever, Walhallas of cloud and air and golden shreds of light. He believes that they are real, building and rebuilding them, and never seems to tire of this titanic play.

King Ludwig was not quite satisfied. He looked rather sullen and said to Wagner: "Divine Richard, you have forgotten: this is my day! You promised you would help me build my newest castle today. Please put away Walhalla. We can do that to-morrow, but let's build my mountain castle to-day."

"Yes, let's," said Wagner, pushing away Walhalla and starting to

sketch a castle of rosy marble with windows cut from diamonds and gardens of emeralds and rubies .. The sky above this cloud castle was pure sapphire and before it gleamed a lake in thousand irredescent rays.

I felt deeply moved as I looked at Wagner for in my earthly existence his music had been my very life.

Shyly I went nearer to him, but a lovely woman suddenly appeared leaning her head against his shoulder. From pictures which I had seen I realized that it was Mathilde Wesendonck.

How touching, how wonderfully touching! I was eager to listen to their conversation. What I heard amazed and disappointed me.

She said in a gentle and pleading tone: "Divine Richard, you promised a new opera... When will you make Heaven truly Heaven by composing it?"

"Nogala Neia nushula nonsense! Oh stop pestering me... I have no adequate opera house here. I cannot give a new opera in a place like this," he said looking around him as though the marvellous hall was nothing but a shack. "There must be another Wahnfried. Nothing less. To be sure: only my operas should be played here. In any case I only like my own music."

He had just added a tremendous rainbow to his plan for Walhalla - a rainbow which crossed an unimaginably deep abyss and shone in blinding colors. Mathilde seemed distressed. She beckoned to Cosima Wagner who approached with great dignity.

"Please inspire him," said Mathilde sadly, "I have lost my power. You are the one now. Please tell him to write a new Tristan. Oh what memories!..." She sighed deeply. Cosima smiled. Laying her hand on Wagner's shoulder she whispered: "A new Tristan, divine husband!"

Wagner glanced up at them and then looked around to see if Minna was anywhere about. She was not....

Asrael whispered to me:" I am quite sure he will rush down to one of the planets again in a thunderstorm. He always does, when he is upset. You see,these women should really leave him alone. He is in Heaven, he should do just as he pleases,but no.They come again and again, begging him to do this or that.It isn't fair.I really think it should be reported to the Lord but it is so complicated. It makes these women happy to feel that they can inspire him here just as they did on earth and being in Heaven - they have the right to do as THEY please. That is a problem which just cannot be solved...."

"But is Wagner allowed to leave Heaven and go,as you say, as a thunderstorm beyond its golden walls?"

"Yes,he has a special permit. He and Beethoven. You see when he first came here Wagner was very bored. He loves drama and theatrical effects. He always wants to change something and covers his ears when the angel choir sings. He says their singing is too even, there is no color in their music. Once he raised such a row that the Lord summoned him before His Holy Feet. Wagner appeared looking very rebellious but having had experience with "loyalty in his earthly life he bowed before God and stood at attention quite correctly. God looked at him and said: "Why are you not satisfied here? What is it you want?" And Wagner replied: "I want a divine opera house in which I may play all my operas, those already written and those I shall yet compose." But I don't think God liked this idea. He does not want any interference with His management. So He told Wagner:"I will permit you to roam through the universe if you should wish so. You may go as a thunderstorm through any of the worlds - that should give you enough drama." That pleased Wagner.

He often leaves Heaven and storms through the clouds in thunder

and lightning. And he always goes back to the earth. He likes to crash down on its people from out of the blue sky and hear them say: "What a frightful thunderstorm!" having no idea that it is Wagner working out his latest drama....

Then Beethoven heard of this and running to God, threw himself at His Feet begging to be permitted to produce his personal thunderstorms. God smiled. He loves artists, you know. He always says they are children and one must be lenient with them. So God gave Beethoven his permit too. But there is a difference: Beethoven never cares about returning to earth. He does not thunder and roar and storm just to create an effect. He loves solitude - and far, far away in a remote corner of the universe where there are no stars and no worlds and no beings - in the immense blue vacuum of nothingness he storms and sings and rages ... His hair, unkempt and wild, flies in the storm of his music, and his ears, deaf in his earthly life, drink in, in an ecstasy of joy, the harmonies of his own creation.."

I looked at Wagner and felt sure he was preparing for another thunderstorm - his face looked so sullen and distracted. But Mathilde did not seem to realize that she should leave him in peace. She seated herself beside him spreading some sheets of paper on her lap and smiled deeply into his gloomy eyes...

"It is such a long time ago, divine Richard, that you composed my five songs. I do not want to seem conceited but you know that my song Traeume" has contributed very much to your fame. Wouldn't you write some others? I have here a lot of new poems - shall I read them to you?"

Wagner leaped out of his seat - so afraid that he would do that.

"No," he said, "no! I will not compose music for your poems. I prefer to compose to my own words. This is all too sweet for me. We suffocate here in sweetness - don't you make it worse by bringing me all this sticky nonsense about flowers and bird songs and what not. If you ask me again I shall take off on a thunderstorm and you know that I am fed up with that too. It is all so boring: always the same - thunder and lightning. And King Ludwig always near me, and mad as a hatter. Now he wants me to build him another castle. We certainly could do that. Credit here is endless. That is the one redeeming feature about this place. I certainly could have used this credit on earth... But I begin to think that all the castles which we build are just fake. Where are they, I ask you? I am afraid Cosima is right. She wants me to give up all these building projects and write another opera. Perhaps I will. Perhaps I will not. After all, what for? I am deadly tired of it all and nothing would please me more than a long sleep." And Wagner leaned back with an expressive yawn.

"Don't dissolve - oh don't!" cried Mathilde in a tone of fright. "You can't do that to me. You promised that we would love each other in eternity, so just stay here and go on playing with thunder and lightning and kings and castles! I know I am not yet advanced enough to dissolve and I do not want you to vanish into the blue air while I am left sitting here with my poems."

"And there we are again," said Wagner throwing her a dark glance. "Look, Mathilde, you must understand: Cosima would not like me to write music for your poems. They are silly anyway. Excuse me - but since we are in Heaven I cannot tell a lie."

Mathilde folded her papers with much energy and left him. Her feelings were very hurt - I could see that and I wondered that Wagner was not at all concerned. He even grinned - yes, he really grinned, then yawned and said, looking at me: "And who are you?" When I replied that I had been a Wagnerian tenor on the earth, he sighed and said: "For heaven's sake, don't sing for me! I am in Heaven. Here I don't have to listen to every stupid tenor who trundles along."

Really! I must say I thought him a rather unpleasant fellow. I would not sing for him for anything. (As a matter of fact, I don't even know whether I still can sing... That was all so long ago. Strange that my thoughts always seem to return to that little planet, earth. As if my experience there had been quite so wonderful - it really was not) I wanted to go away, feeling really hurt which is quite understandable, when Wagner called me back.

"Look," he said benevolently, "don't be upset. I really did not mean that as badly as it sounds. I am just in a bad mood - you would be too if you could not make up your mind whether you wanted to dissolve and get away from all this. To dissolve or not dissolve - that is the question."

"But divine Maestro, why are you dissatisfied?" I asked, amazed. "You have everything here whatever you want. You are surrounded by the spirits who have been dear to you, you build your Walhalla and all Heaven awaits your new opera. I don't see how Heaven could be more heavenly for you."

"You don't, don't you? Don't think that I really enjoy building Walhalla. In doing so I have the feeling that I offend God who so

graciously allows me to offend Him...I should be happy. But you see: three women surround me. My two wives and my ideal love. Two of them have always idealized me and continue to do so. Sometimes it is positively refreshing to see Minna, my first wife, because she at least saw through me better than the others. Can't you see how utterly boring it is to have always to be the great incomparable genius? No matter what you say, to have it considered the deepest wisdom? I am bored to death. I would like to get away. But then Mathilde cries: "Oh don't dissolve!" and Cosima looks deep into my eyes and says: "Heaven expects another opera." And Minna says: "Serves you right. You may not dissolve. Do as they say." Don't you see how difficult it is for me? And what do you think King Ludwig would do if I were to disappear into eternal nothingness? He would go completely crazy - if he can go any more so. I only enjoy myself when I rage through the skies in thunder and lightning, but one cannot do that forever. God - I am tired, Get away, let me sleep and for heaven's sake: Don't sing to me!"

I went away depressed.

Wagner sighed deeply and began to write music on big sheets of paper. Had he succumbed to Mathilda's and Cosima's suggestions? It would be exciting to hear a new opera of his here in Heaven. Bless the two women if they succeeded...

Watching him I saw that he threw the note-covered sheets into the air and lo and behold: music broke from the clouds and sunlight and amidst this music a strange figure walked slowly across the stage set of Walhalla: Wotan.

"You know," Asrael said to me, "God does not like Wotan at all. Wotan

is the one name which God does not accept for Himself. But life without Wotan did not please Wagner - so God gave him the grace to see Wotan in his cloud Walhalla as if it were He in person. It is only a speck of dust which seems to walk over the imaginary lawns - but to Wagner's eyes it is a wonderful God....

Just now the dream figure strode across the emerald path; he looked rather ridiculous to me with his long wig and great cloak and sword. I had the impression that poor Wotan would be completely lost if that sword were ever taken from him...He looked wildly about him and I think he would have liked to roar at the lovely little angels who were flying about everywhere - just as he used to roar at the frightened Walkyries, but since cursing is forbidden here he only moved on rather gloomily.

"Where can I find Richard Strauss?" I asked my friend Asrael.
"I would like to say hello to him."

"I doubt whether you can see him just now. He is rehearsing his new opera and is very busy. But perhaps you would like me to tell you about his arrival?"

We sat down, and Asrael told me the story of Strauss' entry into Heaven.

"When he appeared the angels staged a great welcome for him. I shall never forget his entrance. He came hesitantly and stood quite shyly in the doorway - then he suddenly started forward with tears rolling down his cheeks: the angels were playing the entrance of Octavian from the second act of Rosenkavalier. He stood there surrounded by glory, his music as radiant as the light above him. Then he said:

"Please play the trio from the last act!" But the conductor of the angel's orchestra said: "Don't you want to wait for the trio from the good old times at Covent Garden? Elizabeth Schumann, Delia Reinhart and Lotte Lehmann?" and Strauss said smiling: "Yes, let's wait for them. I suppose they will be here any moment."

Knowing my friend and colleague Lotte especially well I would like to know what she would say if, while still enjoying life on earth, she had had any idea that she was expected so soon in Heaven. She would probably have written one of her Special Delivery letters addressed to Doctor Richard Strauss and said:

"Dear Dr. Strauss:

It is very nice of you and the Heaven's Maestro to wait for me for the trio from your beloved opera Rosenkavalier. I am touched and flattered. But I don't like your remark that I should be there any day now. If I can arrange it I shall certainly take my time, Heaven or no Heaven - I have not the slightest notion of leaving this earth which I love so much - to end a life which has just started to be perfect.... Why should I consider going to Heaven? I live in Santa Barbara - that is Heaven enough for me.

So please don't get impatient. I shall take my time. Years, and years and years - touch wood. See you later - much later."

That is about what she would have written when she was still living out her earthly existence....

I asked Asrael whether she was now in Heaven. He said: "Certainly,

she has been here quite a while. Do you want to visit her?"

I did, but on our way to her we saw Caruso and I had to stop to talk with him. I had always wanted to meet him. Bowing before him I told him who I was (Who am I, by the way? Not Reinhold Wilbrecht. That was just one of my many lives. It is all so confusing!)

"Another tenor, for heaven's sake," said Caruso, sighing. "They seem to be running around here in herds. So don't talk to me about singing, I am through with that. I suffered enough on earth from all the agonies of stage fright. Why am I in Heaven if I must always be reminded that I was once a tenor? I have a much better job now. I paint. Do you remember my caricatures and sketches? Now I paint. I shall be much obliged if you will sit for a portrait. You don't look very interesting, but you will do." He immediately started to paint and it was very hard to sit still enough as I wanted to be on my way. But as I did not want to hurt his feelings I sat for a while. Then Caruso took the canvas from the easel and said with great pride: "Here you are, rather flattered, but quite good."

It was a clever caricature but no real painting. I wondered that Caruso could think it was. But I just said: "That's wonderful," and left him before he could start another. He seemed quite enchanted with his work. He put it in a gold frame and looked at it quite ecstatically. Heaven for him apparently means feeling himself a great painter and being able to forget his real greatness. What a strange place Heaven really is!

Caruso called after me that he would like to do another picture- and by the way to be sure to avoid Lotte Lehmann who would certainly

try to paint me, and God forbid, nobody would recognize that portrait.

This made me very curious so I hurried on. I found her surrounded by easels and collections of oil and water colors. She was absorbed in her work and did not notice me until I went right up to her. She smelled dreadfully of turpentine. Her painting smock was repulsively dirty - even for a painter.

She was surrounded by her pets - she must have gotten a special permit to keep them with her, for what would Heaven be to her without them? Good old Fritzzy sat on a big white cloud looking rather ferocious in spite of his seat of grace. Monkey and Tammy were beside him, Tammy looking so well groomed that I hardly recognized him. At last he was the high bred French poodle he was meant to be -tidy with coal black locks and none of the burrs which used to cover him when he returned from his hunting... All the birds were there too - Jocko the Mynah even sat on the end of Lotte's brush emitting long whistles of appreciation as he eyed her efforts.

"Hello,Lotte," I said,"glad to see you again. How are you - and what are all your dogs and birds doing here?"

"Hello," she answered absentmindedly , "the light is not very good to-day,I can't obviously get these clouds right- or do you think they are good?" They weren't, and I said so. She threw me a haughty glance and said:"You don't understand a thing. This is intentional. No one has to know that these are clouds, it is quite enough that I know it. And,please get out of my clay, you are spoiling all my pots."

Then I saw that the weird figures around her were also samples of her art. Ceramics,God help her! I might have known it.

"You know, Lotte," I said, hoping that she would listen; but she was painting so furiously that I am sure she didn't. "This last time I heard you was as Sieglinde with Lauritz Melchior. What a performance! I have never forgotten it!"

Lotte yawned.

"Yes, perhaps; but this is my real vocation. Through all my incarnations I have been developing as a painter. Don't let's talk about singing. I get stage fright at the mere mention of it. What nerve to stand before the public and perform! Never again! How did I ever do it?" Then, turning toward me, she said impatiently: "I would appreciate if you would leave me alone. I never can work if anybody is watching me. Don't you see that I have my own compartment here? No one is supposed to steal my time trying to chat with me. Frances has a workshop beside me. She paints and makes pots and you can be sure she builds houses and hammers and saws like crazy. She makes too much noise but she always did that on earth too. You can imagine with everything on the scale it is here that she has started to build fantastic skyscrapers - each with its own ocean and islands in the background. Quite lovely, I think.

But all this building makes so much noise it's quite nerve wrecking. Then there is too much music and singing. Over there is the studio of my brother Fritz. He teaches here and I have to hear shrieks of expression all the time. He works until he is exhausted - and then, instead of sleeping, reads about Schubert and Schumann and what not. He could just visit them - they are not far away. Walking together they often pass by his door. But he sits there reading, instead of saying, "Hello,

I love and admire you very much." They would like that. I really don't think he even sees them, he is too absorbed in his reading. But I have to endure all this music.

Beside him is another studio which drives me nuts. Robert Nathan sings there all day long. Listen!"

A powerful tenor voice was singing Lohengrin's farewell and I was very surprised. "But he was a baritone, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but don't you see- this is his Heaven, to be a tenor. Can you imagine that? A man who has written such beautiful books wants to be, of all things - a tenor! Now he is - and I have to suffer..."

"Now run along, I am busy. If you see Melchior tell him I would like to paint his portrait, or Kleinchen's. You know his wife, don't you? I would love to paint her - how pretty she was! Once on earth when I was just beginning to paint, I made a sketch of her and ever since then she has run away whenever she sees me. No understanding! Now go on, I have no time..."

Just as I was leaving her, a tall figure appeared in the doorway. Lotte gave a cry of delight: "Jimmy, where have you been? I was afraid you would never come to Heaven."

It was Vincent Sheean, known to his friends as "Jimmy." He sat down looking very reproachful.

"Why should you have seen me?" he asked morosely. "You never sang again. I watched you through all your rebirths. You were painter, sculptor and writer, but never again a singer. I did not like that. I liked to listen to you and don't give a damn about your paintings and writings and pottery or whatever else you do."

Lotte was hurt.

"You told me we would meet again,didn't you? You did not make any reservations. By the way you weren't as attentive as you say,you apparently missed several of my incarnations when I was forced to be a singer, perhaps to atone for my past sins. But I have to admit that I did get better each time. In my last singing incarnation - I think it was on Mars, I really accomplished something. I mastered a fantastic technique.Quite perfect. Imagine that of me! You should have heard me then! I could sing even the longest phrases in one breath - and you should have heard my high C. Quite something I assure you."

Lotte seemed very proud but Jimmy just smiled.

" I liked you very much with less technique. Perhaps it wouldn't have seemed you anymore.I'm quite glad I missed that..."

"Perhaps you would like to hear me sing now?" but she interrupted Jimmy's delighted gesture, saying;"I am sorry to disappoint you again but I have no accompanist here, so even if I wanted to sing (which I don't) I could not, as there is no one to play for me."

She smiled quite contentedly.Jimmy started to say something but she added quickly: " I know,I know, you were going to say that angels would gladly accompany me, but I would not want that. I only want to sing with Paulchen- you remember Paul Ulanowsky? He is here, to be sure,but he just sits over there surrounded by his stamp collections. What dimensions they have assumed, here! When he first came to Heaven he asked for stamps and the lovely little cherubs dragged in a whole library for him with the result that he hasn't looked at me for some eons now. He much prefers those smelly old books to hearing me sing, and as you know, in Heaven one may do as one wants."

"What about your friend Bruno Walter? Didn't he sometimes accompany you on earth? Perhaps he would do it here too."

"He would, would he? That's what you think! He is so happy to be with Gustav Mahler again that no one can interrupt them. Once I tried just to say "hello" to him but he and Mahler and Thomas Mann were floating between the golden laurel trees talking in such a sophisticated and complicated way that I felt so stupid that I just ran away. They even did not see me. I heard Bruno say to Mahler:" One could not tell me enough about your intuitive understanding of the ultimate theories of physics and about the logical keenness of your conclusions or counter arguments. To-day, by the way, the physical fantasies indulged in by you seem by no means more artistically unscientific to me than Gustav Theodor Fechner's philosophic thoughts about the soul-life of plants or doctrine of "The Comparative Anatomy of the Angels. "

"How true, Thomas Mann answered thoughtfully, "we have learned here in this Mansion of Heaven that nothing exists without soul. On earth we were rather blind but if we had penetrated wisdom to its very roots there would have been the danger that this urge to contemplate life and to mirror it poetically would cause one to become lost to life itself."

Mahler smiled.

"Contemplating life!" he said, stepping forward with the characteristic jerk which even in Heaven seemed not to have been taken from him. "To fulfill the purpose of my life I had to live it - fully and completely. In art as in life I was at the mercy of spontaneity. I remember once I went up to the hut at Maiernigg with the firm resolution of idling the holiday away, and recruiting my strength. On the threshold

of my old workshop the Spiritus Creator took hold of me and shook me and drove me on for the next eight weeks until my greatest work was done."

You cannot imagine, Jimmy, how much de trop I felt. So that is that! No accompanist. Bless Heaven!

Nevertheless, I am sorry that you missed my voice in my re-incarnations. Why didn't you buy my records?"

I was amazed at how practical Lotte had become. It quite annoyed me to hear her making propaganda for her records - even in Heaven... Funny - on earth she wouldn't even listen to them.

As Lotte and Jimmy went on discussing their incarnations I was bored. Being in Heaven - how can one be concerned about the past? About all those births and deaths which were only a preparation for our Heavenly existence. Even on earth I hated to think of things past. But here it seemed such a waste. I enjoy more than ever the lovely thought: NOW! There is no yesterday and no to-morrow. There is just NOW... This Now is so beautiful that I cannot understand how all the spirits whom I have found here are longing for something which is missing and which most of them had on earth. For instance over there I see, sitting in the shadow of a snow white column, looking subdued and sad, Leo Slezak.

Good old Leo! I was so happy to find him here. And beside him - certainly they would never, never, be separated - his beloved wife, Elsa. He should be quite happy, quite, quite satisfied. But he was not.

"What is the matter with you, Leo?" I asked. He looked at me very sadly.

"I cannot tell a good story here, can you imagine that, Reinhold?"

My brain seems to be a kind of dry-cleaner. Everything which goes through it comes out spotless and pure as snow...What kind of a story can I tell here? One gets tired of telling these stories for the hundredth time: an old Jew said to another old Jew...But what he says seems so utterly boring. I cannot believe that my jokes on earth seemed as childish as the ones I am telling here. They laugh - Marand-Joseph! Everyone is so sweet here they even laugh at these silly jokes. But it makes me sad to think of the good old times in Vienna, when for instance I used to tell Eva under the Linden tree in the second act of Meistersinger, the most daring jokes and she pretended not to listen - but how she listened!!! And then - this seems to be the funniest thing of all here - I have no appetite. Can you imagine that? Now that I can eat whatever I want to without having to worry about getting fat, I don't want to eat at all. You could set a full tray before me and I would turn my nose at it. I don't call that heavenly bliss, I call it eternal boredom...."

"Leo," said Elsa warningly - as she had done so often on earth.

"Elsa also does not know what to make of my virtue here," Leo said with the old twinkle in his eye. "I am sure she would be happy if she could find some opportunity to be cross with me - just as a matter of form. She really never was. You know I married an angel. I don't even look at the angels here - they seem quite nondescript after living with this one." He squeezed Elsa's hand lovingly and smothered her warning, "Leo!" with a kiss.

They both looked happy now. I left them, feeling that they were enjoying Heaven tremendously because they were together and that was Heaven enough for them.

Leo called after me: "Listen - do you know this one? An old Jew said to another old Jew..." but I will never know what he said, because music broke through the closed doors of the Great Concert Hall- it sounded overwhelmingly beautiful. Without any doubt it was Strauss. I entered and was delighted to find myself in the middle of the general rehearsal of his new opera.

The first act had just ended with a tremendous Finale which was sublimely effective. There was a burst of applause. As the curtain fell and the suns were turned on again, I saw the distinguished audience - and audience which should stir every heart which had ever beaten on earth, with awe: they were all there, the great composers who had given inspiration to a world which I had been a part of once. The great geniuses in whose service I had become an artist.

I longed to talk with them but I was too new here and much too inexperienced. Those thousands of years - those endless rebirths - what were they in comparison to the eternity of Heaven? How is it possible for me to feel really at home here? I must learn to deserve this blissful existence. Deeply aware of this I stood apart from them, watching, listening, drinking in all what I saw and heard.

My heart beat faster: Schubert - Franz Schubert! How often had I sung his Lieder. Not just in concerts, oh no. Whenever I was sad or disillusioned I found solace in Schubert's music. It was as if my soul were purified through the beauty of his songs. Schubert was for me like a prayer. And there he was- quite near me. He looked so shy and timid; my heart went out to him not only in devotion but with

a kind of fatherly love, an eagerness to protect him. Ridiculous, yes. But he looked so pathetic. I soon discovered why: He wanted to talk with Goethe and struggled to break through to him, but Goethe was surrounded by so many spirits and looked so grand and impressive amidst the snow white clouds that I understood Schubert's awe ... At last he reached him, and bowing low, said: "Your Honor, I have always admired you deeply, but you did not like my music. My setting of the Erlkoenig found no favor with you. You much preferred the music of someone else. I am happy here in Heaven but I would be blissful if you would let me play for you my last setting of the Erlkoenig. I wrote it here especially for you and hope it may be to your taste. Forgive me for disappointing you on earth."

Goethe was silent. He only looked at Schubert as if he would pierce his heart. He sought to control his emotion - then he laid his hand on Schubert's head and said, his voice trembling: "It is I who must ask your forgiveness. It was only my earthly shortsightedness which kept me from penetrating your divine music. I am wiser now and need to hear no other music for my Erlkoenig. Do not alter that, for no other setting could be more beautiful; but honor me by composing for my new poems - I really wrote them in the hope you would. Had you not come to me to-day I would have sought you. Here they are."

I shall never forget Schubert's excitement. He scarcely thanked Goethe - he was much too ecstatic. He rushed away to abandon himself to music - for Goethe.

What a place this Heaven is!

After the delightful shock of watching Schubert and Goethe seeing Robert and Clara Schumann and Brahms together seemed almost like an

everyday occurrence. One gets so quickly accustomed to outstanding experiences when they come in swift succession. I hope that Heaven will never make me feel blasé about all its wonders...But I could look at these three already without trembling- at least without too much trembling....

Brahms stroked his long beard looking rather scornful - yes, I must admit it: really scornful, in spite of being in Heaven where it should be impossible to experience such a feeling. He whispered to Schumann: " I cannot stand this music. What a noise! I had quite enough of that with Wagner's so-called music- spare me Strauss.."

Schumann looking dreamily into the distance did not make a reply. Clara did not seem to have heard the music for her eyes were fixed on Brahms and her smile was not at all the kind one bestows upon an old man with a long beard and in any case seemed to me quite out of place in Heaven. Then I suddenly realized that they did not see each other as I saw them. To one another they were as they had been in the most wonderful period of their lives - young and beautiful. Is it their Heaven to live again through the searing fire of passion? Perhaps it is...Seeking fulfillment they find it in their music and sublimate their longing in the ecstasy of creation....

The opera was a tremendous success and I hoped fervently that the first performance might have the same fire born of the same surging inspiration as this memorable general rehearsal.

I should have liked to greet Strauss but he was surrounded by such a mass of admiring spirits that I hesitated to disturb him.

I was thrilled to find among his admirers Hugo Wolf. And to my amazement there beside him was Vincent Van Gogh. Then with a flash

I realized: of course they would be friends! There is so much they have in common: Wolf painted his music with glowing color - Van Gogh's brush sang with bold and shimmering harmony...

Then I heard from Asrael that they had become close friends. Whenever Van Gogh paints Wolf sits near him composing, each seeming to find inspiration in the presence of the other.

Leaving the Hall of Music I came upon Lauritz Melchior, "The Great Dane." Hospitable as always he begged me to come with him so that I might see the especially glamorous home which had been granted him. Amidst a carefully tended garden, impressive trees and walls covered with golden flowers and laurels, there it was, a gleaming palace. Lauritz seemed blissfully happy with everything his heart desires: A huge mansion built entirely of glass and in front of it an emerald swimming pool at which he sits drinking nectar which to him tastes just like beer, and listening to his latest records. He showed me all his hunting trophies - lions, tigers, elephants. Very impressive! I must say I was surprised to find that one could hunt in Heaven as I had not imagined that any form of killing would be permitted there, but Kleinchen with a twinkle explained it to me later. She said that Lauritz had been unhappy and restless at first. He had said that it was a sorry Heaven if one could not shoot lions. She immediately - as usual - knew what to do. She went to God - and believe it or not, He granted her an audience. He rarely does it but Kleinchen always knows how to get her way. So she explained to God that Lauritz was not happy, and God replied: "He will be. Go home and let him go hunting." When Kleinchen came back and told Lauritz

he would not believe it, but she urged him to go hunting - and lo and behold - all around him were lions and tigers and everything he could possibly want to shoot. All these animals exist only in his imagination but he is convinced that he kills them, so he is now quite satisfied. He has his daily hunting expedition and the supply of animals is never ending.

This is really Heaven. Never mind what is real or what is just a figment of your imagination. The main thing is: you believe it is there...

This seems to me the essence of happiness and wisdom.

Of course I did not give up the idea of talking to Richard Strauss. I knew where to find him for Asrael told me where he went to play Skat. When I approached his table cautiously, not wanting to interrupt the game, he stopped playing, and taking me by the arm asked anxiously: "Haven't you seen my wife in any of your incarnations? She should have been here long ago. I cannot understand that she is leaving me for so long. It is so unlike her. No one can tell me where she is." His expression was very troubled. "Do you suppose that she could have gone to Hell? Believe me that would be great injustice! Pauline was a wonderful wife. She had a loose tongue, to be sure, but one does not go to Hell just for what one says and she never did anything bad. Never. Do you know anyway I could find out? No one will tell me and I am so worried."

I had an idea. "Why couldn't we send one of the cherubs down to Hell to make inquiries?" It was touching to see how Strauss' face lit up at this suggestion.

We found a cherub he did not seem to have anything to do -

and succeeded in persuading him to look through Hell's door for Pauline. He agreed because he was a great music lover - but I am sure that he was not allowed to do this.

I tried to distract Strauss while the cherub was gone and we talked quite a lot about music.

"You know what angers me," he said, "is that so many spirits whom I meet think that I was Johann Strauss. They always ask whether I won't write a waltz for heaven's orchestra. At first I was delighted and said I would but I saw very soon that they didn't mean me at all. It seems funny to discover in heaven that one isn't as popular as one thought! Johann Strauss laughs tears when I tell him. He says that he is annoyed when they think that he wrote Salome and Electra. We had photographs taken together so that we wouldn't be confused any more...."

Seeing our cherub fluttering toward us he interrupted his talk and strode toward him.

"She isn't there," he said breathlessly, "and don't worry. The devil saw me and I told him of your plight. He sends his regards - he said that he was a great admirer of your waltzes, and to tell you that if she should come he would send her to heaven - "They can have her," he said."

That did not seem to me very polite, but Strauss was very happy.

"Now I will really feel that I am in Heaven," he said laughing, "Pauline will come! You see it isn't only that I love her so much and must be with her in eternity. There is another reason too: everyone is so polite here, they are all so kind, I think they are all forced

to behave like angels. It is very boring. If you had lived with Pauline you would know what I mean. I like to have excitement and life around me. She will bring that! How she will bring it! How I long to hear her shriek at me! What a heaven - to hear that again! If only it would be soon!"

I look forward to Pauline's advent and to hear her telling all the heavenly spirits what she thinks of them. Trouble will start in Paradise....

That made me think. I asked Asrael what happens when one meets all the wives, all the husbands, all the lovers - imagine! Through so many, many lives, it certainly adds up....

Asrael smiled: "But we are all one big family," he said gently and for the moment it sounded convincing to me, but just the same I would prefer to stay out of the way of some women whose apparent absence made me appreciate heaven all the more...

Then another idea occurred to me: "How do all these artists get along together? Is the spirit of competition, of jealousy, unknown in heaven?" When Asrael assented emphatically I added distrustfully: "And how about the conductors?"

"See for yourself," said Asrael.

I went to look for the conductors.

First of all I searched for Toscanini.

I found him rehearsing. He had an orchestra of angels. I must say that I had always found his music heavenly, angels or no angels ; but something was wrong here: he was quite different from what he used to be in rehearsals. He was gentle and sweet and never uttered a word of reproach, he only looked at the musicians with an expression

of inner bliss...When the rehearsal was over and he had told them that they were perfect, I went to him.

One after the other the angel musicians came to him and, bending gently over him, asked for his autograph. The Maestro smiled patiently and gave autograph after autograph, writing his name on a feather as each angel spread out his wing for him. What a touching picture! It seemed so amazing to me that I really almost believed that conductors might love each other in this extraordinary place...

I thought a little gossip might make him seem more human. So I told him the old, old story of a lady who said to Koussevitsky after a concert: "Maestro, you are a God!" to which he replied: "Yes, I am. But I know my responsibilities."

The great Arturo smiled benevolently: "Yes, I know this charming story. But do you know what happened when he came to the Gates of Heaven? No? I will tell you. St. Peter opened his big book and searched for the name. Then he smiled, saying: 'You have said that you are God and even feel responsible for your creation. The Lord has heard this and is amused. He has ordered that you shall continue to feel responsible and shall immediately start another Tanglewood, training all the young angels.' I want a rising generation of musicians here," said the Lord. "Now go ahead." You know, "Toscanini added, "he loved that and now he is busy as a bee."

There was no further comment.

"And have you heard," I ventured cautiously, and stepped a little aside, "have you heard that Furtwaengler has just arrived?"

Maestro looked at me with a dreamy expression.

"How nice," he said, "we should do something to welcome him and make him feel at home."

I was quite desperate, then I had an idea.

"And do you know, Maestro, that Stokowsky has invented an orchestra out of the blue air? He does not even need any angels. He just raises his beautiful hands and music slips from his nimble fingers- music which he makes resound like a whole wonderful orchestra."

Toscanini was silent for quite a while. I saw from his expression that a battle was raging within him. But the little devil who had been so faithful to him on earth had vanished, for had he still been with him the Maestro would not have hesitated to say something terrible... But alas, his devil had had to give him up at the Gate of Heaven, so all he could do was murmur something in Italian under his breath- I think I had better not try to translate it....

But he looked very happy after this relapse into something pleasantly earthly, as if an inner tension had been relieved...

Vastly amused I left the great Maestro. A feeling of adventure burned in my veins almost as it used to so often on the good old earth. That carefree, devil-may-care attitude is I suppose very much out of place in Heaven. But when I passed two of the most sublime spirits - Michelangelo and Shakespeare - I almost shouted facetiously at them and only just managed to restrain myself. Fortunately - because I am sure they were lost in deep contemplation. But in some way I just had to show how much at ease I felt with everyone here - and seeing the lovely cherub, Cherubino, I cried happily: "Give my regards to Mozart"

Cherubino smiled and said "Hi" ...What a place this Heaven is!

VII.

Heaven Invaded by Hollywood

It was not long before I had even greater reason for amazement.

Just as I entered the great Hall of Music to listen to a rehearsal of the new Sibelius symphony whom should I see but Mr.Peppertree. He was surrounded by angels who seemed to be very troubled by what he was saying.

Of all people - Mr.Peppertree! I never expected to find him here. But here he was, looking very eager and quite accustomed to being surrounded by angels. Perhaps he thought they were movie stars - after all they do look rather alike. Golden locks, radiant eyes, long, long eyelashes and ethereal figures. I quite understood that Mr.Peppertree felt at home.

Going to him I tried to explain who I was by reminding him of poor little Fabian and his Hollywood adventure. Mr.Peppertree had not the slightest notion what I was talking about - which did not surprise me.

He only said with a deep sigh: "Oh yes- Hollywood! Wasn't that something? Please do not think I am ungrateful for being admitted here, oh no, on the contrary, I appreciate it very much. It's quite nice here, isn't it?"

He threw me a shrewd glance. Then, apparently considering me harmless, he added in a whisper: "But it isn't Hollywood. I'm homesick. I cannot tell you how homesick!"

He looked very miserable, poor soul, and I had no idea how to go about to console him. After all, the other place he could go was

Hell and I doubted if he would like that as well. "But you know," I said in a soothing tone, "if there is something that bothers you just say so. Heaven is filled with kindness. If you say what it is you want, everything will be arranged to make you happy."

Peppertree did not seem convinced. He shook his head sadly: "But nobody will know a thing. Who is here who could understand what I want to do? No one, I am sure!"

"I wouldn't say that, Mr. Peppertree. You forget that God reigns here. Can you doubt that He understands?"

Mr. Peppertree looked thoughtful. "I suppose He is the boss here, and the boss always has the last word. That's the way it was on earth at N.S. Do you remember Mr. Non and Mr. Sense? They were fine people. Mr. Non was my special pet, but Mr. Sense was very clever. Oh, very! I don't believe the boss here is as clever as they were; if he was, Heaven would be a different place."

I sat down beside him. I wanted very much to find out what he meant by that. "What changes would you suggest, Mr. Peppertree?" He looked at me for a moment and then his glance drifted away into the distance.

He sighed deeply. "Look at these entertainments. What a business they are! Symphony concerts! All the players and even the conductors are angels or holy spirits or what have you... Who wants that, I ask you? Who wants to listen to real angels? When I first saw them I thought By golly, I can pick up some super movie queens here, but I soon found out. They are genuine angels. Very sweet, but my God how boring. They have no pep in their playing - how could they? Angels!"... He sniffed.

" I went to some of the concerts because there was nothing else to do but I just couldn't stand them. That's not what the public wants. What it wants is good entertainment, good clean fun. I always gave them just what they wanted. If only I could do something here. Imagine what one could do with this unending source of supply."

"But Mr. Peppertree, why don't you call all the movie stars together - there must be quite a lot of them here by now - and then when you have worked out a plan go to the Boss and see if you can't get a permit for it."

He shook his head sadly. " I tried it, I assure you. That was my first idea. But all the stars I could find said the same thing. They all said, "Look, Peppertree, we all know that the movie business is a racket. Everybody says it, everybody knows it. How can you think that you could get away with a racket here? We are in Heaven! Don't you realize that? Now quiet down and forget it. See?" That's what they said to me. So I just can't get anywhere."

Suddenly an idea occurred to me - a wonderful and exciting idea. Jumping up I almost danced with delight. Peppertree looked at me as if I had lost my mind.

"Listen," I said with trembling voice, "listen to me and be prepared for the most heavenly shock you have ever had. We do not need the movie stars you had on earth. We have here in Heaven the most illustrious cast imaginable. Just wait until I find the people I have in mind. You'll go crazy when you hear their names."

"Oh, names, names," sighed Peppertree. "I can just picture what you

have in mind. Before you start telling me, I say: not popular enough... I cannot stand this highbrow stuff, and even less the highbrow actors. They think they can use their own heads. Everyone knows better than that at Non Sense Inc. No sir, no original ideas! That was why we made the best movies."

He rested his chin on his fists and stared into the distance a picture of nostalgia.

"What is Heaven in comparison to Hollywood? Hollywood did everything for the education of the people. Not only the human beings, the human actors did this - do you remember Charlie, our Chimpanzee? Do you remember him? What an actor he was! Do you remember his face? Wasn't that something - don't you call that expression? Believe me, he could put our most celebrated actors to shame. By the way he was the only one who insisted on having his own ideas and who got away with it." Peppertree chuckled tenderly. "When we rehearsed a scene with him he was always good and obedient. He understood every word and did everything he was told to do. But the moment they started to shoot and he heard the ominous word 'rolling,' hell would break loose. He laughed and danced, stamping his big feet and applauding himself right into the camera. He was sidesplitting. By the way that reminds me of the time we had trouble with him that really deserves a place in eternity. You know as enchanting as his face was, his rear, was not so fine. We always took shots from the front and carefully avoided his embarrassing behind but he seemed to get on to this and suddenly began to turn around to show his better side to the camera... We could not stop him so we had the hairdresser make him a transformation. Charlie let

him arrange this with the greatest friendliness. Then when everything was in order and he was a thing of beauty from every angle they started to shoot the picture again. At that moment he snatched off the transformation and tore it to shreds. Finally the make-up man was called to make up his rear. He objected strenuously saying he was an artist and had no such deal in his contract but luckily he had a wonderful sense of humor and that saved us for he finally did it successfully. I ask you: where will you ever find another actor to equal our Charlie? Where?"

I did not quite know what to say to this question. I could only shrug my shoulders and say - without even getting annoyed for I was far too excited: "Don't be silly. Forget your monkey and his great art. You will be satisfied. You will see! Leave it to me..."

"Okay, okay, Mr. Busybody" said Peppertree scornfully.

I did not pay attention to his bad mood and only repeated: "Leave it to me - and you work out a story. And make it a good one! I'll arrange for the cast. The story is your job. Where is Tom Matson, the writer who shot himself? He would be the man to advise you. Get him. Get busy. I must set to work immediately. Bye- see you later..."

And off I went, leaving Peppertree sitting there - stars in his eyes and the gleam of creation in his bosom....

* * * * *

First of all I looked for Asrael. My good old Asrael was really off duty. He was having a holiday and had no reason to be near me officially. But he never quite left me alone. Even in heaven he didn't entirely trust me... Actually his watchfulness did not bother me at all.

On the contrary I loved him so much and he was so much a part of me that I always welcomed having him around. I didn't even have to call him - there he was emerging from a golden ray of sunlight right before me, looking at me with his sweet and understanding smile.

"In trouble again, poor dear?" I explained that there was no trouble ahead, only something marvellous...He listened attentively as I told him of Peppertree's plight - only a slight shudder shook his silvery body when I mentioned Hollywood...and then I unrolled my plan, my startling and exciting plan:

We would ask God for a permit to make a movie in heaven. A movie such as only could be made in heaven. For instance Michelangelo would do the stage sets, Rembrandt would lend advice on shadow effects, Van Gogh would be the technician for lighting, Velasquez for costumes; as for writers: Shakespeare, Goethe and Dante would collaborate on the script. The cast ! What a cast! I had to lean against a cloud it made me so dizzy...Sarah Bernhard, Eleonora Duse, Ellen Terry, John Drew, Forbes-Robertson, Caruso, Melba, Lili Lehmann - oh this was just a beginning. Who could count the names or say who would be better than another? And the composers! One just cannot choose, the riches are too overwhelming.

I almost said: "I would like a highball," I felt so weak but certainly that was one thing I wouldn't get. Asrael gave me nectar, heaven's one and only drink - and believe it or not: it tasted quite like Scotch...Perhaps this was one of heaven's miracles...

If I had thought that Asrael would object to my plan I was mistaken. He loved it. His eyes shone more brightly than ever and drawing me after him, said, "let's get going...."

I had to wait before the door of the Holiest and there sat Mozart again in his window, with his faithful little Cherubino beside him. As I had to wait for Asrael to return from seeking permission for my scheme - I thought it would be all right if I approached Mozart now and asked him to compose a song for the new movie. In spite of Cherubino's protest I went to him. He turned to me with the distracted expression of one lost in his creation, but he was polite and smiled at me. That gave me courage. When I explained my idea he looked very puzzled.

"A movie," he said confusedly-"what is a movie? I never heard of that, but if God wants me to write a song I will be only too glad to do so. Let's say - a song like my "Veilchen"? I could write of another flower - a lily, I think a lily would be quite appropriate. I will enjoy doing it. When do you want to have the song? Can you wait for it?"

He took a fresh sheet of paper, wrote some words and notes, looked up at the sky beyond resplendent with stars, swept by the grandeur of storm- then he nodded, wrote again, and with a sweet smile handed me the song.

How I would have liked to send a copy of it on the wings of wind down to the earth! How happy it would have made them; a new song by Mozart! But this was not permitted and when I asked Asrael later on why it was not, he was quite horrified that I could have had such an idea. This was only written for heaven. (By the way, it has become a favorite song here, it is often sung by the angel choir and Saint Cecilia sings it as an encore in her heavenly recitals.)

My conscience was not quite clear because I had not told Mozart

when he said he would write the song if God wished it that God did not yet know about it and yet I took the song ...It wasn't quite right of me, but anyway: I had the new song and it was my idea which had inspired Mozart to compose it - and that was something, wasn't it?

Asrael returned smiling: God in his endless grace had granted His permission. So now we could go ahead.

Back to Peppertree!

He sat just where I had left him and didn't seem at all excited. I was disappointed and asked him what was the matter. He said: "Look, young man. I've been far too long in this business. I know how people talk. I don't trust anything anyone says. So I just sat and waited for you to come back, I really didn't expect you to. Now you tell me the truth: has the Boss agreed? What kind of power does He give me? Where are the funds to back us? We have to have financial backing."

Asrael caught his breath. If it is possible for an angel to be angry, Asrael was. His eyes rolled dangerously but he said with a deadly quiet voice: "You are in Heaven, Mr. Peppertree. You must trust God. If you don't want to, let us forget the whole thing. Or perhaps we should look for another producer, just as you say. This idea is really too good to give it up."

"Doesn't that sound just like Mr. Non?" Peppertree said almost tenderly. "Never a clear word. Never anything you can get your hands on. But what did you say - another producer? Don't make me laugh. There is no other Peppertree... Didn't you know my movies? My great Musicals? The ideal - another producer... Sounds funny to me. However I suppose I have a kind of obligation here, don't I? Even if I don't think much of the place at least I get free room and board so I suppose I should

do something for it. Okay. I will. Let's forget about the guaranties but I cannot take full responsibility either. Don't you think there should be some kind of contract? Heaven or not....Heaven, Hell and Hollywood aren't so far apart after all, as far as I can see...."

I winked at him. He seemed to me pretty stupid not to realize that one cannot behave in heaven as on earth. What an idea to ask God for guaranties and a contract...He had a lot to learn yet and I told him so.

He looked at me with half closed eyes, then he seemed to begin to wake up to the fact that he couldn't overdo. That settled it. We agreed that Peppertree should first formulate the story and then present it to the writers. That was the first step.

"Who are the writers?" he asked distrustfully. "I hope not the one you mentioned from Hollywood. What's his name? The one who shot himself"

"Perhaps," said Asrael with acidity, "you will be satisfied with Shakespeare, Goethe and Dante."

Peppertree did not look exactly happy.

"That sounds too highbrow to me," he sighed, "nothing for the popular taste. What does Goethe know about movies, or Shakespeare; it was only Olivier who cut put him across. Who was the third one? Dante? Never heard of him. Who is that guy?"

Asrael looked rather scornful.

"Have you never heard of The Divine Comedy?"

"Oh, he wrote a comedy, that sounds better. Get him! He may be the right one for me. But you have to promise me one thing: I'm the one who has the final say. I'm the one who will tell them what to write. Otherwise it won't be any popular success. I know my business. They are

just writers and writers never have any business sense. They are full of silly ideas. I've been in the show business all my life. I know what the public wants...."

Asrael was thoughtful for quite a while.

"We could find some great philosopher who might agree to be the judge between you and the writers. If we don't do that I am afraid there might be trouble. I wonder who would be the right one."

"How about Diogenes," I asked.

"That's the one who lives in a tub, isn't it?" asked Peppertree very disturbed. "No, we have around here enough nuts- don't take him."

Asrael looked distressed.

"He doesn't live in a tub anymore. He sits at the feet of God- and probably we couldn't get him away from this holy place if we wanted to. I really think Socrates might be better anyway. If we go about it in the right way perhaps we could interest him in this idea."

We got him: which means that Asrael called him from the holy of holies and he came reluctantly. He listened with a puzzled expression and then said:

"No evil can happen to a good man, in life or after death. I shall help you in your plight and try to give my thoughts to your problem. The soul takes nothing with her to the other world but her education and culture. I shall devote them to your service."

We thanked him very much and he retired shaking his head gently.

It was not very difficult to interest Shakespeare.

"A movie," he said. "How strange! A new art! It adds a precious seeing to the eye... Yes - I shall help and write. Of life, of love. As sweet and musical as bright Apollo's lute, strung with his hair;

and when Love speaks, the voice of all the gods makes heaven drowsy with the harmony... They brought my Hamlet to the screen, so I have heard - oh things get around in heaven. Perhaps King Lear will be my movie star. The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven. And as imagination bodies forth from things unknown, the poet's pen turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name..."

Quite elated we left Shakespeare and sought Goethe.

Although absorbed in his writing he listened to us.

"I shall do so if God wishes it," he said with dignity. "It would be good to do a play. One ought every day at least, to hear a little song, read a good poem, see a fine picture, and if it were possible, to speak a few reasonable words....

I could write a third part of Faust. A fiery chariot sweeps toward me on airy wings, My thoughts are eager to explore new spheres of divine creation. I feel, I feel: this third Faust will be my masterpiece...."

Leaving him, to search for Dante, we saw Goethe writing furiously and with utter abandon - the glow of his eyes following me like a flame.

We found Dante in deep meditation and waited watching him before we dared to approach him. He was very kind and said he would always do as God wished.

"The light bark of my genius lifts his sail," he said thoughtfully, "as one who from a dream awaken'd, straight, all he hath seen forgets; yet still retains impression of the feeling in his dream-

so I recall my writing of the Divine Comedy. Here I live in blissful meditation. Mine eye was closed and meditation changed to dream... And dream shall change to play. I shall continue my Divine Comedy. I have now seen heaven and the real hell - I know much better now. But we must find actors who shall rightly portray demonic fire, where in heaven shall we find them?"

"Judith Anderson," I said rather breathlessly. "I saw her Medea. Did that make me shudder! She will be perfect for your role. I am afraid she may even distract the devil from his pleasant duties.."

Dante seemed pleased. We thanked him and went to find a camera-man.

Asrael suggested Galileo. At first he seemed a bit confused by this latest assignment, but after we had explained he was ready to start and appeared quite eager to see a new variety of stars, such as those of our incomparable cast....

Asrael and I were quite delighted by our success in locating the right people. We still had to decide the question of the Director.

"You know," he said, "we must be very careful in selecting the right man for this job. Just think of all these minds, all these temperaments - not to mention Peppertree, who will certainly be a headache. I must confess I would prefer another producer, but since he started the idea we can't very well put him out. We will just have to be sure of selecting a director who would be stronger than he!"

"Who do you have in mind, Asrael?" I asked my friend.

"Oh I don't know. This is such a difficult question. Don't you have an idea?"

We sat down feeling rather depressed.

"What would you say to Julius Caesar?"

"No, I don't think so. Between you and me I don't like dictators - even when they are as great as Caesar. They all end in tragedy. You will never impress Peppertree with a murdered hero...We must have someone who had a successful ending. Popularity is the theme song."

He wriggled restlessly, sighed, shook his golden head and looked about him anxiously. I saw that he had someone in mind but didn't dare say so.

"Say it, Asrael," I begged. He beckoned to me, looking around like a conspirator.

"Don't mention this to anyone, Reinhold, it may be a crazy idea, but I think he would be the best we could find." He breathed deeply, then whispered "Abraham."

I was not surprised, nothing could surprise me anymore. I only said: "But do you think that we could get him?"

"That's what I don't know," answered Asrael worriedly. "It might seem an impertinence to ask him. You know he is always very busy with all the souls that rest in his lap - what could he do with them? On the other hand I almost think he might welcome some distraction. Come, let's ask him. He can always say no. I'm afraid he will, but we can try."

We tried. We went to the holy hall where Abraham sat on a throne of glory. I must say I admired Asrael's nerve in asking him to direct a movie..but after all what a movie! What a public! What a theatre!

When we came back to Peppertree and told him that Abraham had graciously agreed to be the director, he wouldn't believe it. He laughed at us and said, "Tell that to the marines. He would never do that! Not Abraham. And what could I do with a high spirit like that."

He would never listen to my advice. I had better resign. Abraham - ha ha - Abraham, of all people."

To make a long story short: we had to go back to Abraham and tell him to forget all about it. Peppertree was too frightened by the mere mention of his name. He knew enough of Abraham to know that he would be the stronger.

What now? We had no director.

I thought back to my earthly life. "How about Max Reinhardt?"

Peppertree winced. "Too old school for me." I had the impression that he enjoyed our embarrassment.

"How about Constantine Stanislavsky? You would certainly accept this genius, wouldn't you?"

"Wouldn't I know that you would try to bring in a Russian...No, my lad - no Russian invasion! I had enough of politics on earth. Skip him!"

"Look," I said impatiently, "why do we have to decide this question right now? First of all we must have a story. And that, Mr. Peppertree, is your job. Call the writers, tell them what you want. But don't forget that we are in Heaven. Make it something Heaven can enjoy and forget about Hollywood. I don't think that what you consider as art would go over very well here."

Peppertree could only give me a pitying smile.

"Leave that to me, young man," he said with pride and dignity - and off he went to do some deep thinking. I was very curious about the result...

I will never forget the next meeting. The only one who was quite at ease was Peppertree but after all he was the only one who hadn't

a trace of sensitivity!

He greeted Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe as if they had been old pals in Hollywood. "Hi," he said with a fleeting glance at them, "hi, boys, glad to see you. Nice place here, isn't it? Not Hollywood of course, but one can't be too demanding ... Main thing: business seems to be good. Now," and he spread his sheets before him, "let's get down to brass tacks. I understand that you are writer. You have been highly recommended to me and I'm willing to take the risk of employing you. It's certainly good luck for you fellows to be in the first movie story to be written here in - hmhm- Heaven. I have tried to make it easy for you. Always a considerate boss - that's important for the relationship, isn't it? Never mind- let's talk it over. So here is the story: A young fellow meets a girl somewhere in the woods. She is lost you know, has missed her way. Fell into the water. We can do something wonderful with this: beautiful lake, water lilies, you know. She is almost dead and he rescues her. It's very far from any habitation - so he carries her on his shoulders quite a way and then drags her along the dusty road. Then a car comes along and they get a ride. But there is an old man in the car - very rich you know and with your writers' imagination you'd see that he'd fall for the girl and want to get her away from the boy. Now the girl doesn't come out of her faint and doesn't know a thing, but the old guy and the young one start fighting about this girl - the old one has a gun - they always do - and he shoots the young one. Throws him out of the car, and off he drives with the girl. But the young one isn't dead at all. You'd know that because if he was where would the story be? He lies

there in the dust and has a dream. He sees the girl walking over a flowery meadow - of course one has to see this dream - and she sings. He likes that and joins in the singing, so it's a lovely duet. Now comes something very good. The girl - always in the dream - takes off her clothes, not all of them, don't be shocked, she has a beautiful bathing suit underneath; she jumps in the lake and swims; water fairies swim around her and the boy sings to them. Lovely, isn't it? The next scene is in the palace of the rich old man. The girl wakes up, looks around and is very distressed. Things like that happen: that a poor girl is very distressed to wake up and find herself in the apartment of a rich old man. Haha. This is a marvellous opportunity for another song and then..."

Asrael had listened with attention, his lovely elbows resting on the table. Now he interrupted Peppertree and said: "But this sounds like an opera, or what you call it? A musical? If I had known that, I would have asked the composers we have in mind to come. Shall I?"

Peppertree shifted papers around his desk and looked gloomy.

There was a long silence - then ante raised his head and said in a very hushed voice: "No greater grief than to remember days of joy, when misery is at hand ... This man can never understand. All hope abandon, ye who enter here... Look at these walls bedecked with testimonials of his worldly fame... The noise of worldly fame is but a blast of wind, that blows from diverse points and shifts its name, shifting the point it blows from... Even as I entered I felt it deep in me: to a part I come where no light shines...."

Peppertree was quite excited.

"God," he said impatiently, "can't you talk straight like anyone

else? You make me nervous. What do you mean: a part where no light shines? Do you mean hell? That's fine, just dandy; we can use hell. Write about it. We can even put that old one there somehow, that fellow with the gun. How do you do it - that's your problem, boys, you're writers, aren't you?"

Asrael saw that nothing could come out of that meeting - and because he wanted to have the movie made - made as Dante, Goethe and Shakespeare conceived it- he said: "Let's finish this meeting. Why don't you write down your ideas, Mr. Peppertree, and I will present your sketch to the writers. Then they can decide how they want to develop it."

I almost pitied Mr. Peppertree because he seemed so distressed. No one had ever before dared to propose anything like that to him. But he knew he had to take it, so he made a gesture which indicated: get out of here, just as he had done at N.S. when we went to his office...

The three poets departed in bewilderment.

At the door Dante turned and said: "God be with you, I bear you company no more."

Walking slowly over the silver path Goethe added: "Mediocrity has no greater consolation than in the thought that genius is not immortal... This man does not even need this consolation for he, mediocrity personified, can never sense genius as it crosses his path. He is but commonplace and knows not the meaning of Genius. One must forgive him his ignorance."

"Oh brave new world, that has such people in it," sighed Shakespeare. Let us not burden our remembrances with a heaviness that's gone.

We shall write as we see it. Trust William Shakespeare, friends.
He was ever precise in promise keeping."

Off they went to write the story - but I felt quite sure that Peppertree would find it just impossible....

In any case we had learned from this meeting. We knew now that it would be much wiser to talk to the cast and to the painters ourselves and let them bring their ideas and plans to Peppertree when they had formulated them.

But Peppertree was not to be subdued so easily. Suddenly he was beside us saying: "Look, I'm not at all stubborn. It doesn't have to be a musical. We can leave out the music. Or let's do a double feature, the public always likes that. They get a lot for their money. I thought of another wonderful story: there is a mother with ten daughters..."

We now found ourselves in the Hall of Fame amidst a lot of actors. They were standing around, drinking nectar and eating Ambrosia and looking as if it were Champagne. The first I recognized was Sarah Bernhardt. She was talking with Eleonora Duse as though they were close friends. I drew Peppertree's attention to those two women who would be the dream of any theatre director in any world. But Peppertree looked gloomy. "They are not young enough," he said, "they can only play grandmothers. Look at Duse's face! One can't laugh when one sees such tragedy. And Bernhardt! She is too thin. It's quite nice to have an ethereal figure - but there must be some flesh on the bones, and there isn't. I just can't imagine her in a pool."

I didn't listen to him but went to Sarah Bernhardt and told her about our idea.

"Oh yes," she said and threw her arms out in a broad and beautiful gesture, "oh yes, I will play. I will play again and suffer and be in ecstasy...What role am I to play?"

"The mother of ten daughters," said Peppertree in a dry tone.

La Bernhardt put her head sideways and looked very mischievous.

"Olala," she said, "and where are the fathers?"

"Ten children?" La Duse made a gesture of motherly tenderness.

"It is a picture of Italy. O bella patria mia! Ten children! Oh so much love. The father - the great lover- oh I see him- he is beautiful ---Sposo adorato-- but oh- ten children- ten sorrows...Deep, deep tragedy...lasciate me morire---- It is too much!" And she threw her arms about Bernhardt and wept - big, burning tears streaming down her hollow cheeks.

Bernhardt felt uncomfortable. She did not like Duse stealing the show.

"C'est terrible" she said, her voice like music, "ah, je m'en fiche de cette comédie. Elle m'embête...what is the matter with her? If she wants to play the mother she is welcome. I shall be the youngest daughter and have a wonderful love affair - une grande passion. I feel this story is French. Perhaps not the ten daughters " - there was a twinkle in her divine eyes - "but oh cet amour passionné... Ah they say I never knew real love. Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! I who was la grande amoureuse - and I shall play again and live and die dans un embrassement doux et fort...Ah quelle belle vie!..."

Peppertree had listened to all this with an expression of disgust.

"Listen honey," he said to La Bernhardt touching her shoulder with a little slap that made her wince, "let's be honest. You are too

old for, how do you call it:l'amour passionné...We have to face that. No illusions,Baby. Don't flatter yourself that you look like Marlene Dietrich. You don't.And that settles it. But all the young ones look frigid. What's the matter with this place? Have you no sex here? And that you call Heaven?"

"He is quite right," said a soft voice- and turning around we saw Mona Lisa sitting on a cloud,her feet crossed, smiling alluringly. " I shall play the youngest daughter - I am sure Mr.Peppertree will want me for that part."

Duse and Bernhardt exchanged glances.

"He would,would he?" said Duse. "Very interesting.And what do you know of acting,may we ask? Who are you but a painting?"

"I can smile. Lionardo shall put me in a frame - and there my smile will hover over you so that no one will pay any attention to your acting....Ecco - try to undo that!"

I really thought they would go for one another with their delicate little fists. For a moment it didn't seem at all like a heavenly scene, but Lili Lehmann stepped between them- and giving them a slight box on the ears - she had always been a brisk and energetic woman - said:"Shame on you!Fighting like that! Where is the director who is capable of bringing order to this chaos? Short of Hercules there is no one who could handle these crazy people...."

Hercules! That's true. He should be here!

Peppertree laughed.

"Hercules! You don't need a Hercules if you have a Peppertree. Just take these hysterical females off the payroll - you'll see how quickly they'll come back to their senses.One must be subtle.Hercules -indeed!"

But in the meantime some cherubs had been sent to look for him- and I must say we awaited him impatiently because the fight had gotten out of bounds: there were not only Mona Lisa, Bernhardt, Duse and Lili Lehmann, for Caruso and Chaliapin had joined in saying that they couldn't understand that no one had asked them to sing in this movie. Then Schumann-Heink appeared and said that if there was to be a mother of ten daughters who but she could play it? Hadn't she been the national mother of America once upon a time? She could play a mother ten times blessed to perfection.

Bernhardt again said, "O lala" and Schumann Heink forbade her to be frivolous. It was high time that Hercules arrived. He came looking quite stunning with a tremendous club in his big fist and his half-naked body showing all its muscles.

All the female spirits were excited and Bernhardt had the time of her life and forgot about fighting with the others....

La Duse stretched out her hands to Hercules and the fire of her glance seared his flesh. Enraptured she murmured: "Hercules - let me forget il bello Gabriele - forget amore eterno in your embrace..."

Leda who had just taken her swan out for a walk, almost stumbled when she saw Hercules. It even seemed I heard a long low whistle but perhaps I just imagined that.

Her swan tried to drag her along with him on his golden leash. He was very furious and hissed at her and Hercules - Leda followed him as if in a dream, her head turned backward.

I heard that they had a dreadful quarrel afterwards. She said to him: "Look, Jupiter, you have chosen to approach me in the disguise of a swan. Very sweet, and I love it, you are very exquisite, my dear. But one cannot always eat Caviar - sometimes a good juicy steak

is very desirable. You, my sweet Jupiter, are but caviar. Now guess what Hercules is...."

Poor swan! He was very hurt. Leda tried to soothe him and whispered endearments against his silken white head. Her idea that a swan on the leash is better business than a giant in the clouds proved correct. Hercules scarcely noticed her...

Peppertree by the way was quite shocked about Leda.

He drew me aside and whispered: "You know this swan business really disgusts me. I am a modern man, I know quite a lot about life and don't give a damn what people do, but this goes too far. A swan! It really embarrasses me." Then he turned away and his eyes almost popped out of his head. "In heaven's name, who is that - that fat one over there? Look, she's absolutely nude, and she certainly should not be. She has no reason for it. What do you think of that? A fine Heaven. Either they are sexless like beanpoles or they run around so that's a scandal to look at them. Who is she?"

It was Eve, creation's first woman. Even she fell for the husky giant. She approached him, her eternal apple in her hand and seemed rather sure of herself. Adam, trotting beside her wearily, tried to hold her back. "Don't behave as though you are Lilith," he whispered and I must say a rather sad and languid expression crossed his face as he mentioned the sweet and sinful Lilith...

Eve turned to him savagely. "Lilith - I like that! How dare you mention me in the same breath with that demon! Let her haunt the worlds sucking the blood from poor bewitched humans but don't say that name here."

Adam smiled. "I wouldn't be so sure that you are a model of virtue." He should know....

And we all know that Eve has had trouble enough. Didn't she start the whole thing? Wasn't she thrown out of the Garden of Eden? She should be ashamed of herself instead of playing the innocent one....

There she stood, apple and all, eyes demanding, looks curling like snakes over her shoulders....

I was glad that she had a complete fiasco with Hercules.

Peppertree just laughed out loud - so that she turned her head and looked at him intently. Then a smile lightened her rather sullen face and, slowly approaching him, she offered him her apple I almost collapsed with amusement.

Peppertree looked at her with a dazed expression - then he drew back and rubbing his nose, said soothingly: "Relax, Eve. I can see that you are quite a girl, but why don't you concentrate on Adam? I'm not surprised that you don't find this a very exciting project. Perhaps you have concentrated on him too much throughout the eternities. He looks rather weary. But don't try to get me. I like curls and smooth hair as we had it at N.S. You are not at all my type.. Get going, Baby...."

Eve wasn't at all hurt. She just went on her way, her big feet padding softly along the airy ground. She yawned and looked at Adam - and then, resigned, began eating her apple...

Peppertree watched her much amused, but then he turned to us and despair spread over his face.

"Now what is the outcome of all this? I ask you, Asrael - can't you find someone who could be my director? Why are you an angel may I ask? If I were the Boss I would have fired you long ago. Call Serge Romanoff. He will arrange everything. Where is he? I haven't seen

him yet - and for heaven's sake get Hercules out of my sight, he only causes trouble. By golly! Look at those angels. I'd like to know where they are taking him. They seem pretty excited and are looking, I am sure, for a dark corner. Funny Heaven! I almost start to like it here."

We suggested that he go with us to Moses hoping that he would get the right impression if he saw him in all his glory and would take him as a director. But he did not want to go with us at all. He said: "You are only losing time, I will never accept Moses. This is no C.B. de Mille production. I am Peppertree of N.S."

"You are in Heaven," said Asrael in a strict tone, "you are now a part of Heaven." (I couldn't help muttering: "God forbid....")

But what could we do? As the producer Peppertree had the last word. We proposed Napoleon, Alexander the Great - we even suggested Roosevelt. But he was stubborn as a mule. He could not forgive Napoleon his Waterloo - and as for Alexander - wasn't he described as a man of liquid eyes and melting glances? With a head like a lion? Absolutely impossible with all these frustrated females here in this highly moral Heaven. Wouldn't it be just the same as if we had taken cute little Hercules? And Roosevelt? He was quite horrified: taxes are high enough, no Sir, no new Roosevelt taxes...

Asrael suddenly lost his angelic patience.

"I shall ask whom we consider best, Mr. Peppertree," he said with that ringing voice which reminded me of the great strength beneath his gentle exterior. Darling Asrael! This was the right note to clear the confused dissonance of our fruitless conversations with Mr. Peppertree.

His whole attitude shanged in the twinkling of an eye - his bullying manner had vanished and he stood before my beloved angel like a soldier at attention. I suppressed a smile and off we went, Asrael and I. But when we were out of sight Asarel stopped and said: "That was a shameless bluff, Reinhold; I haven't the faintest notion whom we should take..."

Then with a cry of delight he spread his wings and rushed ahead with a terrific speed calling to me to follow him.

Asrael paid no attention to my questions - and knowing him I gave up asking. I only knew: he had the right person.

He had.

None less than Apollo was nominated as stage director - and even Mr. Peppertree's ironic smile vanished when he saw the splendor which the presence alone of the beautiful God seemed to lavish upon the stage.

In any case no one paid much attention to Mr. Peppertree's weak protests - and giving up his attitude of negativism he got into action.

That means he was all over the place...

No one was left in peace for the energetic little man still wanted to be the master of the situation in spite of the fact that he was quite unnecessary. Poor Peppertree! I really felt sorry for him, he seemed to be a complete outsider in Heaven and I wondered how he had ever managed to get in. Perhaps a relative had arranged it for him.

Strangely enough Apollo rather liked him. At first he couldn't understand what he really wanted - then a kind of friendship

developed between them which amazed me. It was a side splitting sight to see Peppertree standing before the radiant Apollo- little shrewd and almost ratlike, yet swathed in the glory of the rays which fell from the fiery eyes of the ever youthful god.

He explained to Apollo that there was really no story as yet since his scenario had been refused.

"Oh yes, there is," said Apollo. "Dante told me about it. It's about the erring soul who wanders through the world until it finds its way to eternal bliss. Didn't you know that?"

Peppertree was the picture of misery.

"What a story," he sighed. "How amusing! People will storm the box office to see it. I wash my hands of it - they will never listen to me. They just don't understand. Look, Apollo, you have been around or at least I think you have. A fellow with your looks - boy, that must have been something. So you ought to know that you can't have a story without some love interest."

"There is, as you call it: love interest. The soul is erring, it goes through many experiences before it comes upon the eternal truth."

"Let's stick to these errings, my lad..."

Peppertree seemed more confident now.

"But have you ever directed a play? Do you know a thing about it?"

"I am the protector of poetry and music, Mr. Peppertree."

"And then they say they don't want a musical... What intelligence! You should have seen my famous Musicals on the earth. I could have given you a job I'm sure. I could have told Mr. Non or Mr. Sense that you were a cousin. You know they always have a soft heart for relatives."

I could have done something for you."

"Thank you, you are very kind." Apollo looked at the little man kindly and sunlight shone on Mr. Peppertree so that he looked positively glamorous, almost like a movie star.

But he had no time to remain with his new friend. He had to see what Michelangelo was doing.

"Much too monumental, my dear boy," he said to the astonished artist. "This looks like a cathedral- and who wants that? Can't you put a swimming pool somewhere? We don't want to make the people feel creepy."

Michelangelo did not have the patience of Apollo. He just shooed Peppertree away.

As he left he saw an angel leaning against one of the marble columns of the stage set. I think it was Daphne. He looked at her and liked what he saw.

"Hi, Toots, who are you? Want a job? I'll give you a test. Hey, wake up, what's the matter with you?"

She blinked a little as if just aroused from sleep and said in a gentle voice: "I am in deep meditation."

"Whatever that is, it's no good. You can't make a face like that and have sex appeal. No, sweetheart, look more alive. We want temperament; we always had a lot of bombshells - you know: girls with terrific pep - that's what the public likes especially, believe Peppertree!"

He went closer to her and touched her shoulder - quite harmlessly, just like a good old uncle. But I never saw anything like it: she got pale- rose trembling, stretched her arms above her head- and was a tree. Just like that.

For a moment Mr. Peppertree was speechless. Then he smiled. "That's good- say-we could use that. It's a swell trick. How do you do it? Relax, Tootsy! I've seen what you can do. You get a job."

But he was not so pleased when the tree soared high above his head - into the blue ether of Heaven's Hall...

* * * * *

Everything was set for the rehearsal.

The shooting was to start immediately. Peppertree was very busy. He trotted from one marble column to the other, rushing the poor angels loaded with suns and stars, before him. He wanted more suns and other chains of stars hanging from the ceiling, swaying out of the blue vacuum into the glowing beauty of Michelangelo's stage setting.

He also ran to the green rooms of all the Stars, to look at them and approve or disapprove. For the first time he agreed with Duse and Bernhardt. He was as shocked as they when he saw their make-up. El Greco, the make-up man, stood quietly beside them letting the storm pass over him.

"Dio mio," cried Duse, "where is my face? Where is my divine brow? What have you done to the alabaster beauty of my skin?"

She was right: it was no longer Duse. Her coloring was incredibly beautiful - but the rosy glow of her cheeks was not at all like Duse. But what horrified her most was that her face was elongated like all the faces El Greco had once painted.

"But I see you like that," said El Greco with amazement. "Faces are that way. I cannot paint what I do not see."

What uproar that caused!

"Get someone else," said El Greco."This is silly anyway."

Peppertree appointed Rubens and everybody was pleased.

Even La Bernhardt got a real round bosom and looking into the mirror said again "o lala" and gave Rubens a languishing smile.

The shooting began - incredibly noble verses were spoken, the acting reached perfection and everyone was happy. Everyone but Mr.Peppertree.

He said to me:"What I can't understand is - who is going to pay all those actors and actresses and singers and what not? I've never had any meeting with the business people."

Asrael lifted an eyebrow."We have no business people here, Mr.Peppertree."

"What do you mean- no business people? Who figures out the cost? Who is the unit manager? Get Sergei Romanoff. He must estimate the cost immediately. It will be terrific, and where can we promote the pictures? Where are the small towns which always offer our best public? How high must we put the price for the opening for example? Who will come? Who is doing the publicity? It all seems absolutely dilettantic to me. Don't you know what art is? Art is - pleasing the public, making the most of each person, each situation. Taking in all the money possible.That's art."

Asrael was quiet for a while, then we looked at each other and both sighed. I said to him:"Don't try,darling Asrael. You might just as well talk Chinese."

But he said very softly:"Mr.Peppertree, we have no publicity. There is no money paying public. We don't want to have anything to do with money.You are in Heaven."

" Okay,okay,I know: in Heaven. But why are we making this movie, I ask you?"

"For art's sake. For God's sake. For Heaven's sake."

Poor Peppertree stood up,put together the papers on his desk, looked at us with a very dignified expression and walked out.In the doorway he turned and with as much energy as was left him after this knock-out blow said:" I never heard of art given for art's sake, for Heaven's sake! What a place, for heaven's sake,what a crazy place!"

So he left us forever. I have no idea what became of him. Perhaps he went to hell. I almost said: I hope so,but being in Heaven O don't dare to commit myself...

VIII.

Eternal Bliss

Peace was restored in heaven now that Hollywood was forgotten. The great spirits floated undisturbed in blissful quiet through the endless blue, and I myself felt no desire for excitement or new thrills. Slowly a kind of enchantment seemed to weave about me, enveloping me and making me deliciously tired.

The light which at the beginning of my heavenly experience had seemed bright and radiant, became soft and dreamlike - the fragrance around me intoxicating. Clouds - silvery and unreal - were wrapped about me as if gentle hands lulled me to sleep...

Time like the blue air beneath my feet had neither beginning nor ending.

What is time?

Only a word which is used in worlds.

A word without meaning.

A human word

It seemed strange and utterly foreign to me, to my real self.

* * * * *

I lie upon a shining white cloud in the endless hall of Heaven. Asrael sits beside me, his hands clasped about his knees, his gaze sweeps sadly over the infinite distance. He looks so beautiful, so kind and wise - it makes me sad that our ways must part....

"Asrael," I say very softly, we have come to the end of our journey together. I feel it. Looking back over my many lives, as I should in

this hour of parting, I realize that they have been a long stairway which I have had to climb - and I have reached the end. Is it not so? It was so strange to awaken each time when I had died. Each time to know that one more step had passed and each time wishing fervently to remember at my next rebirth - to have learned from the previous life and to use my knowledge. But each time I had forgotten... I was blind to the wisdom buried within me, the wisdom of the life before...

I had to learn anew, always anew.

Now everything seems blurred to me - and the existence which I have known here in the endless realm of heavenly bliss also fades away. I know that I never ceased to learn and that even here I have passed through many stages of development. When I came I was like a stumbling child. Now I have learned and I am wiser, wise enough to know that the greatest happiness will be to lie - a tiny speck of dust - at the feet of God....

Do you remember when I painted God's image in the Hall beyond the golden clouds? I painted with music. Music streamed from my hands - and when I took the colors into my long slender fingers these colors sang to me in a harmony almost unbearable in its beauty.

I stood in awe before the painting.

It seemed to me sublime.

I knelt down, worshipping it humbly.

And when I lifted my eyes to His face, to the face of God which I had painted, I felt His eyes burning through my whole being like two suns - and I felt how these suns, these eyes of God, devoured me.

I sank to the ground and felt: this is the last and everlasting bliss.

I know He is calling me, telling me: it is time. I have now but one desire: to vanish in His glow....

Nothing is left of what I was. And long before I breathed and long before I was - where had I been? Have I been a ray of light touching His brow? Have I been a fraction of the cloud where His head may rest? Soon I shall know....

But my loving heart is heavy with one grief: our ways will part, my Asrael. Where will you be when I shall pass into the sleep of deepest peace? You are part of my existence. How can I sleep not knowing where you are? You were in me and with me through eons of timeless time...Where will you be, beloved Asrael?"

How far away he seems! His form has melted into nothingness, his face, radiant and golden, is only a faint and shimmering light, his eyes two burning stars.

I am afraid - so near the goal - I am afraid.

My eyes are heavy, my thoughts dimmed.

I cannot see - I only feel the warmth and light of golden fire- and lips, burning and sweet, pressed to my brow....

Asrael's voice is like a silver thread of music: "Go in peace. I am with you throughout eternity. Don't question - I cannot answer you. I obey and serve...."

Hands are lifting me - glowing loveliness transforms me into light and air...

- 146 -

Sweet slumber cradles me in lofty arms.....

And happiness is mine- happiness unending.

I live, I live - a part of all the universe ! I shall be here
and there and everywhere - perhaps in orsy clouds of dawn - perhaps
in softly sighing wind- perhaps in the endless surge of a myriad
of oceans - perhaps in the song of stars - in rainbows' colorplay-
or in a smile of God ... I do not know.....

IX.

Back to Earth

All this was nothing but a dream ...Without opening my eyes I know what I shall see: not angels and not the golden gates of Heaven's sacred Halls - no, I shall see my bedroom and everything which I once loved - a long time ago, it seems! Outside the window: New York - treetops of Central Park, skyscrapers and the warm sun of spring ... The spicy air floats through the room,exciting and exhilarating as only New York can be.

And yet I must summon courage to face life again - and earth and the complicated destiny of a great tenor - the sad fate of realizing that I must soon bid farewell to glory ...This thought lies like a heavy burden on my weakened heart. But I have learned. I learned from Heaven and from Hell, I learned from my beloved Asrael. - Where is he now? Why can I not feel his presence, nor see his eyes filled with a light unknown to earth....

Weakly I try to look about me.

Lo and behold: A creature stands at the window,tall and slender, clad in white. The sunshine weaves a kind of sheen around her and her face seems beautiful.

"Asrael," I say with a trembling voice,"Oh Asrael..."

But that was not the thing to say because the creature moves toward the bed, not at all an angel but a very efficient looking nurse, and plunges a thermometer into my mouth, saying soothingly: "There,there,be quiet now..." And suddenly aunt Lisa sits beside me

holding my hand. It is funny how time seems to jump: I suppose I must sleep a great deal and whenever I wake up the situation has changed. For instance Bridget now sits where aunt Lisa just smiled at me. "Hello" she says and I honestly think she has tears in her eyes. "Hello, old boy. Good to see you almost normal again. What a shock you gave us. Passing out like that! Frightened me to death. But you will see how quickly you'll recover now. And I have a surprise for you."

"No surprise please." I have to smile, knowing how difficult it is for her to wait to tell me the news. "All right, shoot if you must. I have to take it. I have to accept life after having been so happy in Heaven."

Bridget looks alarmed.

"He is delirious," she whispers to the nurse and both the silly women look at me with concern.

It makes me impatient, but I am too weak to explain. I will do that later...

Time passes. My strength begins to return and with it a new interest in all those things which had interested me before I - before I dreamed that I died.

It was quite a while before aunt Lisa and Bridget could bear to tell me that during my illness Richard arren had sung Tristan with sensational success. Why must they be so careful and annoyingly subtle? I really don't like to ne thoight a hysterical old singer, trembling lest anyone else he considered better than I.

"Look, aunt Lisa," I said with as much energy as I could summon,

" I am glad if he had a success. He should. He is excellent and it was very petty of me to stand in his way. I never will in the future, I don't know whether I want to go back. I learned so much on this flight - oh if I only could tell you everything that happened to me! Will you believe - oh please believe me, aunt Lisa - I heard Dante saying: "the noise of worldly fame is but a blast of wind..." He is so right. A blast of wind! And I cared so much- but I don't anymore. I am sorry that I am back here: I mean I am sorry to be alive again. It was so good to be away from it all....And I miss Asrael so very much. Aunt Lisa, you would have liked him!"

"Asrael - Who is Asrael?" she whispers and I see fright in her good eyes. Oh- its better to keep quiet. They will never understand.

The nurse starts to be official. "I think it is better we let the patient rest." Her tone was almost threatening.

No - I don't want to rest. Apparently I had rested for quite a while.

My eyes travel about the familiar room. Flowers everywhere. And there are clusters of mimosa - very lovely, but the odor is too strong. "They are from Joan," aunt Lisa tells me and her voice takes on its familiar tone of disapproval.

"Throw them out, they stink," I answer....

For a moment aunt Lisa is speechless - a rare occurrence I must say. "She telephones the whole day," she says nervously. "What shall I tell her when she calls again? Do you want to see her? Shall she visit you? You know that I wouldn't like this idea - but I don't want to interfere. Shall I tell her to come? Would it make you happy?"

"Tell her to go to Hell."

That thought makes me chuckle: how she would love it: I mean that strange place called hell - all the diamonds, the beautiful devils! Especially Lucifer would impress her...Yes, by all means let her go to hell...Of one thing I'm sure: I am cured of this infatuation. Cured forever. My dream, if such it was, has taught me to see her as she is. I think I am finished with everything: with singing, with ambition, and - with a sigh I must admit it - perhaps even with love....

* * * * *

But why with singing?

My voice may not be what it has once been, but there is much more than the mere voice. I have all that Warren is struggling for: I have the poise, the deepened expression, I have lived a long life and I have learned from living, from joy and sorrow. Now I have learned from death and from God and the Devil. And last not least - from Asrael...There will be much more in my singing now than there has ever been before....

For what do I lie here - like a man finished with life? I am not. By Jove, life has not been given back to me that I should retire. Richard Warren - indeed! I feel strength returning, the old strength to fight my battles and win them....

Bridget has been watching me very shrewdly. Now her time has come. She is bursting with news: she has a tremendous offer for me from Hollywood. A movie, just as though it had been written for me -

a brilliant star part and as for the fee - I just won't believe it. Almost stammering, Bridget whispers into my ear a fabulous sum. A sum which really does not surprise me after my dream experience. But I am not especially tempted. I feel I need a longer rest. After that I want to go back to the Metropolitan. Back to a challenge! To show that the old Tristan can still compete with a fresh young voice... That is my heart's desire. Not Hollywood...

I tell this to Bridget; she purses her lips and starts to powder her immaculate nose. She tries to persuade me - dollars fly about like balls - along with subtle remarks about a faithless public now entranced by a rising new tenor....

Aunt Lisa sits there like a sphinx. She says that it is my decision alone which counts and that no one has a right to influence me. That I know what she, personally, thinks of Hollywood... There is scorn in her eyes and scorn in her voice...

I feel very alone.

"Think it over," says Bridget clicking her purse. "But not for too long, darling. You know how these people are. They may change their mind." Out she goes, annoyed with me for not sharing her delight over this offer.

Aunt Lisa kisses my forehead. "Sleep well, Reinhold. Think it over carefully. Take your time..."

I have thought it over for days, but I cannot make up my mind. It would certainly be much easier to play a part in a movie with some arias and songs in it instead of wrestling with the difficulties of big Wagnerian roles... And all this money! No one can blame me

for hesitating to refuse. If I should some day resign from the opera I should have to alter my standard of living. I could go on for some time in the movies. The parts would certainly not be breathtaking - I would have to play fathers and old singers - perhaps even comic roles...But - but - but....

Bridget starts being very urgent, and it seems as though I must reach a decision to-day. I am already out of bed and feeling much better. Joan has forced (or smiled?) her way in and looks lovelier than ever, her hair honey gold, her skin delicately tanned by the sun lamp. Ravishing creature - but I feel a hundred years old and quite grandfatherly. She senses that and it saddens me to see that she seems to feel relieved. Poor child. She shall not sell herself to anyone old and done with...

"I have a surprise," she smiles at me and her eyes glitter, not only with their usual radiance but with a peculiar expression of triumph. I can wait to hear about that. I have had quite enough surprises.

Aunt Lisa knits one of her mysterious woolen scarves; they are supposed to be for some charity but seem very useless to me. I enjoy the stillness and seeming peace even if it is the calm before the storm.

Then Bridget bursts in, efficiency personified, very business like, and casts a cold glance of surprise in Joan's direction - just above her golden head....I see that Bridget is on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She cannot stand any longer my indolent "I -don't - care attitude. She is just on the point of opening her mouth for a

long and passionate tirade when Joan says with great relish, obviously enjoying herself no end, " I have a movie contract for a star role with Everest Pictures Incorporated."

This is really a bombshell. We are all speechless."How did you get it?" I ask curiously.

"How does one get it? I just got it! I met a producer - God is he sweet! - and he gave me a test. He says I am just the one he has been looking for, and has given me a seven year contract."

I did not want to destroy her illusion by telling her that a seven year contract is just a fake; so I only said, "Congratulations, darling."

Bridget emerges from her compact having powdered³ her nose viciously: "Just the one thing he is looking for - what for? That's the question."

Joan folds her arms beneath her charming bosom. "For a star role, Miss Collier. Perhaps I may even consider taking you as my press agent."

"Thanks, I can't wait ... When do you leave?"

"To-morrow."

"Bon Voyage," says aunt Lisa from the bottom of her heart.

The three cats are at it again! But this time it doesn't make me nervous. In fact it amuses me no end.

"Don't let them lighten your hair. Lemon color is not becoming to you. I like you as a natural. This deep honey gold is just the thing."

" I am not a natural," says Joan with an I-don't-give-a-damn expression. " I am really a brunette. This is just dyed."

Funny how that hurts me. Ass that I am! To believe always that - Oh what the hell! Never mind. She will soon be lemon yellow and has my blessing whatever she does...

"Give my love to Fabian," I chuckle, "You will meet him. He may be your start. He is quite green and totally dead. You may not like him."

The three women look at me. Of - I shouldn't have said that. Aunt Lisa picks up the thermometer. They are always sure I have a high fever whenever I mention anything from my dream.

Joan chatters on happily. "My producer - his name is Rosenbush - funny, isn't it - says that I should buy a house in Beverly Hills, or perhaps just rent one at first. You know he understands me so well, all my dreams. You know they now have inside swimming pools too: one just slides right from bed and swims out of the room. Imagine! And there are Bougainvilleas everywhere, all the balconies are covered with them. And all the lovely pepper trees!"

Peppertree! It gives me a shock. Mr. Peppertree the great producer! I am sure he would like Joan too...

"One has bathing suits of brocade. Fancy that! I am so excited. And to meet all the stars - many are married - what a shame! But there are always some bachelors left - and I look forward to meeting them all!"

"And your great career, Joan, don't forget that little unimportant business of a career," smiles Bridget showing all her teeth, quite like Lilith in the window of hell... "Speaking of a career, I think it is time to talk about you, Reinhold. What is your decision?"

Joan of course did not give us any peace until she knew everything. The fact that I also had an offer from the city of glamor rather took

the wind out of her sails. That at least gave me another moment to think and to struggle.

"Look,Bridget," I said finally "I'll give you my answer to-morrow morning. Call me at nine and I promise I'll give you a Yes or No."

Bridget loomed there before me like the Final Judgment itself.

"Okay,to-morrow morning at nine sharp.I'll call,Bless your decision,darling.I hope it will be Yes."

Bridget loves dramatic exits. This was a good one.

Joan was rather taken aback. She had prepared a sentimental farewell- the young fairy queen floating away in a cloud of sunlight, bidding goodbye to the brokenhearted old friend who sits dying and resigning with dignity. Now this well rehearsed scene was no longer appropriate.

"I think we may have a thunderstorm," she remarked irrelevantly, looking at the clear blue evening sky. "I must run now.Bye,darling, meet you in Hollywood,maybe." I saw her depart without any sadness on my part.

We are very quiet,aunt Lisa and I. It takes me quite a time but then I have to say it:"Look,let's be honest. I have come to the end of my opera career. This sensation - Warren as Tristan,has killed me. I know that. It's all right and quite as it should be.He is young and I am at the threshold of old age. The world belongs to youth, now more than ever. But if I retire. what will life mean to me? Iam accustomed to the music of applause, to the agonizing delight of singing, of performing. I don't want to stand in the shadow of life, I want to go away,and yet I don't know where to go. Isn't this

Hollywood offer a sign from heaven for me? Doesn't a new door open before me to new glamor, new triumphs? And = last not least - to a new and spectacular way of making a lot of money much more easily?"

Joan was right: a thunderstorm seems to be on its way. It is rumbling far away and a short flash of lightning strikes my eyes. Something seems to whisper through the wind which suddenly raises the lace curtains as if with impatient hands. I try to catch what it says but I cannot understand...

Aunt Lisa looks at me with strangely luminous eyes. It is almost as if two stars would shimmer in her beautiful old face. I look at her fascinated.

"Reinhold," her voice is deep and warm like a cello - "listen to me. I don't want to give you any advice. You must make your own decision. But I shall tell you what I think. You see, my son, I was never a great singer. I was good, I had success, but I never conquered the world. It was not in me. I loved Vienna and was satisfied to be a favorite there. I never experienced the restless yearning which is the soul of real greatness. I was contented- and contentment is a dangerous drug. It kills the lust for life and struggle, the lust for dreams and adventurous living. You, my child, have been great from the beginning. Greatness was inborn in you and I have watched it develop with both delight and fear. You made your way, Vienna could not hold you, the world was your stage. You conquered it - with your great art, only your art. You went your way with a certain ruthlessness following your inner urge - following it for good or bad - never questioning whether you hurt someone else, never considering established

rules because you created your own world, untouchable and perfect in its imperfect ways. That was your life, Reinhold. But you were never commercial. You never sold your art by cheapening it. You could not do that because it wasn't and isn't in you. Don't cheapen it now. Don't step down just because you don't yet see the steps which will lead you further upward. Believe me: they are there. We never shut one door in life without opening another. And when the very last door must be closed, we will find ourselves upon the threshold of a much more beautiful existence than we have ever known before.

Believe me, darling: I know the anguish in your heart. I know that a farewell is full of bitterness if you don't learn to open the doors and windows of your being so that you may learn anew to see, to hear, to create. You are an artist. You are not just a singer. Your art embraces the whole world of art not just music. You will find it opening before you with welcoming arms. And you will be surprised how little of it you have known before.

Now good night, go to sleep, Reinhold dear, and may you dream of Asrael." As she bent over me I felt a tear, warm and trembling, on my cheek.

The room is suddenly flooded with splendor! A flash of lightning like a cry of joy, a flaming "Yes!" breaking through the open door of heaven straight into my heart....

I know my way. I have decided. There will never be a Hollywood for me... Silently my lips form a loving word and I murmur to myself, half asleep: "Thank you, Asrael."

I must have slept for quite a while.

Moonlight strikes my eyes, and a broad ray of its silvery light

falls on the white paper beside my bed. What is it? Ah - Bridget left the movie script ...Very handy...She thinks maybe I will read it, be tempted, and say yes.

I shall not.

My decision is final.

And because it is final it won't matter whether or not I read the script. I might be amused. I feel so wide awake - perhaps it will lull me to sleep again.

Turning on my bedside lamp I take up the script - but with a slight feeling of hesitation.

By golly- it is a lovely part! An important part, if not as Bridget had said, the star part, No - that could not be - yet. They have a very different public in the movies. Perhaps the name Reinhold Wilbrecht wouldn't mean much to them. It would be rather exciting to have to win a new kind of public, not only music lovers but also the masses who seek entertainment for just what it is - distraction. To bring real art and good music to them - wouldn't that be something worth while?

The story seems rather naive. A young couple in love - a quarrel, misunderstanding, happy ending. I am the father, a famous tenor. Quite dignified. I am even a little flirtatious. The girl for whom my heart beats faster than befits my years in the end marries my son....One could play that role without being at all ridiculous. Look at Pinza for instance. I am no older than he is. And he made legions of women swoon on Broadway with his devastating sex appeal. Perhaps I could too.. With the right kind of make-up I could look quite -let's say attractive.

Aunt Lisa - my God, it was quite a different artistic world which she knew, a world in which there were no compromises. Beautiful, but no longer at all practical. Life has changed with all its values. Why should I stay old fashioned and refuse to face simple facts ? I made my final decision but after all, no decision is final until it is put down in black and white. One must be flexible - I think I am... Yes, I am...

I shall sign this contract, now, before aunt Lisa's sad eyes can look at me again with disapproval and disappointment...

The storm returns. It really seems as if someone up there in the sky had gone berserk. With the next flash of lightning I realize: it must be Asrael. My gentle, kind friend Asrael! He is furious - and how could I blame him? He did not like Hollywood - and now he would have to accompany me and live through all the nonsense called "art" - a kind of art which he, like aunt Lisa, cannot appreciate. And which, I must confess to myself, I cannot either....

I am rather mixed up. It has been a dream. Perhaps there is no Asrael. I am almost sure there isn't. I am still so weak my thoughts are very confused. I should really take myself in hand and forget about this dream.

I feel strangely hot - an iron band seems to tighten about my chest. I can scarcely breathe. An open window will help - I want to feel the wind sweep over me - as it did on Mount Everest when Asrael, Fabian and I rested on its summit....

The wind is cool and refreshing - but it was certainly silly to stand at the open window with the manuscript in my hand: suddenly

a whirlwind rushes through the room snatching the movie script. Paper flies about in wild disorder and pages soar out of the window - high over the tree tops of Central Park like wheeling glistening birds.

That is too much!

Asrael, you should be ashamed of yourself! You seem to forget that I am again a human being and no longer the helpless ghost who was forced to follow you.. a savage fury seizes me - and leaning out of the window, I shout into the howling, crashing storm:

"Stop that, Asrael! I shall do what I think is right. I shall..."

Postscript

I am sorry that there is no better ending to my story.

I had an argument with my agent. He says one just can't let a story peter out like that. He is quite right - but what can I do? The strange communication between Reinhold and myself stopped suddenly. I awakened abruptly from the trancelike state to which, throughout the story, Reinhold's incredible experiences had reduced me. I know this is quite understandable and I certainly cannot explain it. But nevertheless this is the situation: Reinhold and I had long been good friends and colleagues, we had sung many operas together and had always liked each other, but why he should have chosen to communicate his thoughts and dreams to me I can't imagine. But the fact remains- he did. Then just at the moment when his story was reaching a dramatic climax it stopped with a suddenness which shook me.

I realized why the next morning when I opened my morning paper and read the sad news of his death...

So this time Reinhold had really died.

I sat for a long time - not knowing what to make of it. The great question was Asrael!!!

Had he really snatched Reinhold away from a life he could not bear to share any longer?

Nonsense!

I must keep my sanity and stop confusing dreams and reality.

There was no Asrael. There was no Fabian. How could I doubt this for a moment?

* * * * *

- 162 -

I went to the funeral. It was uncannily like the funeral in his
- I should say "our" - dream.

Perhaps I should take a rest, go on a fishing trip, even though
I hate catching fish, but at least sit beside a quiet stream and
watch the fish swimming happily under the cool ripples....

Because something happened which made me doubt my sanity.
After the funeral I had to go back and look again. I had to convince
myself that I had just imagined it.

With trembling heart I looked at the next tombstone.

And there it was:

John Fabian
born 1882 Pocatello, Idaho
died 1930 New York City

* * * * *

Lotte Lehmann

Characters in finished version:

Preface, 1-3

Prologue, 4

Unidentified teller of Reinhold Wilbrecht's tale, "an old friend"

I. Tenor in Space, 5-40

Reinhold Wilbrecht, tenor
Aunt Lisa
Joan, Wilbrecht's mistress
Richard Warren, a younger, rival tenor
Cheri, W's poodle
Bridget Collier, W's agent
Asrael, W's guardian angel
Toscanini
Director Jones of the Metropolitan
Reporters at the funeral
Johnny Fabian, W's neighbor in the graveyard
Marius, Fabian's angel, 39

II. Hollywood, 41-57

Asrael
Peppertree, the producer, 42
Mack, the publicity man, 46
Putzi, the coach, 47-48
Jim, the makeup man, 49
The hairdresser, 50
Betty Eaton, 51
Tom Matson, the writer, 53
Joan, 56
Marius, 57

III. Tenor Versus Whale, 58-68

Fabian
Asrael
Marius
Angel at the gate of heaven
Cherubs
St. Peter

IV. Hell, 69-79

Satan
Lesser demons
Lilith, 70-71
Asrael
St. Peter
God

V. Rebirth, 80-85