

'A JOURNEY TO THE
HAMBURG HEATH'

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5000 words.

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We drove to Rotterdam and ate there. I was surprised at the hugeness of the sky, like a blue and white dome stretched over the earth, as I'd never seen it before. The flatness and lack of trees makes the sky so important in Holland; everything is contained in the sky and touched by it, made gloomy or radiant by it; and you see it in people's eyes. There is a wonderful emerald quality in the light as you sometimes see it on the east coast of England, like an early-morning sunlight on sand, suggesting endless spaces.

There was a pale evening sun with high, white clouds, and people were cycling home from work along the banked roads that went above the fields. Rotterdam was strange, with coloured buildings shining like objects in a machine so vast that it turned you into a kind of squalid midget. The biting wind swept through the streets. Nearly everything was new. A few of the old streets remained, their houses squeezed close together. The roads had a gloomy hollowness but sometimes there was a bright corner with café-tables and coloured chairs, and restaurants with walls of glass, such as you see in German towns now. The inn where we ate belonged to older times, like a German bier-stube, the seats wooden with tall backs, the tables thick and sturdy, with a massive tiled stove reaching to the ceiling, and painted dancing figures on the panelled walls, and newspapers in wooden clips hanging from pegs, everything dark with cigar-smoke. We asked for wine and the waiter, dark and Italian-looking, told us that they stocked a good young Bordeaux 'loose', which we ought to try. It tasted

of grapes, anyway. We reflected to each other that in an ordinary wine less than a year old you stood a better chance of getting something pure than in nine out of ten so-called vintages. We pride ourselves on what we know about wine, which isn't much.

It was the first wine we'd had for a long time and it made us feel delightfully tired and heavy, so we decided to go to the next small town and stay there for the night. The familiar sense of being foreigners grew on us again. After a lot of travel I suppose the feeling grows of being a natural visitor---everywhere: a visitor to life, almost. You enter the warmth a moment and then go. There is the utmost freedom of self, you are stripped for a moment of age, moods, even bitter personal struggle, in a perilous anonymity; and the challenge is how to learn to be a visitor gladly, to really be a visitor in yourself, as we all are in the end.

We asked the waiter how far the next town was, on the way to the German frontier, and he told us Gouda, about half-an-hour away. That was perfect. He added with a smile that the people there probably went to bed early, so we should hurry.

We reached Gouda soon after ten, when everything was deserted. The outskirts were barren as parts of Rotterdam had been, with identical, treeless streets on rising ground. The sun had just gone down. First we had to cross a canal and wait for the bridge to be lowered, as a barge was passing underneath. There was this wonderful silence of Holland, coming from the flatness of the earth. The barge, clean and polished, with no cargo in the hold, stole through the night silently, gliding underneath us with a perfect motion, her engines making only the faintest throb in her bowels while the water trickled and ebbed along the sides. A man was at the helm and after the bridge had been passed he handed

the wheel over to his wife, in a tiny, glowing cabin where the brass and paintwork shone. Then the bridge was lowered again, mechanically from inside the bridgehouse, and we went on into the town.

There were further dry, ugly outskirts, all the windows with their curtains open in the Dutch manner, showing neat rooms inside, some of them with polished sideboards and televisions, others with the signs of a meal, solid and scrupulous. Then to our surprise we came to the heart of an old town with canals running through it and a tall church; a tall late-mediaeval town-hall stood alone in the middle of the cobbled square, its shutters bright red, its walls sloping massively, taller than all the houses round the square but at the same time wonderfully unassuming, everything flat and still all round it like a lake. When we saw it, a black shadow in the dusk three storeys high, with its neat red shutters and spire, we felt a sudden relief, as if we'd found a real home for the night. Towns were made for travellers once. They had a special humble touch that consoled and protected.

The shops and hotels round the square glowed and twinkled, tiny compared with the gleaming shadow in the middle. We found a hotel in a sidestreet, with a canal running by it. The staircase to the rooms was so steep, and the steps so high, that it was like climbing an endless tower: the owner, a pale, thin, lined man with still eyes, told us with a quick, jerky smile, in a breathless way, that many sailors had slept in these rooms over the centuries, and that they'd climbed to the 'crow's nest', as they'd called these rooms, in every sort of state, but usually drunk. And he smiled at us constrainedly. The place was simple, clean and bare. First he showed us a tiny double room with a balcony

overlooking the canal, but that was noisy because of the trucks and motor-cycles that roared past below, and we asked for two single rooms instead. One of these gave out on to the courtyard of a hospital, and the other had no window at all, only a fan-light, which he said would supply us with all the air we needed 'for the night'.

We went downstairs again, to sit in the café for a few minutes before going to bed, and I ordered a beer. No, it was a temperance-hotel; and the man nodded his head as he told us this, his eyes pale, as if defending an attitude which we'd just challenged. His voice and the way he looked at us were mild but at the same time he was emphatic, with a puritan implacability which showed in the way he at once returned to the book he was reading, concentrated on it palely and bloodlessly. He added, looking up for a moment, as if to leave us free to sin if we wanted to, that other hotels in Gouda did serve beer and that this one was the only one that didn't. He then put his book aside, seeing perhaps that beer didn't mean so very much to us, and asked if we were English. I was about to explain that I was English while my wife was German by origin, Austrian, Swedish and American by upbringing, and English by marriage, when the opportunity passed, as it usually does. He spoke again, this time to my wife only, as if he thought me a trifle hot-headed to start rambling on about nationalities, and told her that if we had time the following day we should visit the church, only a few yards away, which had the most wonderful stained-glass windows imaginable. And he made it seem that there was something moral about going to the church, and that we'd secretly determined to shirk it: for he nodded in a quick, emphatic way, his lips pursed as if he'd just finished a

reprimanding speech, and returned to his book, seated by the bar where there was a coffee-urn steaming. The room was bare, with a front window like that of a shop, and the tables had gloomy plastic tops.

But morality doesn't interfere with your sleep, not if you've given it as little offence as we had that day, and we slept soundly all night, both of us, my wife with the hospital outside her window and me with a fanlight overhead. In the morning we went down to breakfast and were amazed to see that another part of the long bare room, which we thought had been given over entirely to temperance, consisted of a snug dining-room with a carpet and pleasant cloth-covered tables for the hotel-guests, while the daily customers sat next door drinking coffee and smoking cigars.

I had had a strange dream in which someone offered us a house as a lodgings, consisting only of one room, built in a perfect square with french windows and rather ornate brickwork in the pseudo-Gothic style, and slanting in the most peculiar way like the tower of Pisa. Next to it was the owner's house, which seemed quite normal. And both stood in a bright-green, carefully kept lawn with cypress-trees and clipped bushes, close to a wide deserted roadway. The room itself reminded me of houses where I'd stayed in Austria---bright, with heavy curtains and plenty of wood, and glowing lamps, and fat, shining, tiled stoves. In this square, leaning room I was questioned by the police, who wanted to know---of all things---where my ideas came from. I seemed to understand what they meant because I was about to reply, but they interrupted me, picking up the book I was reading, and said that they noticed I had once expressed an idea from that book, and did I know the author? To which I said, Yes, I'd met him. And there the dream ended. It was a troubled dream which left

me with the feeling that my life---and that of my wife, who'd been questioned before me, and not allowed to warn me in time---was under surveillance: and on account of the thoughts that passed privately and silently through my head.

But the sun was shining, and outside everything looked clean and gleaming. I can still remember the policemen in that dream---dark, rather reticent, methodical, concentrated on their note-taking, without offence, abstracted from us, with blue uniforms and peaked caps.

When we'd had a breakfast of eggs, ham, cheese and coffee we went to the square and found a vegetable and fruit market, with women crowding round the stalls. On one side of the square, squeezed in between houses, stood the weight-house as it was called, with a fresco above showing the round Gouda cheeses being weighed. There were red-currants to buy, and soft, pink peaches. We bought fruit and half a Gouda cheese, then decided to obey the moral imperative from the night before and visit the church. It lay behind the square with houses and canals all round it, hugging its massive walls. All morning the bells had been ringing, rather like the Salzburg Glockenspiel, only less dainty and baroque: these played with a mild, haunting little tune again and again, floating over the town, high-up in a tower, visible from the ground as they swung to and fro. To get into the church we had to ring at the sexton's house close by, opposite the side-entrance, buy tickets at his little office and then be escorted across: the door was opened with a key, and we were told that when we wanted to leave again we should ring a bell by the door inside; then we were closed in with several other people, captive inside a great semicircle of stained glass. The windows were

huge, depicting all sorts of subjects from the Last Supper to the independence of Holland. The biggest was over twenty yards high; and there were sixty-four windows in all. A wonderful silence hung over the church, with the sound of the bells high in the air outside and drifting down sometimes, muffled and gentle. The pews were in the form of a raised auditorium round the pulpit, rather like a lecture-room or a political assembly, the seats rising in tiers, with a long table below, as if for clerks to make their notes. And there were doors leading from it, out into the church; the altar was far away, outside. My impression was of a civic, moral religion which was discussed and hammered out inside this closed, wooden, intimate, even festive structure from the baroque age. It was put there in the middle of the Catholic church, which was spacious and flat, without an air of discussion. It reminded me of the Sheldonian theatre in Oxford; the dark wood suggested people doing things in community; one could imagine the mysteriousness of the silence outside in the evening, with the crisp air, and the glow of lights inside, dulled and rendered intimate by the wood. That has gone out of our lives; we glimpse it in childhood perhaps---we may bring it with us---but the sense of the silence outside being joined to us in a glowing mystery, at Christmas, Easter, Michelmas, as if what we did was known to the vast silence outside, making its vastness protective and exciting, has gone. At one time our seasons went right through the universe, so to speak; and this is finished in us for a time.

We stood at the top of the auditorium looking down. This sense of intimacy is always, nowadays, a sense of the past. I remember feeling it in Lucca once---in a hotel that has since been removed; and in Palestrina, near Rome, walking along the

main street, narrow and cobbled, with lighted shops on either side full of dusty objects; at Leoben, in Austria, in the dining room of a hotel with panelled walls, everything in it intact from before the war, with heavy, solid-looking cutlery and plates, and thick velvet cloth on the tables and old pistols and rifles and swords hanging on the smoky wall.

Most of the windows in the Gouda church date from the second half of the sixteenth century, during the Dutch war of independence that went on for eighty years. When the present church was built the citizens asked all the princes and churchmen known to them to contribute a window; and this was the result. The first window was given by the Bishop of Utrecht, representing the baptism of Christ; Philip II of Spain also gave a window, in which he and the English Mary Tudor, his queen, are represented--- he was then Holland's ruler. The last windows were put in after Gouda had become protestant, at the end of the sixteenth century, and one of them represents 'freedom of conscience'. You see that in the handsome wooden auditorium, carefully civic, humped in the middle of the vast church perhaps rather defiantly and self-consciously.

We spent the rest of the day on the road; on the Dutch side of the German frontier we stopped and wrote a few cards to England. It was Saturday and we were told at the local shop that we would only find stamps on the German side of the border and had better post the cards from there; but we wanted to post them on the Dutch side because it was the first time we'd been to Holland and our cards showed windmills, children in clogs and the typical Dutch muslin hats, standing against a background of tulips and daffodils. So the shopkeeper said he would post

them himself on Monday if we left the money, which we did.

In Germany, not many yards across the border, we stopped for a coffee. Already there was the German emphasis and downright-ness; it was in the shape of the road even, the way people walked, their clothes, the signposts; the mildness of Holland and England was gone; everything had a clearer and darker and more immense look, with tall, shadowy trees on either side. There had been no sunlight since the morning, and it was bitterly cold with heavy clouds, though the month was July. For a few hours we drove along quiet, straight roads, then there was the autobahn for the last stretch of two hundred kilometres, ebefore we reached the heath near Hamburg where we were to stay.

Our friends had provided a map, pencil-drawn, which showed the local church, a hunting lodge, the woods, and several tracks going through the woods. We were to take one of the tracks. And the house, they wrote at the bottom of the map, had a cement post outside it and a painted wooden gateway. It sounded very simple. After leaving the autobahn we had ten or fifteen minutes driving, then we came to it---a church, which was a clean, modern building, with a wide sandy track at the side of it; then a hill, dense with trees---clearly the woods marked on the map. So we took the track. Sometimes the sun came through and made the houses and sandy track gleam; then a dark cloud would pass and the shadows under the trees would seem to be drawing everything into them. We saw nonhunting lodge, though. Up we went over thick tree-roots, as the path got narrower and narrower; but instead of a cement post and a painted gateway at the top there was more dense pine-forest, and tiny houses half-hidden in the shadows. We came out at the top of a hill, where the path ended, and found two houses on either side of a courtyard, built of brick and stone,

with tiled roofs; but a notice-board outside announced that it was a clinic.

We'd taken the wrong track, that was clear. But there were too many others for us to choose from. A few girls came running out, then an older woman. They looked at our map and couldn't make head or tail of it. They suggested that we return to the bottom of the hill where the church was, and gain again from there. No one had heard of our friends, nor of their houses, though they were certainly not a hundred yards away from this point. On second thoughts they decided that one of the girls should go with us, as she lived at the bottom of the hill and must return home in any case. She was a plump, smiling girl of sixteen and squeezed in beside us, turning the car suddenly into a sort of merry-go-round for us, and the journey into a spree. She laughed and exclaimed as we bumped over the roots. She would show us the hunting lodge---wie ulkich that we hadn't found it! Yes, we had taken the wrong track. There was the hunting lodge, a simple building standing alone at the foot of the woods, closed, its windows curtainless; and close to it was a track---it was this one we had to take. And she got out again, waving us an energetic goodbye.

Up we went again. The path narrowed like the other one, going into the darkness of the woods, its roots getting thicker and thicker, like boulders; and---again like the other one---it came out at the top of a hill, presumably the same hill. Still there was neither cement post nor painted gateway, only tiny shacks half-hidden among the trees. But this time there was an open space, at least: the track led into several others, some of which looked promising, with houses on either side. Disregarding the map, which now told us nothing, we took the middle one, where

we saw two men walking along in a leisurely, Saturday-afternoon way.

We stopped and asked them. 'Who?' they cried, as if the name---a perfectly ordinary German name---sounded outrageous, like hobgoblins in the woods. We repeated it. No, they'd never heard the name. What were the houses called? Noch'n Gedicht (Just One More Poem) and Unser Paradies (Our Heaven)---we felt a little silly saying it. They nodded---this didn't seem outrageous or odd to them at all! No, they'd never heard of these houses. They studied our map. Yes, they knew the church of course, at the foot of the hill. And there was the hunting lodge---ya, ya! they cried, spotting the hunting lodge. And here was the path leading up from the hunting lodge---a murmured ya, ya, as they pored over it, grim and intent. We'd come too far, perhaps. The cement post and the painted gateway? we asked. No, they knew of no cement post or painted gateway; and from the way they shook their heads you would think that cement posts and painted gateways were not only not there, or near there, but impossible anywhere. So perhaps we hadn't come too far! Perhaps the post and the gateway were ahead. No, they could assure us of that, they weren't ahead. And when they said this you would have thought they had them in their pockets, and were therefore quite certain about where you wouldn't find them. Then the map was wrong. We all bore down on the map in a vengeful way---the map was wrong! of course! what a silly map! The best thing was to go by a description of the people we were after, and the kind of house they lived in. Well, they were called W---, and he, the husband, was a doctor; they had four children, twof of them quite grown-up; and the wife we described in some detail---blonde, er robust-looking,

handsome, blonde, blonde! No, they didn't know anyone like that. (Surely, you felt like saying, you must know somebody in the world like it, especially in Germany, where blonde, robust-looking women abound?)

Back to the map. And we suddenly see, in tiny writing, that the owner of the plot of land next door is a Dr. Schach. Ah, Doctor Schach! Yes! Schach! Schach! They spat the word out, beaming, with the tremendous German enthusiasm that is like a hurricane and as dangerous. Yes, now he lived further along the track, not this way, which leads further into the woods, but the other way, so that---here they got philosophical---having reached the top of the hill as we'd done just now, our correct move ought to be to turn left instead of right, whereas we had not only turned right but taken the subsidiary of the two tracks etc etc... We nodded in a daze. So like a dream!

And now they came to think of it, surely they did know the gentleman we were looking for? Dr. W---? Yes, that was a well-known name on this hillside, but they couldn't think in what connection! Yes, two doctors lived side by side; it had often been remarked by people locally, as a phenomenon. We should certainly find the house if we went along this path, only in the other direction.

We turned round and waved them goodbye; and they went on with their quiet Saturday-afternoon walk, a dog running between them. The map was hopeless, we told each other---better not use it. This time we travelled along the brow of the hill, without trees on either side, only heather. Then we came to a fork: one path led downwards, back to the area we'd just left, and the other went further into the woods. The men hadn't mentioned this in all their philosophy! It was like having ploughed all the way through the Deduction of the Categories

without being told about Space and Time! The path into the woods seemed to end in darkness, a sort of Kantian hole where you might expect to find the noumenon, after all these years; and the other went into a further maze of tracks like themes in Wagner---God alone knew where they might lead!

So we turned round again and once more found ourselves with the two men and their dog. What, we had found no houses at all? This was a new development---as if we'd swiped their houses in some way and sent them somewhere else! Then, one of them said, apparently rejecting this idea, that we must have taken the path into the woods: and his philosophy had expressly forbidden that.

Now: also!---meaning action! The man with the dog---a slim man with genial, reflective eyes---will come with us. The wind begins to rise, armies form up, ultimatums to be sent, officials called into ante-rooms and secret chambers, bands to play, the flags to be brought out, marching orders to be distributed---
achtung! alles verboten! himmelfahrt und gute Reise! steigen Sie aus! Rumpf, stumpf und humpf!

Could we squeeze him in? Indeed, we could, by squeezing our front-line battalions up on the left axis and passing his companies through on the right. But his dog? what about his dog? is he allowed, too? Yes, yes, consider him as B Echelon, along with the heavy armour! So we were all in. The door slammed---achtung! wir gehen nach England! let the English king and the English business men in their top hats and hunting boots shiver in their timbers, we're on our way! The man outside looked forlorn---the army had locked him out---and he was minus not only his afternoon's Kameradschaft but the dog as well.

Off!---the car sounded like a tank, or at least a truck with caterpillar-tracks. And I swear we manœuvred those tree-roots

better than we had done before. We rode them---up! with a swinging motion---and down again! I could have sworn there was a war on. Just driving along a track in the woods it certainly was not: the noise, the rising and falling, the bumps we took in descent, were much too momentous for that.

The dog was tiny, a little white fellow with a fluffy tail and bright eyes rather like his master's; he sat on the floor at the man's feet. The man we left behind---he nodded to us as we drove off, with a perplexed smile---was apparently a week-end guest. Were we Dutch? the dog-owner asked my wife. He had heard us talk a foreign language together? No, English. Ach, so! A brief silence. But the fact that he'd found himself in an enemy vehicle instead of the fatherland's didn't make any difference---he would fight on our side! So on we went.

This time the map really came in for it. Who had drawn it? The lady? Yes. Ach, ach---all three of us ach-ed as hard as we could. Women shouldn't draw maps! They don't make allowances for the way the thing will be seen at the time, in the given situation! The map was blöd, dum, ganz falsch and a hell of a lot else besides. I felt like screwing the thing into a ball. We'd certainly given it as effective a Blitz as a map ever got.

Now there was the house. He nodded towards it quietly, beaming. But where were the cement post and the painted gateway? Then it couldn't be the house: these things weren't to be seen! But there was a blonde woman, standing by the path. Admittedly, you couldn't call her robust-looking---she was on the slim side, but---? No, it wasn't her, my wife said. He looked at my wife doubtfully as if to say, 'Are you sure she hasn't been taking slimming cures?' No, it wasn't her. And he shrugged,

seeming to tell himself that of course if we were going to reject all the blasted blonde women in the woods we were quite likely to find ourselves without a bed for the night, and he didn't see why he should take responsibility.

Perhaps we should sound our horn? Our friends had told us to sound it four times, as everybody else in the woods sounded it three times and they would therefore know it was us. We did it, four times. And at once the dog began leaping up and down on the floor, his eyes gleaming like fires, barking his head off. We looked down at him, astonished. We'd always thought, until then, that the thing to do as a dog was to bark at a car from the outside of it when it made that noise, not from inside. But this dog was different. His owner explained him to us. This dog of mine, he said, always barks from inside the car when he hears the horn, because that is how I, the owner, signal my approach to my own house on week-ends, only three times and not four---everybody sounds their horn three times here (with a quick scrutinising look, as if to say, 'Now you know'), and this horn, sounded from inside, means for the dog a week-end of runs and walks and routing about in the garden which he never gets in the city, for he's in the city all week---! His eyes nearly exploded with gleam, and the words poured out like steam from a German spa.

The good blonde lady who wasn't our friend began walking towards us, and we decided to put the whole matter to her---I think he had hopes that after a little quiet persuasion she might prove to us that she was our friend after all. He jumped out: achtung, the attack is on! Did she know where Dr. W--- lived? He said it like a Panzer Grenadier division moving forward under enfilade fire. But she wasn't a bit frightened. In fact, she

was like the enemy waiting under a heavy armoured cover. She smiled---ya, ya! (two 88mm shells, bang on their target). Ya! (a landmine). Ya! (a swift aerial attack to mop up). She knew the lady! In fact---nein, ist das möglich?---we are all dancing about already, apparently the order has come through that the enemy has evacuated his positions---in fact, our friend had asked her to keep a look-out in case she found two English friends of hers lost in the woods! Ah-h-h-h-h! And ach, so! was? Roars, applause, laughter, dances---I find I'm flushed in the cheeks already, and my wife looks as if she's been up a mountain on a ski-lift.

Our friend particularly asked her to ask us to sound the horn four times when we arrived instead of the customary three because four would denote to her that we were 'new' to the woods. So again---one, two, three, four---and the dog starts barking like mad again, until his master tells him to jump out of the car, at which he stops barking abruptly, the rule being that he only barks inside, at least on military operations like this one. Quietness descends on the woods. Nothing happens. I sound the horn again---this amazing dog doesn't even look up. And again no one comes. Well, then, did our kind friend know where the W--- family lived by any chance? Yes, she did. In fact, she would take us there---if---could she squeeze in the car? We looked at the man, and his dog: the answer depended on them; it now appeared that with the collapse of the enemy defences, and their evacuation of positions, our own front was as tight as it could be, and short of opening new engagements on our left or right, which would take time, we would have to ask one of the commanders to fall into rear-reserve. He obliged at once, and said he was near his home---he walked off waving merrily, with his dog, beaming and bursting with happy helpfulness!

We had to turn round, our new friend told us. We had somehow to squeeze past a post in the middle of the pathway--- that must be the cement post!---and avoid falling fifty yards into a gully on the other side, if we could. So I turned the car round and slowly, gingerly, edged it past the post, having asked my wife and our guest to walk behind, so as (on the best military principles) to keep down the casualty-rate. I got past, and they joined me again. Straight on! And there, at the top of the hill, standing by a painted gateway, was our friend, waving frantically, with two of her daughters, and in a moment we were lost in hugs, kisses, pushes, slams, playful pinches, hair-ruffling, squeezes and even, though I couldn't be sure of this, bites. We'd arrived!

A JOURNEY TO THE HAMBURG HEATH.

We got on board the Queen Wilhelmina at about eleven in the morning on our way to Hamburg, and watched a pony, grey and slim, being loaded into a narrow box on the quayside and strapped with various halters until he could hardly move: suddenly he kicked his legs up and tried to clamber over the front; he tried again and again, pushing his head back, but couldn't; then the crane lifted him high in the air and lowered him slowly into the dark hold of the ship.

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A party of Englishmen, with one young girl dressed in tight white trousers and jumper, drove fast cars on board, and behaved in a jarring and unnatural way, as if something special ought to be recognised in them by other people without bits being in their flesh, in their eyes or even in the way they were dressed; it seemed to be only in their engines, which made a threatening roar as they left the quayside. They seemed to be on a jaunt but the jaunt wasn't theirs---it was an idea they had as to what a jaunt should be, and only the trappings were there. They were going 'abroad' as it might have happened in another epoch, when it was enough of a privilege in itself to be noticed. The girl had no depth in her face, her body lacked softness and real sex, perhaps because engines and threatening roars can't move us into softness or sex. She kept clasping one of the young men round the neck ~~xxxx~~ theatrically, but without affection and even without belief in her acting. And the rest of the party laughed uneasily and made abashed jokes. They were keeping something up which none of them wanted, none of them believed in and none of

them were made for in any case.

One of the men had a flushed face and a paunch---they were the material of jollity without it being there; and he wore casual clothes without any effect of casualness. It was all like a panic-stricken performance before an invisible---perhaps hostile---audience; something had to be done, there had to be a laugh, to create what people call vitality, a sort of ~~stagnant~~ death-dance. Their nerves were smashed. And nothing could be done until they had each had made a sort of pause in his life, and collected his nerves together slowly.

I've noticed this again and again since we left Italy a few weeks ago---how torn people's nerves are. The first thing that goes is self-trust: a smile can put them at ease and a frown can unsettle them. So different from Italy where your face isn't watched as an index of feeling.

When we got to the Hook of Holland it was sunny and quite warm, after a rough crossing, and we stood on the quayside waiting for our car to be unloaded. The pony was hauled out of the hold again and we saw that he'd been in the same box throughout the voyage, lasting six hours. He came swining down, looking haggard and worn-out. Apparently the crane swinging above frightened him, and when it brought a car down near him he made a sudden plunge as he'd done at Harwich, and this time succeeded in getting his front legs over the entrance of the box, so that he ~~sat there~~ stood there panting, his eyes with an exhausted but astonishingly dignified and passionate look, and his hoofs dangling over the front. Two or three dockworkers tried to ease him back again, pushing at his hoofs until they were back inside: he tolerated this slow pushing and heaving for a time, his head high, with a flashing look of defiance, then, at the moment when

they thought they'd succeeded, he made a plunge again, with a vivid movement of ferocity, and pushed his hoofs out exactly as before. Again the slow pushing back took place and again, with even greater ferocity than before, nearly striking one of the dockers in the head, he made a leap that shook the whole box, and this time he got his legs right out, and ~~was~~ had freed his chest. Then a clerkly-looking man came along and calmly directed the halters to be loosened; apparently, he was used to horses. The pony, understanding, pulled back his hoofs and stepped out of the box like a guest, quietly and delicately, his head bowed rather wretchedly, his tail and mane bedraggled; he was dusty all over and his eyes had a look of infinite relief. Someone led him by the halter along the quayside where we were standing: we were surprised how small he really was, his thrusts had been so mighty. He stood no higher than my chest. We asked where he was bound for and the man looked at the label on his halter: it was a village near Rotterdam. Was he for killing---surely, no? No, certainly not, the man said, shaking his head with a smile. Perhaps for children. He now had a train journey before him, of two or three hours.

The pony was still hardly recovered; his head was hanging, and we fed him a whole apple, forgetting to break it up; he showed some interest in this and chewed for a long time without swallowing, froth pouring out of his mouth on to the cobbles. He'd clearly been sick during the voyage---he was now, according to the man, cleaning his stomach out. He frothed over the man's trousers and shoes, and coughed, then he was led away. But he came back, this time with a tall, peasant-like man who had a ruddy face and muscular bare arms. This time we gave him carrots, breaking them up, and he nudged his head against us, reviving, and made a long groaning noise to arouse our sympathies: he was waking up and blew

loudly down his nostrils. When he continued the walk he went a few paces and stopped, pulling at the halter, then deliberately shook his coat free of the dust; already he was looking smarter, though his tail still hung down like pieces of old grey cloth. His walk was steady and delicate like a young girl's, especially as he had no shoes and so made only the slightest thumping sound on the cobbles; and now and then he would give the huge man at his side an intimate nudge as if he could smell the countryside in him. There was a simplicity about the man which we noticed when we talked to him--he waited patiently while we fed the animal carrots, and returned when we pulled another one out of the bag, with an expectant smile on his face that seemed to speak on ^{the pony's} behalf ~~of the pony~~. Animals know these things, and it looked as though they were talking to each other quietly as they walked along; the pony was telling him about the awful voyage.

The party of would-be boisterous people drove off with a roar as they'd driven on at Harwich; it was strange, each one of them was a quiet person, really; it showed in their faces--they had more delicacy than they were willing to show; and their peculiar distorted gestures and false laughs had grown up between them like a third person.

We drove to Rotterdam and ate there. I was surprised at the hugeness of the sky, like a blue and white dome stretched over the earth, as I'd never seen it before. The flatness and lack of trees makes the sky so important in Holland; everything is contained in the sky and touched by it, made gloomy or radiant according to it; and you ~~even~~ see it in people's eyes. There is a wonderful emerald quality in the light as you sometimes see it on the east coast of England, like an early-morning sunlight on sand, suggesting endless spaces.

There was a pale evening sun with high, white clouds, and people were cycling home from work along the banked roads that went above the fields. Rotterdam was strange, with vast coloured buildings shining like objects in a machine so vast that it turned you into a squalid kind of midget. The biting wind swept through the streets. Nearly everything was new. A few of the old streets remained, their houses squeezed close together. The roads had a gloomy hollowness but sometimes there was a bright corner with café-tables and coloured chairs, and restaurants with walls of glass, such as you see in some German towns now. The innwhere we ate belonged to older times, like a German bier-stube, the seats wooden with tall backs, the tables thick and sturdy, with a massive tiled stove reaching to the ceiling, and painted dancing figures on the panelled walls, and newspapers in wooden clips hanging from pegs, everything dark with cigar-smoke. We asked for wine and the waiter, dark and Italian-looking, told us that they stocked a good young Bordeaux 'loose', which we ought to try. It tasted of grapes, anyway. We refelected to each other that in an ordinary wine less than a year old you stood a better chance of getting something pure than in nine out of ten so-called vintages. We pride ourselves on what we know about wine, which isn't much.

It was the first wine we'd had for a long time and it made us feel delightfully tired and heavy, so we decided to go to the next small town and stay there for the night. The familiar sense of being foreigners grew on us again. After much travel you have the sense of being a natural visitor---everywhere: a visitor to life. You enter the warmth a moment and then go. You have the utmost freedom of self, you are stripped for a moment of age, moods, even bitter personal struggle, in a perilous anonymity which makes it difficult to grasp life again, since it can take away all the illusions of locality---they become illusions;

there isn't a place you can go back to; all places have become gestures made in a thousand different ways amid trees and fields, in the silence of the weather; this is the sadness, the growing inability of things to exercise their charm over you, especially if they come from men; there remains the weather, and face after unknown face; and the challenge is how to learn to be a visitor gladly, to really be a visitor in yourself, as we all are at the end.

We asked the waiter how far the next town was, on the way to the German frontier, and he told us Gouda, about half-an-hour away. That was perfect. He added with a smile that the people there probably went to bed early, so we should hurry.

We reached Gouda soon after ten, when everything was deserted. The outskirts were barren as parts of Rotterdam had been, with identical, treeless streets on rising ground. The sun had just gone down. First we had to cross a canal and wait for the bridge to be lowered, as a barge was passing underneath. There was this wonderful silence of Holland, coming from the flatness of the earth. The barge, clean and polished, with no cargo in the hold, stole through the night silently, gliding underneath us with a perfect, smooth motion, ~~its~~ ^{her} engines making only the faintest throb in her bowels while the water trickled and ebbed along the sides. A man was at the helm and after the bridge had been passed he handed the wheel over to his wife, in a tiny-glowing cabin where the brass and paintwork shone. Then the bridge was lowered again, mechanically from inside the bridgehouse, and we went on into the town.

There were further dry, ugly outskirts, all the windows with their curtains undrawn in the Dutch manner, showing neat rooms inside, some of them with polished sideboards and televisions, others with the signs of a meal, solid and scrupulous. Then to

our surprise we came to the heart of an old town with canals running through it and a tall church; a tall late-mediaeval town-hall stood alone in the middle of the cobbled square, its shutters bright red, its walls sloping massively, taller than all the houses round the square but at the same time wonderfully unassuming, everything flat and still all round it like a lake. When we saw it, a black shadow in the dusk three storeys high, with its neat red shutters and a spire, we felt a sudden relief, as if we'd found a real home for the night. Towns were made for travellers then. They had a special humble touch that consoled and protected.

The shops and hotels round the square glowed and twinkled, tiny compared with the gleaming shadow in the middle. We found a tiny ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ hotel in a sidestreet, with a canal running by it. The staircase to the rooms was so steep, and the steps so tall, that it was like climbing an endless tower: the owner, a pale, thin, lined man, with still eyes, told us with a quick, jerky smile, in a breathless way, that many sailors had slept in these rooms over the centuries, and that they'd climbed to the 'crow's nest', as they called these rooms, in ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ every sort of state, sometimes worn out after a rough sea, but usually drunk. The place was simple, clean and bare. First we were shown a tiny double room with a balcony overlooking the canal, but that was noisy because of the trucks and motor-cycles that roared past below, and we asked for two single rooms instead. One of these gave out on to the courtyard of a hospital, and the other had no window at all, only a fanlight, which he said would supply us with all the air we needed 'for the night'. We went downstairs again, to sit in the cafe for a few minutes before going to bed, and I ordered a beer. No, it was

a temperance-hotel; and the man nodded his head as he told us this, his eyes pale, as if defending an attitude which we'd just challenged. His voice and the way he looked at us were mild but at the same time he was emphatic, with a puritan implacability which showed in the way he at once returned to the book he was reading, concentrated on it palely and bloodlessly. He added, looking up for a moment, as if to leave free to sin if we wanted to, that other hotels in Gouda did serve beer and that this one was the only one that didn't. He then put his book aside, seeing perhaps that beer didn't mean so very much to us, and asked if we were English. I was about to explain that I was ~~and that~~ ^{while} my wife was German by origin, Austrian, Jewish and American by upbringing, and English by marriage, when the opportunity passed, as it usually does. He spoke again, this time to my wife only, and said that if we had time the following day we should visit the church, only a few yards away, which had the most wonderful stained-glass windows imaginable. And he made it seem that there was something moral about going to the church, as if we'd already determined to shirk it: for he nodded in a quick, emphatic way, his lips pursed as if he'd just finished a reprimanding speech, and returned to his book, seated by the bar where there was a coffee-urn spouting. The room was bare, with a front window like that of a shop, and the tables had gloomy plastic tops.

But morality doesn't interfere with your sleep, not if you've given it as little offence as we had that day, and we slept soundly all night, both of us, my wife with the hospital outside her window and me with a fanlight overhead. In the morning we went down to breakfast and were amazed to see that another part of the long bare room, which had been hidden the previous evening, consisted of ~~pleasant~~ a dining room with a carpet and pleasant cloth-covered tables ~~and chairs~~ for the hotel guests, while the daily

customers sat next door drinking coffee and smoking cigars.

I had had a strange dream in which someone offered us a house as a lodgings, consisting only of one room, built in a perfect square with french windows and rather ornate brickwork in the pseudo-Gothic style, only slanting in the most peculiar way like the tower of Pisa. Next to it was the owner's house, which was quite normal. And both stood in a bright-green, carefully kept lawn with cypress trees and clipped bushes, close to a wide deserted roadway. The room itself reminded me of houses where I'd stayed in Austria---bright, with heavy curtains and plenty of wood, and glowing lamps, and fat, shining, tiled stoves. In this square, leaning room I was questioned by the police, who wanted to know---of all things---where my ideas came from. I seemed to understand what they meant because I was about to reply, but they interrupted me, picking up the book I was reading, and said that they noticed I had once expressed an idea from that book, and did I know the author? To which I said, Yes, I'd met him. And there the dream ended. It was a troubled dream which left me with the feeling that my life---and that of my wife, who'd been questioned before me, and not allowed to warn me in time---was under surveillance: and for the thoughts that passed privately and silently through my head.

But the sun was shining, and outside everything looked clean and gleaming. I can still remember the policemen in that dream---dark, rather reticent, methodical, concentrated on their note-taking, without offence, abstracted from us, with blue uniforms and peaked caps.

When we'd had a breakfast of eggs, ham, cheese and coffee we went to the square and found a vegetable and fruit market, with women crowding round the stalls. On one side of the square, squeezed in between two houses, stood the wright-house as it was

called, with a fesco above showing the round Gouda cheeses being weighed. There were redcurrants to buy, and soft, pink peaches. We bought fruit and half a Gouda cheese, then decided to obey the moral imperative from the night before and visit the church. It lay behind the square with houses and canals all round it, hugging its massive walls. All morning the bells had been ringing, rather like the Salzburg glockenspiel, only less dainty and baroque: these played with a mild, haunting little tune again and again, floating over the town, high-up in a tower, visible from the ground as the bells swung to and fro. To get into the church we had to ring at the sexton's house close by, opposite the side-entrance, buy tickets at his little office and then be escorted across: the door was opened with a key, and we were told that when we wanted to leave again we should ring a bell by the door inside; then we were closed in with several other people, captive inside a great semicircle of stained glass. The windows were huge, depicting all sorts of subjects from the Last Supper to the independence of Holland. The biggest was over twenty yards high; and there were sixty-four windows in all. A wonderful silence hung over the church, with the sound of the bells high in the air outside and drifting down sometimes, muffled and gentle. The pews were in the form of a raised auditorium round the pulpit, rather like a lecture-room or a political assembly, the seats rising in tiers, with a long table below, as if for clerks to make their notes. And there were doors leading from it, out into the church; the altar was far away, outside. My impression was of a civic, moral religion which was discussed and hammered out inside this closed, wooden, intimate, even festive structure from the Augustan age. It was put there in the middle of the Catholic church, which was spacious and flat, without discussion. It reminded me of the Sheldonian Theatre in Oxford; the dark wood

suggested people doing things together in community: one could imagine the mysteriousness of the silence outside at evening-time, and the glow of lights inside, dulled and rendered intimate by the wood. That has gone out of our lives; we glimpse it in childhood perhaps---we may bring it with us---but the ~~xxxxxxxx~~ sense of the silence outside being joined to us in a glowing mystery, at Christmas, Easter, Michelmas, as if what we did was know to the vast silence outside, making its vastness protective and exciting, has gone. At one time our seasons went right through the universe, so to speak; and this is finished in us for a time.

We stood at the auditorium looking down. This sense of intimacy is always, nowadays, a sense of the past. I remember feeling it in Lucca once---in a hotel that has since been removed; and in Palestrina, near Rome, walking along the main ~~xxxxxx~~ street, narrow and cobbled, with lighted shops on either side full of rather dusty objects; at Leoben, in Austria, the dining room of a hotel with panelled walls, everything in it intact from before the war, with heavy, solid-looking cutlery and plates, and thick velvet cloth on the tables and old pistols and rifles and swords hanging on the smoky wall.

Most of the windows in the Gouda church date from the second half of the sixteenth century, ~~that is, after the Reform; and~~ during the Dutch war for independence that went on for eighty years. When the present church was built the citizens asked all the princes and churchmen known to them to contribute a window; and this was the result. The first window was given by the Bishop of Utrecht, representing the baptism of Christ; Philip II of Spain also gave a window, in which he and the English Mary Tudor, his queen, are represented---he was then Holland's ruler. The last windows were put in after Gouda had become protestant,

at the end of the sixteenth century, and one of them represents 'freedom of conscience'. You see that in the handsome wooden auditorium, carefully civic, humped in the middle of the vast church perhaps rather defiantly and self-consciously.

We spent the rest of the day on the road; ^{again} on the Dutch side of the German frontier we stopped and wrote a few cards to England. It was Saturday and we were told at the local shop that we would only find stamps on the German side of the border and had better post the cards from there; but we wanted to post them on the Dutch side because it was the first time we'd really been to Holland and our cards showed windmills, children in clogs and the typical Dutch muslin hats, standing against a background of tulips and daffodils. So the shopkeeper said he would post them himself on Monday if we left the money, which we did.

In Germany, not many yards across the border, we stopped for a coffee. Already there was the German emphasis and downrightness; it was in the shape of the road even, the way people walked, their clothes, the signposts; the mildness of Holland and England was gone; everything had a clearer and darker and more immense look, with tall, shadowy trees on either side. There had been no sunlight since the morning, and it was bitterly cold with heavy clouds, though the month was July. For a few hours we drove along quiet, straight roads, then there was the autobahn for the last stretch of two hundred kilometres, before we reached the heath near Hamburg where we were to stay.

Our friends had provided a map, pencil-drawn, which showed the local church, a hunting lodge, the woods, and several tracks going through the woods. We were to take one of the tracks. And the house, they wrote at the bottom of the map, had a cement post outside it and a painted wooden gateway. It sounded very

n.p) simple. [After leaving the autobahn we had ten or fifteen minutes driving, then we came to it---a church, which was a clean, modern building, with a wide sandy track at the side of it; then a hill, dense with trees---clearly the woods marked on the map. So we took the track. Sometimes the sun came through and made the houses and sandy track gleam; then a dark cloud would pass and the shadows under the trees would seem to be drawing everything into them. We saw no hunting lodge, though. Up we went over thick tree-roots, as the path got narrower and narrower; but instead of a cement post and a painted gateway at the top there was more dense pine-forest, and tiny houses half-hidden in the shadows. We came out at the top of a hill, where the path ended, and found two houses on either side of a courtyard, built of brick and stone, with tiled roofs; but a notice-board outside announced that it was a clinic.

We'd taken the wrong track, that was clear. But there were too many others for us to choose from. A few girls came running out, then an older woman. They looked at our map and couldn't make head or tail of it. They suggested that we return to the bottom of the hill where the church was, and begin again from there. No one had heard of our friends, nor of their houses, thought they were certainly not a hundred yards away from this point. On second thoughts they decided that one of the girls should go with us, as she lived at the bottom of the hill and must return home in any case. She was a plump, smiling girl of sixteen and squeezed in beside us, turning the car suddenly into a sort of merry-go-round for us, and the journey into a ~~xxxxxx~~ spree. She laughed and exclaimed as we bumped over the roots. She would show us the hunting lodge---it was ~~xxxxxx~~ that we hadn't found it. Yes, we had taken the wrong track. There was the hunting lodge, a simple building standing alone at the foot of the woods, closed, its windows curtainless; and close to it

was a track---it was this one we had to take. And she got out again, waving us an energetic goodbye.

Up we went again. The path narrowed like the other one, going into the darkness of the woods, its roots getting thicker and thicker, like boulders; and---again like the other one---it came out at the top of a hill, presumably the same hill. Still there was neither cement post nor painted gateway, only tiny sheds half-hidden among the trees. But this time there was an open space, at least: the track led into several others, some of which looked promising, with houses on either side. Disregarding the map, which now told us nothing, we took the middle one, where we saw two men walking along in a leisurely, Saturday-afternoon way.

We stopped and asked them: 'Who?' they cried, as if the name---a perfectly ordinary German name---sounded outrageous, like hobgoblins in the woods. We repeated it. No, they'd never heard the name. What were the houses called? Noch'n Gedicht (Just One More Story) and Unser Paradies (Our Heaven)---we felt a little silly saying it. They nodded---this didn't seem outrageous or odd to them at all! No, they'd never heard of these houses. They studied our map. Yes, they knew the church of course, at the foot of the hill. And there was the hunting lodge---ya, ya! they cried, spotting the hunting lodge. And here was the path leading up from the hunting lodge---a murmured ya, ya, as they pored over it, grim and intent. We'd come too far, perhaps. The cement post and the painted gateway? we asked. No, they knew of no cement post or painted gateway; and from the way they shook their heads you would think that cement posts and painted gateway were not only not there, or near there, but impossible anywhere. So perhaps we hadn't come too far! Perhaps the post and the gateway were

ahead. No, they could assure of us of that, they weren't ahead. And when they said this you would have thought they had them in their pockets, and therefore quite certain about where you wouldn't find them. Then the map was wrong. We all bore down on the map in a vengeful way---the map was wrong! of course! what a silly map! The best thing was to go by a description of the people we were after, and the kind of house they lived. Well, they were called W---, and he, the husband, was a doctor; they had four children, two of them quite grown-up; and the wife we described in some detail---blonde, er, robust-looking, handsome, blonde, blonde! No, they didn't know anyone like that. (Surely, you felt like saying, you must know somebody in the world like it, especially in Germany, where blonde, robust-looking women abound?)

Back to the map. And we suddenly see, in tiny ~~sixty~~ writing, that the owner of the plot of land next door is a Dr Schach. Ah, Doctor Schach! Yes! Shach! Schach! They sept spat the word out, beaming, with the tremendous German enthusiasm that is like a hurricane and as dangerous. Yes, now he lived further along the track, not this way, which leads further into the woods, but the other way, so that---here they got philosophical---having reached the top of the hill as we'd done just now, our correct move ought to be turn left instead of right, whereas we had not only turned right but taken the subsidiary of the two tracks etc etc... We nodded in a daze. So like a dream!

And now they came to think of it, surely they did know the gentleman we were looking for? Dr W----? Yes, that was well-known name on this hillside, but they couldn't think in what connection! Yes, two doctors lived side by side; it had often been remarked by people locally, as a coincidence. We should certainly find the house if we went along this path, only in the other direction.

We turned round and waved them goodbye; and they went on with their quiet Saturday-afternoon walk, a dog running between them. The map was hopeless, we told each other---better not use it. This time we travelled along the brow of the hill, without trees on either side, only heather. Then we came to a fork: one path led downwards, back to the area we'd just left, and the other went further into the woods. The men hadn't mentioned this in all their philosophy! It was like having ploughed all the way through the Deduction of the Categories without ~~having~~ ^{being} told about Space and Time! The path into the woods seemed to end in darkness, sort of Kantian hole; and the other ~~led~~ ^{where you might expect to find} into a further maze of tracks like themes in Wagner---God only knew where they'd lead! The path into the woods seemed to end in darkness, a sort of Kantian hole where you might expect to find the noumenon, after all these years; and the other went into a further maze of tracks like themes in Wagner---God alone knew where they might lead!

So we turned round again and once more found ourselves with the two men and their dog. What, we had found no houses at all? This was a new development---as if we'd swiped their houses in some way and sent them somewhere else. Then, one of them said (apparently rejecting this idea), we must have taken the path into the woods. And his philosophy had expressly forbidden that.

Now: also---meaning action. The man with the dog---a slim man with genial, reflective eyes---will come with us. The wind begins to rise, armies form up, ultimatums to be sent, officials called into anterooms and secret chambers, bands to play, the flags to be brought out, marching orders to be distributed---achtung! alles verboten! himmelfahrt und gute Reise! steigen Sie aus! Rumpf, stumpf und humpf!

Could we squeeze him in? Indeed, we could, by squeezing our front-line battalions up on the left axis and passing his

companies through on the right. But his dog? what about his dog? is he allowed, too? Yes, yes, consider him as B Echelon, with the heavy armour! So we were all in. The door slammed--- achtung! wir gegen nach England! let the English king and the English business men in their top hats and hunting boots shiver in their timbers, we're on our way! The man outside looked forlorn---the army had locked him out---and he was minus not only his afternoons kameradshaft but the dog as well.

Off---the car sounded like a tank, or at least a truck with caterpillar-tracks. And I swear we maneuvred those tree-roots better than we had done ^{before.} We rode ~~up~~ them---up! with a swinging motion---and down again! I could have sworn there was a war on. Just driving along a track in the woods it certainly was not: the noise, the riding and falling, the bumps we took in descent, were much too momentous for that.

The dog was tiny, a little white fellow with a fluffy tail and bright eyes rather like his master's; he sat on the floor at the man's feet. The man we left behind---he needed to us as we drove ^{off with} ~~and gave us~~ a perplexed smile---was apparently a week-end guest. ~~xxxx~~ Dutch? the dog-owner asked my wife. He had heard us talk a foreign language together? No, English. ~~xxxx~~ Ach, so! A brief silence. But the fact that ~~the~~ he'd found himself in an enemy vehicle instead of the fatherland's didn't make any difference---he would fight on our side! So on we went.

This time the map really came in for it. Who had drawn it? The lady? Yes. Ach, ach---all three of us ach-ed as hard as we could. Women shouldn't draw maps! They don't make allowances for the way the thing will be seen at the time, in the given situation! The map was blöb, dum, ganz unrecht and a hell of a lot else besides. I felt like serweing the

thing into a ball. We'd certainly given the thing as effective a blitz as a map ever got.

Now here was the house. He nodded towards it quietly, beaming. But where were the cement post and the painted gateway? Then it couldn't be. They weren't to be seen. But there was a blonde woman, standing by the path. Admittedly, you couldn't call her robust-looking---she was on the slim side, but---? No, it wasn't her, my wife said. He looked at my wife doubtfully as if to say, 'Are you sure she ^{hasn't} ~~has~~ been taking slimming cures?' No, it wasn't her. And he shrugged, telling himself that of course if we were going to reject all the blasted blonde women in the woods we were quite likely to find ourselves without a bed for the night, and he didn't see why he should take responsibility.

Perhaps we should sound our horn? Our friends had told us to sound it ~~three~~ four times, as everybody else in the woods sounded it three times and they would therefore know it was us. We did it, four times. And at once the dog began leaping up and down on the floor, his eyes gleaming like fires, barking his head off. We looked down at him, astonished. We'd always thought, until then, that the thing to do as a dog was to bark at a car from the outside of it when it made that noise, not from inside. But this dog was different. His owner explained him to us. This dog of mine, he said, always barks from inside the car when he hears the horn, because that was how he, the owner, signalled his approach to his own house on week-ends, only three times and not four---everybody sounded their horn three times here (with a quick scrutinising look, as if to say, Now you know), and that horn, sounded from inside, meant for the dog a week-end of runs and walks and routing about in the garden which he never got in the city, for he was in the city all week---! His eyes nearly

exploded with gleam, and the words poured out like steam from a German spa.

The good blonde lady who wasn't our friend began walking towards us, and we decided to put the whole matter to her--- I think he had hopes that after a little quiet persuasion she might prove ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ to us that she was our friend after all. He jumped out, achtung, the attack is on! Did she know where Dr. W----& lived? He said it like a panzer grenadier division moving forward under enfilade fire. But she wasn't a bit frightened. In fact, she was like the enemy waiting under a heavy armoured cover. She smiled---ya, ya! (two 88mm shells, bang on their target). Ya! (a landmine). Ya! (a swift aerial attack to mop up). She knew the lady! In fact---nein, ist das möglich?---we are all dancing about already, apparently the order has come through that the enemy has evacuated his positions--- in fact, our friend asked her to keep a look-out in case she found two English friends of hers lost in the woods! Ah-h-h-h-h! Roars, applause, laughter, dances---I find I'm flushed in the cheeks already, and my wife looks as if she's been up a mountain ^{or} for a ski-lift.

Our friend particularly asked her to ask us to sound the horn four times when we arrived instead of the customary three because four would denote to her that we were new to the woods. So again---one, two, three, four---and the dog starts barking like made again, until his master tells him to jump out of the car, when he stops barking abruptly, the rule being that he only barks inside, at least on military operations like this one. ~~xxxx~~ Quietness descends on the woods. Nothing happens. I sound the horn again---this amazing dog doesn't even look up. And again no one comes. Well, then, did our kind friend know where the W----family live by any chance? Yes, she did. In

fact, she would take us there---if---could she squeeze in the car? We looked at the man, and his dog: the answer depended on them: it now appeared that with the collapse of the enemy defences, and their evacuation of positions, our own front was as tight as it could be, and short of opening new engagements on our left or right, which would take time, we would have to ask one of the commanders to fall into rear-reserve. He obliged at once, and said he was near his home---he walked off waving merrily, with his dog, beaming and bursting with happy helpfulness!

We had to turn round, our new friend told us. We had somehow to squeeze past a post in the middle of the pathway---that must be the cement post!---and avoid falling fifty yards into a gully on the other side, if we could. So I turned the car round and slowly, gingerly, edged the car past the post, having asked my wife and our guest to walk behind, so that * (on the best military principles) to keep down the casualty-rate. I got past, and they joined me again. Staright on! And there, at the top of the hill, standing by a painted gateway, was our friend, waving frantically, with two of her daughters, and in a moment we were lost in hugs, kisses, pushes, slams, playful pinches, hair-ruffling, squeezes and even, though I couldn't be sure of this, bites. We'd arrived!
