

C E U P R E S S C L A S S I C S

Friedebert Tuglas



*The Poet and the Idiot
and other stories*

C E U P R E S S

The Poet and the Idiot

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The Poet and the Idiot

and other stories

Friedebert Tuglas

Translated by Eric Dickens



Central European University Press

Budapest • New York

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Published in 2007 by

Central European University Press
An imprint of the
Central European University Share Company
Nádor utca 11, H-1051 Budapest, Hungary
Tel: +36-1-327-3138 or 327-3000
Fax: +36-1-327-3183
E-mail: ceupress@ceu.hu
Website: www.ceupress.com

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This translation was supported by a fellowship
from the National Endowment for the Humanities

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ISBN 978-963-7326-88-2
ISSN 1418-0162

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Tuglas, Friedebert, 1886-1971.

[Short stories. English. Selections]

The poet and the idiot : and other stories / Friedebert Tuglas ; translated
by Eric Dickens.

p. cm. -- (Central European classics series)

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN-13: 978-9637326882 (pbk.)

I. Dickens, Eric. II. Title.

PH665.T8A25 2007

894'.545--dc22

2007014653

Printed in Hungary by
Akadémiai Nyomda, Martonvásár

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Introduction

Estonian literature in its written form is little more than a century old. While oral poetry dates back hundreds of years, and was avidly collected during the 19th century by enthusiasts who often spoke German at home, novels, poetry, essays and criticism written in the Estonian language did not begin to flower until the end of that century.

As Estonia was part of the Russian Empire, then of the Soviet Union, it is something of a miracle that the powerful presence of the Baltic Germans, the periods of Russification, and other more subtle forms of cultural pressure, have not eradicated Estonian as a serious literary language. Today, not only are many books written in Estonian, but most key works of world literature are translated into it, for a potential readership of no more than a million people. One of the central figures to encourage this development during the first half of the 20th century was Friedebert Tuglas.

THE AUTHOR

Friedebert Tuglas was born Friedebert Mihkelson on 18th February 1886 on the grounds of the Ahja manor

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where his father worked as a carpenter. The manor lay near the university city of Tartu (German: *Dorpat*; Russian *Yuryev*). His initial schooling occurred in the Russian language, but by 1901, Tuglas was being sent to schools where Estonian was the language of instruction. His childhood appears to have been a happy one and this is reflected in one of the sunniest of his works, the novel *Väike Illimar* (Little Illimar), which appeared in 1937, much later than the stories featured here. But at the age of nineteen, Tuglas fell foul of the Czarist authorities when he was caught up in the events of the 1905 revolution and spent three months in prison, in Toompea Gaol in Tallinn, right under what is now the Estonian Parliament.

For more than a decade after his release, Tuglas became a homeless wanderer, living in several European countries and visiting several more. By September 1906 he had established himself as a regular visitor to Finland, but his restless spirit meant that he spent five consecutive winters living in Paris at the Estonian artists' colony housed in a round building called *La Ruche*, and lived for much shorter periods in Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. He even visited Estonia on a number of occasions by using false passports he borrowed from literary friends for the purpose. But he could never stay long, afraid that the police would catch up with him.

During this period of exile, Tuglas also made longer visits to Italy (Rome, Genoa, Naples) and Spain (Madrid, Toledo, Seville, Granada, Barcelona), and his travel diaries from both those countries were later published and incorporated in his Collected Works. Being an Estonian,

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i.e. a citizen of a small nation, Friedebert Tuglas was always sensitive to the fate of other isolated peoples. His description of how the Catalonians fared with regard to the Castilians in Spain is as relevant today as it was in 1913 when he visited the Iberian Peninsula.

During the period of the First World War (1914–18), the author was busy writing some of the most memorable of his short-stories, several of which have been translated for this volume. He also wrote the summer novel, *Felix Ormusson* (which appeared in 1915), involving a love triangle. Like so many of Tuglas' works, this novel had a slow birth, being first thought about, then drafted, then revised and expanded, until a final version was arrived at. Also typical of Tuglas' working method is that parts and drafts of the novel were written in various countries, in this case near Helsinki and in Paris; Tuglas drew together the drafted fragments while on the shores of Lake Ladoga. A similar origin for each of the stories presented here can be gleaned from the notes at the end of this book.

When Estonia became independent after the First World War, the Russian Revolution, and the Estonian War of Independence, Tuglas returned home and joined various literary movements. In 1918, he married Elo Oinas, who was to remain his wife until her death in 1970, a year before Tuglas himself died.

During the 1920s, Tuglas settled down, became a literary critic, then Chairman of the Estonian Writers' Union and, in 1923, founded the literary monthly *Looming* (Creative Endeavour), which still appears today. On several occasions Tuglas was editor-in-chief of this pub-

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lication. At about this time, Friedebert Mihkelson turned the nom-de-plume “Tuglas” into his official surname. The name is said to be *Douglas*—as in Alfred, Lord Douglas—pronounced in an Estonian manner. That same decade, Tuglas was made an honorary member of the Finnish Writers’ Association.

During the 1920s and 1930s, Tuglas made two longer documented trips abroad, one to the Maghreb in 1928, another to the Scandinavian countries a decade later. His experiences in North Africa are recounted in an almost 300-page-long travelogue. Tuglas visited Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco (especially Marrakesh, Fez and Casablanca). As in the case of Spain some two decades earlier, Tuglas does not fail to mention smaller nations, such as the Berbers, and is aware of the history of North Africa during ancient times, also touching upon the subject of Islam and differences between that religion and Christianity.

In 1937, the same year that his novel *Little Illimar* appeared, Friedebert Tuglas was made an honorary member of the PEN Club in London at the same time a similar honor was bestowed on the leading Estonian woman poet of that epoch, Marie Under. The letter was signed by then PEN Chairman, Herman Ould, and there was even talk of setting up an Estonian branch of PEN.

A couple of years later, war broke out. The first Soviet occupation of Estonia lasted from the summer of 1940 to the summer of 1941. The German Nazis then invaded the country and stayed until the Red Army pushed them out in 1944. The rest of Tuglas’ life was

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spent under the renewed Soviet occupation, which finally ended in 1991, two decades after his death.

Tuglas was leftist by instinct and had many friends among writers and artists with Communist sympathies. During the right-wing autocracy of the 1930s, such people had to tread carefully and remained more cultural figures than political ones. But once the Soviets arrived, things changed. Some left-wing intellectuals now occupied posts in the Soviet Estonian puppet governments, such as Johannes Semper, who served as Minister of Education during the government of 1940–41. In the 1930s Semper had been interested in aesthetics and philosophy, and wrote a dissertation on style and structure in the works of André Gide. An even more interesting, albeit tragic, example of political collaboration was that of the medical physician, expert on Modernist French poetry and later Soviet Estonian prime-minister, Johannes Vares (nom-de plume “Barbarus”), who committed suicide under suspicious circumstances in 1946, said to have been “persuaded” to go to his death by the Soviet secret police.

Tuglas himself miraculously avoided getting caught up in national politics in a fatal way during all three Estonian occupations, but he suffered as well. During the first Soviet occupation, Tuglas edited *Looming*, but then fled to the countryside during the ensuing German takeover of Estonia, when his Tartu home and several of his manuscripts were destroyed in 1944 during the bombing of the city. When the Soviets returned in that year, and the Estonian Soviet Socialist Republic was restored, a difficult period in Tuglas’ life began. Ac-

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cused, like Semper, of cosmopolitanism and harboring anti-Soviet sentiments, he was likewise expelled from the Writers' Union and forced to make his living by translating, having been banned from all publishing in his own name. After the death of Stalin, Tuglas and Semper were rehabilitated.

The only monograph biography of Tuglas to date appeared in 1968, written by the Communist Nigol Andresen, who had been the Estonian translator of the *Communist Manifesto* during the 1930s and still had good connections within the Party. But even Andresen had suffered during the post-WWII Stalinist purges in occupied Estonia and had spent time in prison, something Tuglas himself had managed to avoid after his sojourn in Toompea Gaol back in 1905–6.

When Friedebert Tuglas died in 1971, he had become revered as the grand old man of Estonian literature. His home, formerly that of the major Estonian woman poet Marie Under and her husband, who had fled to Sweden in 1944, was turned into the *Tuglas Museum* which, after renewed Estonian independence in 1991, was renamed the *Tuglas and Under Museum*.

THE STORIES

All the stories, and the essay, featured here were written during the First World War, 1914–1918, or in the first years of Estonian independence in the early 1920s. The style in which they are written can be termed Gothic Symbolist. They somehow reflect the troubled spirit of the times, but exhibit the influence of a wide selection

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of writers, ranging from J. P. Jacobsen, via Oscar Wilde and Maxim Gorky, to Friedrich Nietzsche and Georges Rodenbach, and Edgar Allan Poe—i.e. writers from Denmark, Ireland, Russia, Germany, Belgium and the United States.

Tuglas was interested in the visual arts, and this too can be sensed from the stories, which contain vivid, even garish, colors and descriptions of moods and landscapes that are sometimes heightened and distorted, as can be seen in paintings from that epoch.

The subject matter of Tuglas' stories represented here ranges from a starving prisoner, via a luckless pharmacist's hallucinations from childhood, a wandering soldier who encounters weird spirits, to a young man sitting in a park, accosted by a devilish lunatic who wants to introduce a new brand of devil worship to the world. Previously, between 1901 and the beginning of the First World War, Tuglas had written in a more realistic and romantic vein, but, perhaps on account of the mood of the war and his long wanderings in Western Europe, he began to write his core stories. Tuglas was always simultaneously working on several stories of rather different mood and subject matter, so that, within the general category of Gothic Symbolism, the results are interestingly varied.

The mentality of Friedebert Tuglas, as reflected in his works, has something of both the short-story writer Poe and the filmmaker Ingmar Bergman. Both of these artists oscillate between a pronounced morbidity and wacky, burlesque humor. Poe not only wrote "The Fall of the House of Usher" but also the spoof on the sub-

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mission of works to various publications “The Literary Life of Thingum Bob, Esq.” Bergman, whose black-and-white films of the 1950s were heavy, dark and sombre, and in which even clowns and circuses were redolent of depression and death, also made comedies and the epic “Fanny and Alexander,” which is chiefly a work of sun and family, though still streaked with gloom. Bergman once said of himself in a TV interview: “At heart, I’m a jolly old man really.” Such could also be said of Tuglas as he grew older, a man who, a decade or so after finishing his suite of Gothic Symbolist stories, ended up writing the delightful realist novel of childhood, *Little Illimar*, and who was always ready to turn his hand to hoaxes such as *Arthur Valdes* or write Whitmanesque poems mocking Stalin.

*

The first story here, *Freedom and Death* (1915), already shows Tuglas’ clear interest in hallucination and distorted reality. The protagonist is the starving prisoner, Rannus, who is filing away at the bars across a window facing the street. He is unable to emerge from his hiding place in the prison’s firewood storeroom, where he can see, but not reach, city life below. The reader is never quite sure what he is seeing and what he is imagining. The building site across the street is described using starkly garish colors.

While Tuglas published very little poetry during his lifetime, there is often a poetic, even musical rhythm to his stories. The most well crafted example of this is perhaps *The Golden Hoop* (1916), which is divided into three

parts where both the short paragraphs and interlude of the middle part of the story, give a feeling of tight composition. Once again, the theme of distorted reality and dreamlike landscapes is very clear, as is the vividness of the colors of faces, clothing and elements of nature. This particular story is based on a folk tale to which Tuglas added elements of his own.

One curious story is *Arthur Valdes* (1916), which is the fictional biography of a mythical Estonian writer, and also Tuglas' aesthetic credo. It is a partly autobiographical work from the time that Tuglas was living in Paris with a number of Estonian painters—Nikolai Triik, Konrad Mägi and Ado Vabbe—whom Tuglas had originally met on the Swedish-speaking Åland archipelago, between Finland and Sweden. This story has led various other Estonian writers, including August Gailit, Jaan Kross and Toomas Vint, to introduce the figure of Arthur Valdes, originally invented by Tuglas, into their stories and novels. Tuglas here in effect reviews a collection of stories he never wrote, using Valdes as his mouthpiece. Estonian academic and translator Mihkel Mõisnik examines the derivation of this style of fiction in detail in a dissertation.

Cannibals (1916) is a story of awakening sexuality and death. Three small children, two boys and a girl, are playing an innocent game of cannibals as they walk through the landscape near an old lime kiln. The sister of one of them has been missing for a couple of days. They then stumble upon her body in the kiln, where she has hanged herself on account of an unhappy love affair and pregnancy. The story examines the mood of the children and their growing awareness of adult sexuality.

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Echo of the Epoch, written between 1914 and 1919, is not a story, but a series of short cultural observations, and is heavily influenced by the mood and events of the First World War. It is almost Gidean in its aphoristic quality. Tuglas made many such observations, which have been collected in a work entitled "Marginalia," the 96 short sections of which were collated from notes made between 1906 and 1936. It is clear that Tuglas employs a similar style in both his stories and short aphoristic pieces. But he was much less "literary" in the large body of critical works he produced over the years, with longer essays on, for example, William Shakespeare, Henrik Ibsen, Valeri Bryussov and Alexis Kivi.

The Wanderer (1919) is another of Tuglas' stories that was influenced by his sojourn in Paris. Again Tuglas divides the story into three parts, as he did with *The Golden Hoop*. It is a relatively bookish story, with Allan, the protagonist, reading everything from Flaubert's "Temptations of Saint Anthony" to the *Bhagavad-Gita*. The middle section involves a mysterious lady, while the final part blends themes from the first two: literary influences—this time Baudelaire, Nietzsche and Whitman—and the return of the lady.

The Mermaid (1920) is more of a modernized fairy-tale. It is the story of an outsider, Kurdis, a somewhat malformed trapper of frogs for the table of the island brigand leader Kaspar the Red. The local people worship Kaspar the Red, who bribes them with feasts and merriment. The all-powerful Kaspar bigamously marries a mermaid caught in his fishing net, wherefore the name of the story. In the end, the mermaid, when set free,

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does what all mermaids do, drawing the sad misfit down with her into the depths.

The Air is Full of Passion (1920) is said to have been influenced by Lafcadio Hearn, and tells the story of a cavalryman, the cynical Lieutenant Lorens, who chances upon a small house while out riding. The house is populated by rather sinister beings, including the young woman Mirandola. This story reminds one of the *Weird Tales* comics that had become popular in America at about the time Tuglas was writing it, and is perhaps the nearest Tuglas got to writing a horror tale.

The Poet and the Idiot (1920) is, by contrast, almost a philosophical tract. Tuglas originally wanted to include the story in his novel about a triangular love affair, *Felix Ormusson* (1915), but found that the subject matter and length of the section no longer fitted in. The main character here is still Ormusson himself, who is sitting in a park overlooking the city of Tartu. He is disturbed by a cranky figure whose pockets are stuffed with slips of paper, on which his madcap theory of converting the world to devil worship are written. The fifth and final section of the story involves a hallucinatory symposium including the “idiot” he meets in the park, a Dominican monk and various other figures, all of whom argue how a system of philosophy can be made attractive to the masses.

The last of the stories translated here, *The Day of the Androgyne* (1925), is somewhat lighter than the rest, perhaps reflecting the fact that Tuglas could relax, now that the Estonian Republic had come into being. What is intriguing about this short novella is the fact that it has the same style—*commedia dell'arte*—and subject matter—

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sex change—as Virginia Woolf’s novel *Orlando*, which appeared three years later. This story is said to have arisen from a jocular conversation at an authors meeting, where someone suggested Tuglas had published a (non-existent) collection of stories entitled “The Hermaphrodite’s Trousers.” The joke led to a well-crafted story, partly mood poem, partly spoof. In the space of one day, the Androgyne wakes up as a little Princess, ages years at a time, and turns into a man halfway through who, in turn, ages and becomes a cruel old Prince. The events are similar to those in *Orlando*, except that they occur in reverse; in the Woolf book, the Prince turns into a Princess. Whether both Tuglas and Woolf gathered their influences from similar Russian sources remains speculation. There are even echoes, in the opening passages, of Alexander Pope’s “The Rape of the Lock.” And Tuglas also manages to incorporate within the story a satire on the private squabbles of those in government.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS
AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

I would like to thank Tiina Randviir of the Estonian Institute for her close reading of my translations of these stories and for rescuing me from the inevitable mistakes that a translator makes.

*

As search engines, the Wikipedia and other internet sources of information are so plentiful nowadays, I have

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not annotated the stories. I have often explained the few Estonian references by a word or two within the text. But the names of European and other artists, writers, composers and other cultural figures can easily be found on the internet.

*

Eight volumes of Friedebert Tuglas' Collected Works have been published to date as part of a project begun in 1986. Between 1957 and 1962, a set of eight volumes were published, covering largely the same works, but now that Estonia is independent and has shrugged off Soviet censorship, more of the previously suppressed or abridged material can be published. The new *Collected Works* will also include a good deal more of Tuglas' critical work.

*

The texts of all the stories and of the essay "Echo of the Epoch" (*Aja kaja*) have been translated from the Collected Works (*Kogutud Teosed*) of Friedebert Tuglas, as published between 1986 and 2001 by the Eesti Raamat publishing house in Tallinn. The notes on the individual stories that Tuglas himself wrote, and which are to be found at the end of the book, come from a volume entitled "Rahutu rada" (The Restless Path), published posthumously in 1973, where a number of supplementary notes are to be found that do not appear elsewhere. This volume has not yet been incorporated in the Collected Works.

*

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When choosing which stories to translate, I have deliberately avoided some of Tuglas' most famous ones, e.g. *Popi and Hubu*, *The End of the World*, *The Last Greeting* and *Riders in the Sky*, as the volume *Riders in the Sky*, which includes these and other stories, can easily be obtained via on-line bookshops. These were translated by Oleg Mutt, an Estonian who spent his childhood years in New York and thus had a good command of English. To complete the circle, Oleg Mutt's son, Mihkel, is the present editor of the previously mentioned literary monthly *Looming*, which was started by Friedebert Tuglas.

Eric Dickens, July 2006

Freedom and Death

1.

The moon rose from behind the walls. Sharp black shadows cut the square stone yard in two. Between the round cobbles sprouted spring grass. The sickly green blades reached out above the cobbles still hot from day—as if extending welcoming healing fingers to their friends.

Rannus lay high up under the ceiling by the narrow window looking out. The milky light of the full moon shone in his face. He was a thin man with a straggly red beard, wearing a grey prison uniform. He inhaled the cool air from the large stones deeply, and watched the sky grow darker and the moon rise higher, turning pink.

He had been lying here the whole evening, hidden by birch logs, with his face turned to the yard, which he could see through the window as narrow as the slit of an arrow. He had seen himself being searched for, he had listened to the curses of the principal warder and watched the backs of the warders' heads, bowed in guilt.

They had strode around and quarreled until it had grown dark. They had opened the door of the firewood store and looked for him there. He had heard them rummaging among the logs and talking about him. His heart had been pounding with fear. He had stuffed his

fist into his mouth, in order not to cry out. He was afraid his heartbeat would shift the whole pile of logs.

But they had not discovered him! They slammed the door shut and locked it again. He could see them standing helplessly in the yard in the evening light: to escape from the yard, surrounded on all four sides by stone walls like a well, and exit from which was only possible through a guarded passageway, would be something of a miracle!

He had risked everything, even his very life. Today or never! By tomorrow he would no longer have been lying here, his limbs free. Just before evening, he had seen the blacksmith crossing the yard with his tools. Tomorrow he would have been in irons with his fetters riveted. And the day after, he would be on his way to Siberia.

Because the local authorities had handed him over. Oh, how his doddering old mother had poked her fingers through the bars and whispered, how she had pleaded with the local council, had run alongside the judge's horse—her ancient hair flying and her hands stretched out! But they had brushed her aside.

Rannus lay there, his fist pressed to his teeth. He wanted to get out and avenge himself on them, to a man! He wanted to shoot the whole lot of them, burn down their houses, and gallop off to Pskov with their best horses!

He had never complained about his sentence. He had committed a crime and was being punished for it—that much he understood. But now an injustice had been committed. Was there any debt left for him to repay that justified this abuse? He had received more than his full measure! Quite enough, and more besides!

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He would rather die than live forever without hope and remain in this pit they had pushed him into. He wanted to walk in the footsteps of that man whose deeds were spoken in a whisper from one generation of prisoners to the next, like memories from great epochs.

What was he compared with him! He had built a lighthouse on a high cliff. On stormy autumn nights it had cast its blood red light over the foamy waves, luring ships into its web like a spider. With a bloody sword in hand, his coal beard black fluttering in the wind, he had stood on the shore as the sea raged.

He had sat in the cell, and now in the woodshed, with an iron ring around his throat and his legs in irons. He had remained there for a long time, then he had escaped. He had broken his fetters like Samson and battered through the walls with his iron fists. Under the thin layer of limestone he had found an ancient secret tunnel. He had broken through to it and fled.

As they sat in their cell in the light of the yellow lamp, the prisoners fancied that they heard his chains jangling down in the cellar as they lay on their bunks. The autumn winds blew the ends of his long beard through the bars, and he seemed to be urging them on to great deeds there from beyond the cell, immortal for centuries, like the Wandering Jew.

And like this man, Rannus wanted to seek his fortune! The memory frightened and consoled him. He had wanted to walk in his footsteps, touch the same parts of the walls as the pirate had once done. This would have brought him—a wretched and crippled man—joy.

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He watched the empty yard with feverish eyes. His thoughts raced at a crazy pace, his dreams were aflame. The moon crept higher and higher—it was as if someone were walking across the coal black night sky with a misty lantern.

As if in his sleep, Rannus counted the strokes of the clock. Then he gave a start: midnight already, and he was still here, at the start of his journey, anything but free! Was it not all the same whether you were lying on your bunk in your cell or hidden here under a pile of firewood, only to fall into their hands again the next morning?

He sat up, cautiously rolling the small logs off his body. The stack nearly reached up to the ceiling, so he couldn't stand up. He looked around him: the cellar was pitch dark. He could hardly see the faint glimmer of the birch bark of the tree outside the window. Everything was silent as the grave.

He began crawling on all fours, stopping every minute to listen. All he could hear was the way the dust fell down from the logs. Then all at once, his hands snatched at thin air. He turned around and sat on the edge of the pile, his legs dangling over the sides.

He listened again for a moment, but all was silent. Then he began to lower himself from the stack, feeling his way down with his feet. His toes touched the lower logs. He began descending, as if by a flight of stairs. The stack creaked and rocked under him.

Suddenly, he stumbled and fearfully grabbed the top of the stack. At that same moment, a log slipped out from under his feet and fell with a clatter onto the stone

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floor. Rannus crouched down, as if his legs had been hit, and put his hand, which had been bloodied by gripping the stack, into his mouth.

There he sat for a while, sucking his thumb, his eyes straining in the darkness. He was shaking all over with fear. He did not dare move an inch: how far might the clatter perhaps be heard! The warders would hear it through the open airing window of the corridor, and even in the guardroom they could be awakened by the noise.

He waited for a long time, motionless. But everything was still. Then he rose to his feet and began to feel his way over the piles of split logs, the ladders and planks. He moved like a poltergeist, secretly towards the door whose crosspieces he had once hacked through when he had been left alone for a while chopping wood.

He squeezed between the woodpile and the wall. His jacket scraped slightly against the plaster and the logs. He felt around the door, found the pile of sawdust, and dug into it. Then his hand eased the door open, so it stood ajar. Using all his force, he pressed his bony body through the crack.

He stopped just outside the door, struck by the endless darkness and icy cold. He found the stub of a candle in his shirt pocket and lit it: he was standing at the beginning of a narrow passage, his head touching the ceiling. Directly in front of him was a brick staircase whose crumbling steps led down into the darkness like an underground river in grey waves.

2.

Holding his candle close to him, Rannus walked down the steps. His hand was trembling and his knees shaking from fear, so he found it hard to walk. The air between the moldy walls grew even chillier. After several dozen meters, the staircase came abruptly to an end and a downward sloping passage began.

Rannus walked briskly downhill, like someone being pushed from behind. He took larger strides with his injured leg than with the healthy one. Blood began to drip again from his thumb and he stuck it in his mouth. In this way he loped forward, one hand to his mouth, the other holding the candle.

After some time, the passage changed. The downward slope grew less pronounced, the muddy floor almost leveled out. The walls, plastered at first, now became more uneven. The passage now was through limestone, and no attempt had been made to smooth the walls. Here and there, sharp stones jutted out, and he had to take care not to trip up on the uneven floor.

He walked for a long time and his pace slowed down. There were bends in the passage here and there and he had to sometimes make sharp turns. He stopped now and again, looking over his shoulder, but saw nothing: two or three weak rays from the candle were reflected by the walls, slightly illuminating the bumps on the walls.

Then the passage began to open out. A few steps later, Rannus was in a space the size of a small room, and before him lay the mouths of two passages. He

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came to a halt in dismay: which passage should he take? Which was shorter? And where did they emerge?

He stopped a moment to think. His indecision rose, and with it his agitation. Nevertheless, he could not spend much time deciding. He chose the right-hand passage, which seemed wider, and began proceeding along it. But his previous joy at being free was now ruined.

He only managed to walk for several dozen steps, when he suddenly stumbled over a pile of stones that had fallen from the ceiling. He scrambled over it and continued on his way. But the passage grew ever more irregular. All at once it ended in a confusion of higgledy-piggledy slabs of limestone, whose jagged edges were turned towards Rannus like the teeth of a saw.

He came to a halt for a moment at this rubble, and turned sadly on his heels. It was a dead end! He should have taken the other passage! He suddenly felt his exhaustion, his shirt grew wet despite the chill of the cellar and, on reaching the room again, he sank down wearily upon the pile of stones.

He wiped the dust from his pockmarked face. He wasn't used to exerting himself and grew tired so quickly! He looked around: curved black walls, a vault from which stones stuck out like claws, and the dusty floor, over which the candle cast a weak light.

Then his eyes fell on the candle. How rapidly it had burned! There was hardly half left. And yet he had a long way to go. But he could not set off now, he wanted to rest a while before setting off again. He raised the candle to his lips and blew it out.

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He was instantly enveloped by pitch blackness. He stayed where he was without stirring, without even daring to lower the hand holding the candle. In the darkness, he now felt something else he had not noticed before, namely the silence. It was a dizzying lack of sound, which was tangible, painful to his skin.

He closed his eyes and tried to picture where he was. He felt as if he had left time and space and entered an underground realm of darkness and silence. He had abruptly left everything he was familiar with, daily life and human concerns, and felt as if he had been journeying for several days in a row.

His blood throbbed in his ears and fearful thoughts entered his brain. He suddenly felt himself to be shut in by the stone walls—around, above and below. He felt the ghastly stoniness, the sense of being underground, and that there was no way out. It sank over his being, he sensed it more with his body than his mind, began to bow under its burden.

Then a searing thought crossed his brain: what if neither passage led anywhere, neither the old nor the new? What if he had been destined to lose his way here? Being forced to wander around here for days on end, then collapse out of exhaustion onto the stone floor, his tongue parched in his mouth.

For there was another tale told about the pirate: that he did not escape. That he wandered through the cellar and remains there to this day. That he wanders down secret passages, muttering to himself, trying to find a way out. His black beard has grown so long that it trails

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along the ground, his eyes blazing out from out of his stiffened beard like those of a cat.

Perhaps he was waiting for Rannus round the next bend, would appear to him suddenly, hideous and unearthly. Perhaps he would all of a sudden place his iron hand on his shoulder, press his stiffened beard against his face, and whisper inconceivable words in a hoarse voice with his inconceivable tongue.

An unspeakable fear filled Rannus' heart. He snatched at the candle, but his hands were trembling so that he was unable to light it for several moments. He felt as if every instant of his life and death were predetermined—a more terrible death than human reason could imagine—the eternal night of a stone cellar.

He came to his senses when the weak candle flame lit up the grey room once more. He would almost have retraced his steps, given himself up to his captors. But this seemed as horrible as his escape.

Now he chose to go down the left-hand passage. It was much lower and even shorter than the other. He could hardly walk upright. The passage took countless turns with many cavities and niches. Rannus swerved between the walls, crept along on his knees over piles of stones, supported himself on ledges of limestone, clutching his flickering candle.

He tried in vain to judge where he was. Maybe under the castle; but perhaps he was already above the city itself. If only they knew, those who were now sleeping soundly in their warm beds! He was like a coal miner deep underground, wandering beneath their flowering dreamscapes through his cavern.

The passage grew ever narrower. Rannus now had to crawl on his knees. The air had grown stuffy, as if this were only some smoke duct and not an ancient secret passage. Nauseating, dizzying, unnamable odors entered his nostrils. His shoulders were covered with a thick layer of dust and his worn-down shoes slipped on the wet limestone slabs.

And if they knew! They wouldn't feel any mercy towards him! Not one of them! They would send hunting dogs to sniff him out. Set bloodhounds on him. They would rip him apart till he was bloody, tear at his flesh in their rage, throw him with limbs tied into a stone cell, and return to their warm beds.

Their most terrifying dreams, wherein they would see endless grey labyrinths and stone spiral staircases without end in horrible towers, were nothing compared with reality. The furthest huts in the wilderness were nearer than his lonely cave, which was only a few fathoms below their pleasant dwellings.

Rannus' bad leg began to ache. This old aching of the bone woke him amidst the damp cold. Shooting pains went through his limbs and he was now crawling, having been obliged to pull his leg towards him in this cramped space. With his face screwed up in pain and a cold sweat breaking out on his forehead, he crept onwards.

And it began to become clear to him: this was how the pirate had escaped. There must be another passage, one that he had found blocked up. Then the whole of the tale about the pirate began to seem quite improbable. Had he even managed to escape? In fact, had he ever really existed? Perhaps this was all a myth, and he

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himself was the first poor fool to try to escape by this route!

Now he felt a sharp pain in the finger that was holding the candle; the flame had reached his fingernail. Afraid, he stood the candle on the palm of his hand; it would only burn for a few more moments. The fiery wax was running into his palm, but he felt no pain. Then the wick drooped and went out in the pool of molten wax.

Pitch blackness surrounded Rannus. He tried to crawl on, but everything now seemed so narrow that he couldn't even move his elbows. He couldn't manage to move forwards or go back. His limbs began to shake. He fell over onto the floor, his body bathed in warm sweat.

Oh, if only he could return to his cell! But he was now separated from it, in a completely dark series of passages, foul-smelling and without a breath of fresh air. He could ramble about here for days on end without reaching anywhere. He was like a mummy in a stone coffin; no he was like someone buried alive who wakes and bangs his head against the coffin lid until he loses consciousness, before true death arrives!

He lay where he was for a long while. Then he felt a breath of air, coming from the smoke vent. He thought that this might be an indication of the end of the passage. He used his last strength to crawl a few feet further. The passage widened and suddenly he saw, just beyond a small turn and through thick bars, a patch of the city dawn.

For a long time Rannus did not move. All he did was look at the light at the end of the passage without turn-

ing away his eyes. It was the sky, a waft of mist, which seemed pink in the light of the electric street lamps, a point of boundless space after the phantoms of the blackness underground!

He approached the bars and tried them with his hand. They were the thickness of a bony wrist, riveted in place. He looked out. The passage led upwards for several feet before opening onto a wall with gaps. He could scarcely make out the sentry box on the earthen rampart and the dozing guard next to it.

3.

Daybreak. In the green sky a faint mist could be seen wafting in large patches; here and there, pinks and reds were beginning to spread across the clouds. The dark green trunks of trees stood in the chilly sunrise, as if coated with the greenish mists of dawn.

The sky grew more and more flushed. All at once the sun's rays fell on the clouds, of which light wispy ones hovered like towers above the still, dark blue curve of the sea. Mist rose from them in long swathes like watery hair.

Then black columns of smoke rose from the factory chimneys into the clean air, and hooters blew, long and low, like the first heavy stroke of the bow against the double-bass of the day, tossing watery grey spirals of steam into the air.

The day was awakening once more, a new day with people, horses and wagons on all the roads, with strings

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of carts, trains and ships. A new day over the factories, railway stations and ports, over the blazing chimneys, the thundering rails and the blood-red cranes in the soot-filled harbors.

How Rannus had longed for this day! How long he had imagined his freedom! He had imagined himself emerging in a meadow outside the city, surrounded by dew and a frolicking herd of horses. Or on the beach, where the gentle waves rolled onto the sand between the fishing boats. Or even in the dark of the forest, with cold stars winking through the treetops.

Instead of all this, he was still on the prison grounds. In several hours he had done no more than wander around the prison cellar. And there were bars across the windows and a guard on the rampart—he was almost as much a prisoner as before. In prison, where he would have to stay and die—within sight of boundless freedom!

He sat in the mouth of the passage, took hold of one bar, and began to file another, taking advantage of the growing noise from the street. He had a small three-faceted file used to sharpen saws. But the bars were thick and he would have to file through at least four of them. It was not going to be that easy to escape from here, and the work would take the whole day!

He filed away and at the same time watched everything happening outside. He watched the guard pacing the rampart. He knew this guard, he was number 13. He could imagine his mood from his posture. He followed him walking there and empathized with his boredom as he put his hand across his mouth and yawned.

As if the filing tired him, or he could not for some reason carry on, he sat cross-legged like a Turk at the mouth of the passage and watched life unfold before him. It was a long time since he had observed it: those people, vehicles and trees out there on the boulevard!

For him, someone used to tedium and stillness, the bustle out on the street seemed to go on for ever and was wearying to him. Weeks and months between four walls, with the same routine and the same people, had passed unnoticed. How long the hours seemed now!

He noticed the smallest things, becoming like a sleuth. He guessed at the nature of passers-by and their professions. He carried on his investigations even when they were out of sight. He attributed jobs, friends, wives and children to them. And he sat at the table that had been laid, eating lunch with them.

Then he turned his eyes to the street again. He saw large numbers of horses moving along, the color of chestnut, mouse grey and fawn. Wagoners, brewery dray horse drivers in leather aprons on carts stacked with beer barrels, and a whole string of carts, where blood red girders made an ear-splitting din.

Then he saw a peasant stop. He was wearing a grey jerkin, had burning eyes and a beard, and knee-length boots. He stopped his framed wagon in front of a shop, on whose door a shiny scythe was affixed. He knocked the dust off his clothes and entered the shop, staying a good while.

The horse scraped restlessly at the side of the road, froth coming from its mouth. What a stupid man, thought Rannus, going in there and leaving his horse

unattended. Were there only so few thieves in town! But what a good horse, he then thought. The man himself was a churl, driving a wagon of manure, but the horse itself was worth a hundred rubles. Thank God Rannus understood the minds of horses!

The horse waited quietly, and the man did not emerge. Strange, thought Rannus, you can see but cannot touch. How many people are passing by, but no one touches it. It would be so easy: approach, take the reins, jump on board, and drive away. Pick the right moment or leave be—the art was in the timing.

His hands began to tremble. With one eye he looked at the guard, with the other at the countryman's horse. He was back once more stealing horses, trading them in exchange for those passing by on the street. And his heart pounded, as if he were really performing such perilous acts.

Then the countryman came out, got up on the wagon and drove away. Drove away! It had been such a good opportunity! But no one had taken advantage of it, neither he nor anyone else. Rannus grew sad and his excitement was snuffed out in an instant.

No, this was not really what he was thinking about. Each time he had left prison with the advice rather to die than to steal: but every time he had stolen again, as it was easier than dying. Now he was determined to pay back all his enemies; but when he thought about it, that too was pointless.

This was the reason, he thought to himself as if waking up, that he was neither a prisoner nor free. And he started to file away again. But his thoughts wandered

hither and thither, confused and restless. His sight was broken up, as moonlight is broken up on the waves, and instead of one world, he saw several.

He saw the events on the street as if in a dream. A company of Cossacks rode slowly by, the irons of their horses jingled, the forest of grey spears swayed. Then he saw a beggar on crutches making his way over the rampart. And on the roof of the house opposite he saw a grimy man with a bundle of sooty rope, stooping again and again against the clear sky like a ghostly demon.

Then he heard a song, long-drawn-out and monotonous. The masons were singing as they placed their bricks on the top of walls. He saw how bricks were thrown from hand to hand from a yellow pile. The brick would rise as if borne on the crest of a wave, higher and higher, until it reached the hands of the master mason, who put it on the wall, adding it to the thousands of others.

It was like an ants' nest, like a hive of bees making honeycomb after honeycomb. The brick flew from hand to hand, thousands of bricks, until high walls had risen, the high ridges of roofs, by comparison to which people were tiny and ephemeral. Everything was happening in one mad rush, like the urge to travel to warmer climes, to which flocks of birds would wing their way in the autumn.

Only he was still here, behind bars, inside a rampart with a sword-wielding man on top—only he and the likes of him did not feel this urge. They were alien to the builders, to the construction workers who stacked brick