

# From the Memoirs of Satan

By Wilhelm Hauff

In this way the jovial stranger had kept myself, and twelve or fifteen other gentlemen and ladies (our fellow guests), in a perpetual whirl of delight. Scarcely any had any special business to detain them at the hotel, and yet none ventured to entertain the mere idea of departure, even at a distant day. On the other hand, after we had slept for some time late on mornings, sat long at dinner, sung and played long of evenings, and drank, chatted, and laughed long of nights, the magic tie which bound us to this hotel seemed to have woven new chains around us.

This intoxication, however, was soon to be put an end to, perhaps for our good. On the seventh day of our rejoicings, a Sunday, our friend Von Natas was not to be found anywhere. The waiters gave as his apology a short journey; he could not return before sunset, but would certainly be in time for tea and supper.

The enjoyment of his society had already become such a necessity, that this piece of information made us helpless and ill at ease.

The conversation turned naturally on our absent friend and his striking, brilliant apparition among us. It was strange, but I could not get it out of my head that I had already met with him in my walk through life, but in a different shape; and, absurd as the idea was, it still forced itself irresistibly on my mind once and again. I called to mind, from years long gone by, the recollection of a man who in his whole demeanour, but more especially in his glance, had the greatest resemblance to him. The one of whom I now speak was a foreign physician, who occasionally visited my native town, and there lived at first in great retirement, though he soon found a crowd of worshippers collected around him. The thought of this man was always a melancholy one, for it was asserted that some serious misfortune always followed his visits; still I could not shake off the idea that Natas resembled him strikingly, in fact that he was one and the same person.

I mentioned to my next neighbour at table the idea that incessantly haunted me, and how unpleasant it was <to identify so horrible a being as the stranger who had so afflicted my native city, with our mutual friend who had so fully gained my esteem and affection; but it will seem still more incredible when I assure my readers that all my neighbours were full of precisely the same idea, and that all fancied they had seen our agreeable companion in some entirely different shape.

“You are enough to make one downright melancholy,” Baroness von Thingen, who sat near me; “you make our friend Natas out to be the Wandering Jew, or God knows what more!”

A little old man, a professor in Tibsingen, who had joined our circle some days before, and passed his time in quiet, silent enjoyment, enlivened by an occasional deep conference with the Rhine wine, had kept smiling to himself during what he called our “comparative anatomy, and twirling his huge snuff-box between his fingers with such skilful rapidity, that it revolved like a coach-wheel.

“I cannot longer refrain from a remark I wished to make,” exclaimed he at last. “Under your favour, gracious lady, I do not look upon him as being precisely the Wandering Jew, but still as being a very strange mortal. As long as he was present, the thought would, it is

true, now and then flash up in my mind, 'You have seen this man before, but pray where was it?' but these recollections were driven away as if by magic whenever he fastened upon me those dark wandering eyes of his."

"So was it with me—and with me—and with me," exclaimed we all in astonishment.

"Hem! hem!" smiled the Professor. "Even now the scales seem to fall from my eyes, and I see that he is the very same person I saw in Stuttgart twelve years ago."

"What, you have seen him then, and in what circumstances?" asked Lady von Thingen eagerly, and almost blushed at the eagerness she displayed.

The Professor took a pinch of snuff, shook the superfluous grains off his waistcoat, and answered—"It may be now about twelve years since I was forced by a lawsuit to spend some months in Stuttgart. I lived at one of the best hotels, and generally dined with a large company at the table d'hôte. Once upon a time I made my first appearance at table after a lapse of several days, during which I had been forced to keep my room. The company were talking very eagerly about a certain Signor Barighi, who for some time past had been delighting the other visitors with his lively wit, and his fluency in all languages. All were unanimous in his praise, but they could not exactly agree as to his occupation; some making him out a diplomatist, others a teacher of languages, a third party a distinguished political exile, and a fourth a spy of the police. The door opened, all seemed silent, even confused, at having carried on the dispute in so loud a tone; I judged that the person spoken of must be among us, and saw—"

"Who, pray?"

"Under favour, the same person who has amused us so agreeably for some days past. There was nothing supernatural in this, to be sure, but listen a moment; for two days Signor Barighi, as the stranger was called, had given a new relish to our meals by his brilliant conversation, when mine host interrupted us suddenly—'Gentlemen,' said he, 'prepare yourself for an unique entertainment which will be provided for you tomorrow.'

"We asked what this meant, and a grey headed captain, who had presided at the hotel table many years, informed us of the joke as follows—'Exactly opposite this dining room, an old bachelor lives, solitary and alone, in a large deserted house; he is a retired Counsellor of State—lives on a handsome premium, and has an enormous fortune besides. He is, however, a downright fool, and has some of the strangest peculiarities; thus, for instance, he often gives himself entertainments on a scale of extravagant luxury. He orders covers for twelve, from the hotel, he has excellent wines in his cellar, and one or the other of our waiters has the honour to attend table. You think, perhaps, that at these feasts he feeds the hungry, and gives drink to the thirsty—no such thing; on the chairs lie old yellow leaves of parchment, from the family record, and the old hunk is as jovial as if he had the merriest set of fellows around him; he talks and laughs with them, and the whole thing is said to be so fearful to look upon, that the youngest waiters are always sent over, for whoever has been to one such supper will enter the deserted house no more.

"The day before yesterday he had a supper, and our new waiter, Frank, there, calls heaven and earth to witness that nobody shall ever induce him to go there a second time. The next day after the entertainment comes the Counsellor's second freak. Early in the morning he leaves the city, and comes back the morning after; not, however, to his own house, which during this time is fast locked and bolted, but into this hotel. Here he treats people he has been in the habit of seeing for a whole year, as strangers; dines, and

afterwards places himself at one of the windows, and examines his own house across the way from top to bottom.

“ ‘Who does that house opposite belong to?’ he then asks the host.

“The other regularly bows and answers, ‘It belongs to the Counsellor of State, Hasentreffer, at your Excellency’s service.

“But, Professor,” here observed I, “what has this silly Hasentreffer of yours to do with our Natas?”

“A moment’s patience, Doctor,” answered the Professor, “the light will soon break in upon you. Hasentreffer then examines the house, and learns that it belongs to Hasentreffer. ‘Oh, what!’ he asks, ‘the same that was a student with me at Tibsingen’—then throws open the window, stretches his powdered head out, and calls out—‘Ha-asentreffer—Ha-asentreffer!’

“Of course no one answers, but he remarks: ‘The old fellow would never forgive me if I was not to look in on him for a moment,’ then takes up his hat and cane, unlocks his own house, goes in, and all goes on after as before.

“All of us,” the Professor proceeded in his story, “were greatly astonished at this singular story, and highly delighted at the idea of the next day’s merriment. Signor Barighi, however, obliged us to promise that we would not betray him, as he said he was preparing a capital joke to play off on the Counsellor.

“We all met at the table d’hôte earlier than usual, and besieged the windows. An old tumble down carriage, drawn by two blind steeds, came crawling down the street; it stopped before the hotel. There’s Hasentreffer, there’s Hasentreffer, was echoed by every mouth; and we were filled with extravagant merriment when we saw the little man get out, neatly powdered, dressed in an iron grey surtout with a huge meerschaum in hand. An escort of at least ten servants followed him in, and in this guise he entered the dining-room.

“We sat down at once. I have seldom laughed as much as I did then; for the old chap insisted, with the greatest coolness, that he came direct from Carrel, and that he had six days before been extremely well entertained at the Swan Inn at Frankfort. Barighi must have disappeared before the dessert, for when the Counsellor left the table, and the other guests, full of curiosity, imitated his example, Barighi was nowhere to be seen.

“The Counsellor took his seat at the window; we all followed his example and watched his movements. The house opposite seemed desolate and uninhabited. Grass grew on the threshold, the shutters were closed, and on some of them birds seemed to have built their nests.

“ ‘A fine house that, opposite,’ said the old man to our host, who kept standing behind him in the third position. ‘Who does it belong to?’

“ ‘To the Counsellor of State, Hasentreffer, at your Excellency’s service.

“ ‘Ah, indeed! that must be the same one that was a fellow-student with me,’ exclaimed he; ‘he would never forgive me if I was not to inform him that I was here.’ He opened the window,—‘Ha-asentreffer—Hasentreffer!’ cried he, in a hoarse voice. But who can paint our terror, when opposite, in the empty house, which we knew was firmly locked and bolted, a window-shutter was slowly raised, a window opened, and out of it peered the Counsellor of State, Hasentreffer, in his chintz morning-gown and white nightcap, under which a few thin grey locks were visible; this, this exactly, was his usual morning costume. Down to the minutest wrinkle on the pallid visage, the figure across the street

was precisely the same as the one that stood by our side. But a panic seized us, when the figure in the morning-gown called out across the street, in just the same hoarse voice, 'What do you want? who are you calling to, hey?'

" 'Are you the Counsellor of State, Hasentreffer? ' said the one on our side of the way, pale as death, in a trembling voice, and quaking as he leaned against the window for support.

" 'I'm the man,' squeaked the other, and nodded his head in a friendly way; 'have you any commands for me?'

" 'But I'm the man too,' said our friend mournfully, 'how can it be possible?'

" 'You are mistaken, my dear friend,' answered he across the way, 'you are the thirteenth, be good enough just to step across the street to my house, and let me twist your neck for you! it is by no means painful.'

" 'Waiter! my hat and stick,' said the Counsellor, pale as death, and his voice escaped in mournful tones from his hollow chest. 'The devil is in my house and seeks my soul; a pleasant evening to you, gentlemen,' added he, turning to us with a polite bow, and thereupon left the room.

" 'What does this mean?' we asked each other; 'are we all beside ourselves?'

"The gentleman in the morning-gown kept looking quietly out of the window, while our good silly old friend crossed the street at his usual formal pace. At the front-door, he pulled a huge bunch of keys out of his pocket, unlocked the heavy creaking door—he of the morning-gown looking carelessly on, and walked in.

"The latter now withdrew from the window, and we saw him go forward to meet our acquaintance at the room-door.

"Our host and the ten waiters were all pale with fear, and trembled. 'Gentlemen,' said the former, 'God pity poor Hasentreffer, for one of those two must be the devil in human shape.' We laughed at our host, and tried to persuade ourselves that it was a joke of Barighi's; but our host assured us that no one could have obtained access to the house except he was in possession of the Counsellor's very artificially contrived keys; also, that Barighi was seated at table not ten minutes before the prodigy happened; how then could he have disguised himself so completely in so short a time, even supposing him to have known how to unlock a strange house? He added, that the two were so fearfully like one another, that he who had lived in the neighbourhood for twenty years could not distinguish the true one from the counterfeit. 'But, for God's sake, gentlemen, do you not hear the horrid shrieks opposite?'

"We rushed to the window—terrible and fearful voices rang across from the empty house; we fancied we saw the old Counsellor, pursued by his image in the morning-gown, hurry past the window repeatedly. On a sudden all was quiet.

"We gazed on each other; the boldest among us proposed to cross over to the house—we all agreed to it. We crossed the street—the huge bell at the old man's door was rung thrice, but nothing could be heard in answer; we sent to the police and to a blacksmith's—the door was broken open, the whole tide of anxious visitors poured up the wide silent staircase—all the doors were fastened; at length one was opened. In a splendid apartment, the Counsellor, his iron-grey frock-coat torn to pieces, his neatly dressed hair in horrible disorder, lay dead, strangled, on the sofa.

"Since that time no traces of Barighi have been found, neither in Stuttgart nor elsewhere."

