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HERMANN HESSE (1877–1962) was born in Württemberg, Germany. He resented his pious and repressive upbringing, and was determined to be “a writer or nothing else”. His writing was greatly influenced by his travels to Asia and through his friendship with psychoanalyst Carl Jung. In 1946 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. Several of his novels are available or forthcoming from Pushkin Press Classics, including *Siddartha*, *Narcissus and Goldmund* and *Journey to the East*.

W. J. STRACHAN (1903–1992) was a poet, translator, teacher, and passionate promoter of modern art. Born in Hull, he studied English and French at St Catharine’s College, Cambridge and later cultivated a number of long-term friendships with some of the 20th century’s most prominent writers and artists.

DEMIAN

THE STORY OF EMIL
SINCLAIR’S YOUTH

HERMANN
HESSE

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN
BY W. J. STRACHAN

PUSHKIN PRESS CLASSICS

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Prologue

I cannot tell my story without going a long way back. If it were possible I would go back much farther still to the very earliest years of my childhood and beyond them to my family origins.

When poets write novels they are apt to behave as if they were gods, with the power to look beyond and comprehend any human story and serve it up as if the Almighty himself, omnipresent, were relating it in all its naked truth. That I am no more able to do than the poets. But my story is more important to me than any poet's story to him, for it is my own—and it is the story of a human being—not an invented, idealized person but a real, live, unique being. What constitutes a real, live human being is more of a mystery than ever these days, and men—each one of whom is a valuable, unique experiment on the part of nature—are shot down wholesale. If, however, we were not something more than unique human beings and each man jack of us could really be dismissed from this world with a bullet, there would be no more point in relating stories at all. But every man is not only himself; he is also the unique, particular, always significant and remarkable point where the phenomena of the world intersect once and for all and never again. That is why every man's story is important, eternal, sacred; and why every man while he lives and fulfils the will of nature is a wonderful creature, deserving the utmost attention. In each individual the spirit is made flesh, in each one the whole of creation suffers, in each one a Saviour is crucified.

Few people nowadays know what man is. Many feel it intuitively and die more easily for that reason, just as I shall die more easily when I have completed this story.

I cannot call myself a scholar. I have always been and still am a seeker but I no longer do my seeking among the stars or in books. I am beginning to hear the lessons which whisper in my blood. Mine is not a pleasant story, it does not possess the gentle harmony of invented tales; like the lives of all men who have given up trying to deceive themselves, it is a mixture of nonsense and chaos, madness and dreams.

The life of every man is a way to himself, an attempt at a way, the suggestion of a path. No man has ever been utterly himself, yet every man strives to be so, the dull, the intelligent, each one as best he can. Each man to the end of his days carries round with him vestiges of his birth—the slime and egg-shells of the primeval world. There are many who never become human; they remain frogs, lizards, ants. Many men are human beings above and fish below. Yet each one represents an attempt on the part of nature to create a human being. We enjoy a common origin in our mothers; we all come from the same pit. But each individual, who is himself an experimental throw from the depths, strives towards his own goal. We can understand each other; but each person is able to interpret himself to himself alone.

I

Two Worlds

I BEGIN MY STORY with an event from the time when I was ten years old, attending the local grammar school in our small country town.

I can still catch the fragrance of many things which stir me with feelings of melancholy and send delicious shivers of delight through me—dark and sunlit streets, houses and towers, clock chimes and people's faces, rooms full of comfort and warm hospitality, rooms full of secret and profound, ghostly fears. It is a world that savours of warm corners, rabbits, servant girls, household remedies and dried fruit. It was the meeting-place of two worlds; day and night came thither from two opposite poles.

There was the world of my parents' house, or rather it was even more circumscribed and embraced only my parents themselves. This world was familiar to me in almost every aspect—it meant mother and father, love and severity, model behaviour and school. It was a world of quiet brilliance, clarity and cleanliness; in it gentle and friendly conversation, washed hands, clean clothes and good manners were the order of the day. In this world the morning hymn was sung, Christmas celebrated. Through it ran

straight lines and paths that led into the future; here were duty and guilt, bad conscience and confessions, forgiveness and good resolutions, love and reverence, wisdom and Bible readings. In this world you had to conduct yourself so that life should be pure, unsullied, beautiful and well-ordered.

The other world, however, also began in the middle of our own house and was completely different; it smelt different, spoke a different language, made different claims and promises. This second world was peopled with servant girls and workmen, ghost stories and scandalous rumours, a gay tide of monstrous, intriguing, frightful, mysterious things; it included the slaughterhouse and the prison, drunken and scolding women, cows in labour, foundered horses, tales of housebreaking, murder and suicide. All these attractive and hideous, wild and cruel things were on every side, in the next street, the neighbouring house. Policemen and tramps moved about in it, drunkards beat their wives, bunches of young women poured out of the factories in the evening, old women could put a spell on you and make you ill; thieves lived in the wood; incendiaries were caught by mounted gendarmes. Everywhere you could smell this vigorous, second world—everywhere, that is, except in our house where my mother and father lived. There it was all goodness. It was wonderful to be living in a house in a reign of peace, order, tranquillity, duty and good conscience, forgiveness and love—but it was no less wonderful to know there was the other, the loud and shrill, sullen and violent world from which you could dart back to your mother in one leap.

The odd thing about it was that these worlds should border on each other so closely. When, for example, our servant Lina sat by the door in the living-room at evening prayers and joined in the hymn in her clear voice, her freshly washed hands folded on

her smoothed-down pinafore, she belonged wholly and utterly to mother and father, to us, the world of light and righteousness. But when in the kitchen or woodshed immediately afterwards she told me the story of the little headless man or started bickering with her neighbours in the little butcher's shop, she became a different person, belonged to another world and was veiled in mystery. And it was the same with everybody, most of all with myself. Doubtless I was part of the world of light and righteousness as the child of my parents, but wherever I listened or directed my gaze I found the other thing and I lived half in the other world, although it was often strangely alien to me and I inevitably suffered from panic and a bad conscience. Indeed at times I preferred life in the forbidden world and my return to the world of light—necessary and worthy though it might be—was often almost like a return to something less attractive, something both more drab and tedious. I was often conscious that my destiny in life was to become like my father and mother; pure, righteous and disciplined; but that was a long way ahead; first one had to sit studying at school, do tests and examinations, and the way always led through and past the other, dark world and it was not impossible that one might remain permanently in it. I had read, with passionate interest, stories of prodigal sons to whom this had happened. There was always the return to their father and the path of righteousness that was so fine and redeeming that I felt convinced that this alone was the right, good, worthy thing; and yet I found the part of the story which was played among the wicked and lost souls far more alluring. If it had been permissible to speak out and confess, I should have admitted that it often seemed a shame to me that the Prodigal Son should atone and be 'found' again—though this feeling was only vaguely present deep down within me like a presentiment or possibility. When I

pictured the devil to myself, I found no difficulty in visualizing him in the street below, disguised or undisguised, or at the fair or in a tavern but never at home.

My sisters belonged likewise to the world of light. It often seemed to me that they were closer in temperament to father and mother, better and more refined and with fewer faults than I. Of course they had their defects and their vagaries but these did not appear to me to go very deep. It was not as with me whose contact with evil could become so oppressive and painful and to whom the dark world lay so much closer. My sisters, like my parents, were to be spared and respected, and if one quarrelled with them one always felt in the wrong afterwards; as if one were the instigator, who must crave forgiveness. For in offending my sisters, I was offending my parents, which made me guilty of a breach of good conduct. There were secrets that I would have been less reluctant to tell the most reprobate street urchin than my sisters. On good days when everything seemed light and my conscience in good order, I enjoyed playing with them, being good and kind to them and seeing myself sharing their aura of nobility. It was like a foretaste of being an angel! That was the highest thing we could conceive of and we thought it would be sweet and wonderful to be angels, surrounded with sweet music and fragrance reminiscent of Christmas and happiness. How rarely did such hours and days come along! I would often be engaged in some harmless and authorized game which became too exciting and vigorous for my sisters and led to squabbles and misery, and when I lost my temper I was terrible and did and said things that seemed so depraved to me that they seared my heart even as I was in the act of doing and saying them. These occasions were followed by gloomy hours of sorrow and penitence and the painful moment when I begged forgiveness and

then, once again, a beam of light, a tranquil, grateful unclouded goodness for hours—or moments as the case might be.

I attended the local grammar school. The mayor's son and the head forester's son were in my class and sometimes joined me. They were wild fellows, yet they belonged to the 'respectable' world. But I also had close relations with neighbours' sons, village lads on whom we normally looked down. It is with one of these that my story begins.

One half-holiday—I was little more than ten years old—I was playing around with two boys from the neighbourhood. A bigger boy joined us, a rough, burly lad of about thirteen from the village school, the tailor's son. His father drank, and the whole family had a bad name. I knew Franz Kromer well, and went about in fear of him so that I felt very uneasy when he came along. He had already acquired grown-up ways and imitated the walk and speech of the young factory workers. With him as ringleader we climbed down the river bank near the bridge and hid ourselves away from the world under the first arch. The narrow strip between the vaulted bridge and the lazily flowing river consisted of nothing but general rubbish and broken pots, tangles of rusty barbed wire and similar jetsam. Occasionally we came across things we could make use of. We had to comb these stretches of bank under Franz Kromer's orders and show him our discoveries. These he either kept himself or threw into the water. We were told to notice whether there were any items made of lead, brass or tin. He retained these together with an old comb made of horn. I was very uncomfortable in his presence, not because I knew my father would forbid this relationship but out of fear of Franz himself, but I was grateful for being included, and treated like the others. He gave the orders and we obeyed as if it was an old custom, although it was my first time.

At length we sat down on the ground; Franz spat into the water and looked like a grown-up; he spat through a gap between his teeth and scored a hit wherever he aimed. A conversation started and the boys boasted about their grand deeds and beastly tricks. I remained silent and yet feared to offend by my silence and incur Kromer's wrath. Both my comrades had made up to him, and avoided me from the start. I was a stranger among them and felt that my clothes and manners were taken as a kind of challenge. Franz could not possibly have any love for me, a grammar school boy and a gentleman's son and I was in no doubt that the other two, if it came to it, would disown and desert me.

Finally, out of sheer nervousness, I began to talk. I invented a long story of robbery, in which I featured as the hero. One night in the corner by the mill a friend and I had stolen a whole sackful of apples, not just ordinary apples but pippins, golden pippins of the best kind at that. I was taking refuge in my story from the dangers of the moment and found no difficulty in inventing and relating it. In order not to dry up too soon and perhaps become involved in something worse, I gave full rein to my narrative powers. One of us, I reported, had always stood guard while the other sat in the tree and chucked the apples down, and the sack had got so heavy that in the end we had to open it and leave half behind, but we came back half an hour later and fetched them too.

I hoped for some applause at the end of my story; I had warmed up to the narrative at last, carried away by my own eloquence. The two smaller boys were silent, waiting, but Franz Kromer gave me a penetrating look through his narrowed eyes. "Is that yarn true?" he asked in a menacing tone.

"Yes," I said.

"Really and truly?"

"Yes, really and truly," I asserted defiantly while I choked inwardly with fear.

"Can you swear to it?"

I was very afraid but I said 'Yes' without hesitation.

"Hand on your heart?"

"Hand on my heart."

"Right then," he said and turned away.

I thought this was all very satisfactory and I was glad when he got up and turned to go home. When we were on the bridge I ventured timidly that I must go home.

"No desperate hurry," Franz laughed. "We go the same way."

He sauntered along slowly and I did not dare to go ahead, but he was in fact going in the direction of our house. When we arrived, and I saw our front door and the fat doorknocker, the sun in the windows and the curtains in my mother's room, I breathed a sigh of relief. Back home! O good, blessed home—coming back to the world of light and peace!

When I had quickly opened the door and slipped in ready to slam it behind me, Franz Kromer edged in too. In the cool, gloomy paved passage which was lit solely from the courtyard he stood close to me and said in a low voice, "No hurry, you!"

I looked at him terrified. His grip on my arm was like a vice. I tried to guess what was going on in his mind and whether he was going to do me some mischief. If I were to let out a loud and vigorous shriek would someone above be quick enough to save me? But I gave up the idea.

"What is it?" I asked, "what do you want?"

"Oh nothing much, I merely wanted to ask you something. The others needn't hear."

"Well? What do you want me to tell you? I must go up, you know."

"I suppose you know who owns the orchard by the corner mill?"

"No, I don't. The miller I think."

Franz had put his arm round me and drawn me close to him so that I couldn't avoid looking into his face at close range. He had an evil gleam in his eyes and he gave an ugly laugh. His face was full of cruelty and sense of power.

"Yes, kid, I can tell you who owns the orchard. I've known for a long time that people have been stealing apples and I also know that the man in question said he would give two marks reward to anyone who could tell him who stole the fruit."

"Heavens!" I exclaimed. "But you wouldn't let on to him?"

I felt that it would be futile to appeal to his sense of honour. He belonged to the 'other' world; betrayal was no crime as far as he was concerned. That much was clear to me. The people of the 'other' world were not like us in these matters.

"Not let on! My dear fellow, do you think I can mint my own money and produce a couple of marks out of a hat? I'm poor. I haven't a rich father like you and if I can earn two marks I've got to earn them. He might even give me more."

He suddenly left me. Our house passage no longer smelt of peace and safety; the world was tumbling about my ears. He would denounce me as a criminal; they would inform my father, perhaps the police would come. All the horror of chaos threatened me; the outlook for me was horrible and dangerous. The fact that I had not committed a theft was a mere detail. I had sworn that I had. God in heaven! Tears welled in my eyes. I felt that I should have to buy myself out and I groped desperately. Not an apple, not a pen-knife; nothing. Then I remembered my watch. It was a silver watch but it did not go. I just wore it 'like that'. It came to me from my grandmother. I quickly drew it out.

"Kromer," I said, "you mustn't tell; it would be a beastly thing to do. Look, I'll give you my watch; unluckily it's the only thing I have, but you can have it. It's made of silver," I added nervously. "It's good workmanship and it's only got some slight defect which can easily be put right."

He smiled and took the watch in his large hand. I looked at that hand and felt how rough and hostile it was towards me and how it was trying to tighten its grip on my life and peace of mind.

"It's silver," I repeated nervously.

"I don't give a damn for your silver and your old watch!" he said with withering scorn. "Get it repaired yourself!"

"But Franz," I exclaimed, trembling with fear lest he walk off. "Just wait a moment! Take the watch! It really is made of silver, honestly. And I haven't got anything else."

He gave me a cold, scornful look.

"Well, you know who I'm going to see. Or I might even inform the police. The sergeant is a friend of mine."

He turned as if to go. I held him back by his coat sleeve. He must not go. I would much rather die than have to suffer what would happen if he went off like that.

"Franz," I implored, hot with emotion, "don't do anything stupid! It *is* a joke, isn't it?"

"It's a joke all right, but it might be an expensive one for you."

"Just tell me, Franz, what I am to do and I'll do whatever you like!"

His eyes narrowed and he laughed again.

"Don't be a fool!" he said with false good humour. "You know as well as I do. I can earn two marks and I'm not rich; you know I can't afford to chuck them away. But you're rich; you've got a watch. You've only got to give me two marks and everything will be all right."

I grasped his logic. But two marks! It was far away beyond my means and as unattainable as ten, a hundred, a thousand marks. I did not have any money. There was a money-box which mother kept for me and it contained a few ten and five pfennig pieces put in by uncles when they came to visit us and by other family friends on similar occasions. Apart from that I had nothing. I was not given any pocket money at that age.

"I haven't got anything, honestly," I said gloomily. "I haven't any money. But I'll give you anything else. I've got a book about Indians and soldiers and a compass. I'll fetch it for you."

Kromer merely contracted his lips in an evil sneer and spat on the ground.

"Talk sense!" he commanded. "You can keep your stupid rubbish. A compass! Don't make me angry, do you hear, and hand over the money!"

"But I haven't any. They don't give me any. I can't do anything about it!"

"Bring me two marks tomorrow morning then. I'll wait for them downstairs after school. See you have them ready, or you'll find out what happens if you don't."

"Yes, but where am I going to get them from when I haven't got any?"

"There's plenty of money in your house. That's up to you. Tomorrow after school then. And I tell you... if you don't bring it..." he flashed an intimidating glance at me, spat again and vanished like a shadow.

I felt unable to go upstairs. My life was wrecked. I thought vaguely of running away and never returning or of drowning myself. I sat down in the dark on the bottom step of our outside staircase,

withdrew into myself and abandoned myself to my misery. Lina found me there weeping when she came down with a basket to collect some firewood.

I begged her to say nothing about it, and went upstairs. On the right of the glazed door hung father's hat and mother's sunshade; an atmosphere of homeliness and affection hung about all these things; my heart warmed to them gratefully as that of the Prodigal Son must have done when he was confronted with the sight and smell of the old familiar rooms of his house. But none of this was mine any longer; it all belonged to the world of my parents and I was deeply and guiltily engulfed in the alien tide. I was involved in excitement and wrongdoing, threatened by the enemy, beset by dangers, fear and scandal. The hat and the sunshade, the good old sandstone floor, the large picture over the hall cupboard and the voices of my elder sisters coming from the living-room, it was all more moving and precious than ever but it had ceased to be a comfort and something I could rely on and had become a kind of reproach. This was no longer my world; I could have no part in its cheerfulness and peace. My feet were defiled; I could not wipe them on the mat; I was accompanied by shadows of which this world of home knew nothing. I had had plenty of secrets, plenty of scares before but it had all been light-hearted compared with what I was bringing back with me that day. Fate was tracking me down, hands were reaching for me from which my mother could not protect me; of which she knew nothing. What my crime was—theft or lying (had I not sworn a false oath by God and everything that was sacred?)—did not come into it. My sin was not this or that; my sin was that I was in league with the Devil. Why had I associated with him? Why had I listened to Kromer more than I had ever done to my father? Why had I lied about that theft, fathered myself with

crime as if it had been a heroic deed? And now the Devil held me in his clutches, the enemy was at my shoulder.

For the time being my fear was not of the next day, it was the horrible certainty that I was treading the downhill path that led into darkness. I felt that my first lapse was bound to be followed by others and that my presence among my brothers and sisters, my demonstrations of affection towards my parents were a lie, that I was living a fate and a lie that I was hiding from them.

For a moment a flash of confidence and hope lit inside me as I stood looking at my father's hat. I would tell him the whole story, the judgment he passed and the punishment he meted out would make him into my confidant and saviour. It would only mean the kind of penance I had done often enough, a difficult and painful hour, a difficult and rueful request for forgiveness.

How sweet it all sounded. How tempting it was! But it was no use. I knew that I would not do it. I knew that I now had a secret, a debt which I had to work out for myself. Perhaps I was at the parting of the ways, perhaps from now on I would always belong to the wicked, depend on them, obey them, become one of their number. I had played the man and hero and now I must bear the consequences.

I was glad that my father upbraided me about my muddy shoes. It side-stepped the issue, the graver sin passed unnoticed and I got away with a reproach which I secretly transferred to the other affair. In so doing, a strange new feeling lit up inside me, an unpleasant, ruthless feeling, full of barbs—I felt superior to my father! For the moment I despised his ignorance; his reprimand about the muddy boots seemed trivial. "If you only knew," I thought, and felt like the criminal who is being tried for stealing a loaf of bread when he has confessed to a murder. It

was an odious, hostile feeling but it was strong and it somehow fascinated me and took a firmer hold of me than any other aspect of my secret and my guilt. Perhaps, I thought, Kromer has already gone to the police and denounced me and while I am being treated here as a small child, storms are gathering above my head!

This was the all-important and permanent element in the whole experience as I have related it. It was the first crack in the sacrosanct person of my father, a first incision in the pillar on which my childhood's life had rested but which every man must destroy before he can become his own true self. The real, inner line of our fate consists of these experiences which are hidden from other people. A gash or wound of this kind grows together again; it is healed and forgotten, but in the inner recesses of our minds it lives on and bleeds.

I was so horrified by this new feeling that I would willingly have fallen at my father's feet and begged forgiveness. But you cannot crave forgiveness for anything fundamental and a child is as deeply aware of that as any wise man.

I felt the need to reflect on my problem and plan out my course for the next day; but I failed completely. It was as much as I could do the whole evening to try and acclimatize myself to the different atmosphere in our sitting-room. Wall-clock and table, Bible and mirror, bookshelf and pictures were likewise leaving me behind, and I had to gaze at them with a frozen heart as I saw my world, my good, happy life becoming a thing of the past and breaking away from me. There was no escaping the fact that new tap-roots held me firmly anchored in a dark and alien land. For the first time in my life I was tasting death, and death tastes bitter—for it is birth pangs, fear and dread before some terrible renewal.