

Otto Emersleben
IN THE CREVASSES OF THE ARCTIC
A Travel Narrative

Translated by Mark William Lutte

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Whoever knows me, knows that in my opinion there is no “chance”.
I attribute everything, whatever occurs, to a higher will.

– Karl May/ *Winnetou IV*

In Arizona, you should have known me back there, Mister,
there I had friends and gold like no other.

– Rainer Werner Fassbinder/ *Das Kaffeehaus*

CHAPTER I

The Congress Travels

Like every human being I have an external and an internal life. My external personality is named Karl May and busies itself with writing. My internal personality has no name; it makes itself known through my books. I have traversed the globe from the lands of the East to the Far West. Part of the adventures on those expeditions found expression in my writing. Who could defend this claim with more justification and right than I: The earth is far more than a thousand day-journeys long, and its width is just as great.

Not long ago I reached the Great White North, a part of the world, with which I had not yet become well acquainted. It all began with my wife and I boarding a ship headed for New York* in the summer of 1904. Following my numerous travels to North America, I was especially looking forward to this journey, as it was supposed to finally bring me long-awaited recognition among geographical experts. In September of that same year, geographers from all corners of the world gathered together for their World Congress in the American capital of Washington – for the first time outside of Europe. I had prepared a presentation on the topic: “The Spread of the Common Mulberry Tree in the Valleys of Kurdistan under Special Consideration of Incidences in Manglana and Gumri as well as in the Valley of Sab el Ala.” Since the death of my friend Winnetou, the West of the American continent was disappearing more and more from my range of interests, so I was pleased that

* Translator’s note: written as *Neuyork* in original text; a spelling typical to that era

this golden opportunity presented itself to show Klara – we had just married the year before – the New World. My Bowie knife, Henry carbine, and bear-killer consequently stayed at home, just like Winnetou's silver rifle^{*}, which I had taken into my own care after an attack by enemy Indians at the grave of the Great Chief of the Apaches.

The days before the departure from Radebeul were filled with busy doings up to the last instant. Arrangements had to be made concerning this author's works and home for the extent of our absence; friends demanded the opportunity for a proper farewell. One's enemies also had to be considered, getting together right at that moment and planning new attacks against me, as we were meeting our travel arrangements. I trusted the defense of my cause to a few capable lawyers and to the care of my publisher, and our fate on the sea to a solid travel enterprise.

During the twelve-day crossing to New York I made the acquaintance of a young German by the name of Rudolf Franke, with whom – although myself a Saxon, and he being from Braunschweig – I saw perfectly eye-to-eye. *Little Heart*^{**}, a name I used for my dear Klara, shared my enthusiasm for this dashing young man. In his profession as a businessman he wanted to try his luck in the New World, something his homeland had denied him up to now, like so many others. He mentioned that the reading of a report from an upright man named Kara Ben Nemsi regarding his experiences in wild Kurdistan, where this man – yes, even as a salesman had traveled about, was not altogether unrelated to his decision to emigrate. As my Little Heart, with eyes closed, silently nodded in approval, I admitted that I was, in fact, this Kara Ben Nemsi, and trustingly laid my hand on the shoulder of my young countryman.

* Translator's note: These weapons of Karl May are better known as *Bowiemesser*, *Henrystutzen*, *Bärentöter*, and Winnetou's *Silberbüchse*.

** Translator's note: written as *Das Herzle* in original text

Franke's astonishment was not slight. With his mouth open he drew back from my hand, and whispered to me, listening intently for a response: "That means you are..."

"I was," I said. "Yes, I was indeed Old Shatterhand, and now that I'm again going to America, the world still calls me *Scharlih*.* I happily respond to that." To completely convince him, I gave him the full title of my presentation at the coming congress.

"So it's not Kara Ben Nemsi who is giving the presentation?" Franke asked. The disappointment in his words could not to be missed.

"Of course he's giving it," I said, with the encouraging gesture of placing my right hand on my breast, "but only as a private scholar, and under his legal name."

Unfortunately, we had to part ways with Franke immediately upon disembarking the ship, and for him the thorny path of the immigrant began.

Back home, in the countries of the Old Continent, the majority of the congress' participants might have been considered armchair scholars – the conference's program made every single one a discoverer of America. For the congress traveled. Leaving Washington, where the congress opened, we soon came back to New York. There we had another encounter with our "old" friend Franke. In the meantime he had been searching for work; he already had – as he happily reported – a potential position as purchasing and economic manager in a large hotel. We dined together in a nice little spot in Hoboken (on the outskirts of New York), a harbor known as 'Little Germany'. The sauerkraut that was served alongside my Kalbshaxe, prepared with steamed onion slices, nutmeg, and yellow-gold bacon-drippings, will remain unforgettable to me.

* Translator's note: This is the nickname given to Old Shatterhand by the title character of *Winnetou I* (page 545, original edition of 1893, available at <http://www.ub.uni-bielefeld.de/KarlMay/winnetou/>).

On the morning following this fortunate encounter, Klara and I, along with the rest of the members of the congress, boarded a roomy river-steamboat. We traveled up the Hudson River, and finally went over land to Niagara Falls and to Chicago. The congress still met, tirelessly, even while underway. In every location along the voyage these meetings took place, plenary as well as in work-groups, and complete with banquets and cocktails. Local bands of geographers were assembled to greet us, and with them came businessmen, diplomats, teachers, and military officers (even in the so-called 'New World' one subscribes to the odd belief, that violence and extermination are acceptable means for reaching humane ends).

At the meetings, members praised each other with compliments, exchanged offprints of their articles, information, addresses; there were bows and countless discussions among colleagues at the fringes of the crowd. My wife enthusiastically took part in the congress' lady's program, and besides experiencing the receptions and banquets, which she attended with me, she also got to know the schools, prisons, soup-kitchens, and libraries of this great republic. She did not withhold her astonishment from me, concerning how unfamiliar the people of this country were with my books. They were, after all, the origin of everything she had known about America up to this point, those very books of mine.

We traveled comfortably. In Pullman cars for the most part, now and then on steamships or with horse and buggy. At one point we were even expected to enter a cage, in order to descend into and view a coalmine. What I especially treasured, were the possibilities to personally meet with these geographers and travelers. I certainly felt, upon these opportunities, a sharp distinction between those among the group that purely collect

facts and myself. For me, writing has never been a question of fame whatsoever, whether before or after my death. Above all else, questions concerning all of humanity were my focus. The possibilities of destruction have become so virulent, that no one is able to control them any longer, and instead we are all controlled by them. Mankind has to come to the realization, that it must rise and head toward the realm of noble humanity; each one of us in our own right. What can each individual do, to prevent the threatening catastrophe? My books are parables, in which I attempt to provide an answer for such questions. Helpless as the teller of a fairy tale. What my nemeses at home resentfully call the ‘Karl-May-Problem’ is actually nothing more than the problem of all humankind, on which countless millions have already worked, without reaching any tangible conclusion. They accuse me of plagiarism and fraud only because they do not understand this.

The president of the congress was a well-known polar explorer: America’s Robert Peary, who had attained the rank of commander in the *Navy* (although he never commanded any ship of war). In one of his addresses he spoke of the distinct “migratory character” of our event. The newspapers reported on the story intensely, not only mentioning the opulence of the banquets with foreign dignitaries and representatives of the American government, but also in their ‘social events’ columns on the multitude of peripheral activities along this great journey.

I gave my lecture in St. Louis, the last stop.

There the opportunity arose to become better acquainted with Commander Peary, himself. Like me, he was the child of poor parents – to be more exact: his father died when he was only three years old. His poverty was not my poverty, however. Ultimately, his mother made it possible – although through horrible difficulty – for him to be educated as a

civil engineer. He seemed to be very proud of the fact that she lived to see the dawn of his fame as a polar explorer. She died only a few years ago. Peary proved to have not only a profound knowledge of the Arctic, but knew my entire body of work as well. He was also a man who knew how to set himself in the right light concerning the press. He had, as he repeatedly assured me – and soon I could convince myself, that this assurance was certainly correct – excellent connections with the American president, Theodore Roosevelt. Thanks to these connections, Peary was for now totally free from all other duties in the *Navy*, and at the same time, he practically had a direct presidential order in his pocket to conquer the North Pole for his country at all costs.

In his speech at the closing of the congress, Peary spoke of a time of big things, in which we are living. And in New York, at the Gala reception for the foreign guests, he elaborated on his own plans to the astonished and attentive group of experts: after having spent nearly twenty years of his life in the wide expanses of the Arctic, next summer he would, using a specially-built, polar-cruising steam-sailer, push as far as possible into the heart of the polar island-world and from there with dog-sleds and Esquimos – his Esquimos, as he often said – he would reach the North Pole. A keel had already been laid for the ship that would bear the name of President Roosevelt. “Shall I win?” he asked meaningfully, with both hands cast up in the space before him, much like a priest. “God knows. I hope and dream and pray that I may. And if I do not, some one else will. There is no higher, purer form of rivalry than this polar quest.”

Peary was without a doubt imposing in appearance, there in his dress suit, which had been excellently tailored. The tall, massive yet thin figure; the penetrating, sharp eyes, whose quick movements seemed to flee from nothing; the powerful, bushy moustache – I

could envision him in his fur costume, which he wore on every voyage to the world of eternal ice. He must not have looked all that different from a walrus then. Dinner had just ended as he gently took me by the arm and asked, smiling earnestly, “Doctor, how is it, that you of all people have not yet traveled the Arctic?”

I left my wife in the care of the German ambassador. “Maybe I just haven’t written about it yet,” I responded ambiguously. Peary pulled me gently, but pointedly aside. “Honestly, my dear Peary, what does this mean? Paper, as we both know, is patient. And other than that, I’m not yet finished with all my travels.”

“That is exactly what I’m implying,” he said, giving me a wink. His face rapidly took on an earnest, business-like expression. “You know, at first I was also not drawn to the ice. Not even to the Pole. All that came much later. As a young *Navy* lieutenant I first romped about the isthmus of Nicaragua assigned to surveying. Back then we Americans wanted our own connection between the great seas of the world –“

“I know, I know,” I conceded. What was he driving at? Just now, because we were walking closely together, I noticed that he slid along more than he stepped. It was probably to conceal a slight limp that otherwise would have been unavoidable; after all, a few years ago he had to have almost all of his toes removed on account of severe frostbite. As soon as we stood apart from the other small groups, he paused, stared me straight in the eyes, and said: “Short and sweet, I’m not the youngest anymore. This will be my last attempt, Doctor. And I should like it if you accompanied me. Do you have a command of the Esquimo language?”

Overcome with surprise, I let his arm fall from mine. “Of course Inuit is among the fifty or so languages that I have to offer,” I hurried to assure him. Everything we had heard

about expeditions and daring plans in this week of the congress was suddenly wide-awake inside of me. Each of us had our own reasons for getting involved. Was it not all just a big gamble? The stakes were high to be sure, and quite a few explorers had already paid for their obsession with their own lives. But it was worth it – provided that one achieved a great score.

“As far as age is concerned, what should I say? You’re – let me guess – not yet fifty, right?”

“Certainly not, although it won’t be long.”

“And I am presently sixty-two, you see.”

“And – you’re a newly wed.”

I nodded humbly. “Alright then,” Peary bellowed in satisfaction. He lifted his arms up joyfully, leaned back slightly, anxiously keeping his balance, and said: “Assuming this pleasant circumstance is not somehow a hindrance, I hereby formally invite you to join me next summer on board my hopefully-completed vessel. Together we will sail up to the jumping-off-point for my dash to the Pole.”

I stopped short, my indecision quite apparent. “Hindrance? What do you mean by that?”

“Well, would a – let’s say – several-week-long separation meet with the approval of your wife?”

“My wife would have nothing against this plan. But tell me, didn’t your wife accompany you more than once to the North? She even wintered-over with you once, if I remember correctly.”

“Several times, several times. But I should like to spare you that, believe me. You could return to the States with the relief ship, which will be sailing along with us as our tender. And if you want, go ahead and bring your wife along. In any case, the invitation goes for the both of you.”

As he continued speaking, suddenly Peary’s Negro servant appeared. He stood at attention, keeping a proper distance, and audibly cleared his throat.

“What is it then, Henson,” Peary asked indignantly.

The Negro had an open, dutifully keen smile stretched across his face. He removed his white-gloved hand from his mouth, and responded: “I beg your pardon, Sir. Your presence is requested at – at the telephone. The President of the United States would like to speak with you.”

“Then you will have to excuse me,” said Peary smiling, with a bow to me. “Carefully consider my proposal. The offer stands.” I took this chance to thank him, and I promised that I would give my answer by the end of the congress. Then I could hear him, as he moved away, barking at Henson: “Where is the thing, then? This fellow is going to start getting pushy.”

A few days later everything had come to a close and we had happily survived the congress. The resolutions and the reports were adopted, and the busiest of the participants even took off on a train trip to Mexico. Robert Peary could be satisfied with the outcome. He had received the endorsement of the world’s leading geographers for his claim that exploration of the Arctic, particularly of the regions close to the Pole, was primarily an American matter. Or, as the text of the resolution itself read, it represented “a more immediate interest to the people of North America.” This was a slap in the face for the polar

explorers of other countries – but I must confess, I, too, voted for this closing line, all the while keeping Peary’s invitation in mind, which I certainly did not wish to endanger. My Little Heart had given her approval to this undertaking, and I immediately approached Peary to signal my grateful acceptance of his proposal. He promised that he would notify us in the coming summer of the exact place and time of our departure.

In St. Louis, years ago, my way to the Wild West had begun. From here I set out as a surveyor with Ol’ Sam Hawkens – as one who everyone believed to be a *greenhorn*^{*}, because that was the first time I ever came across highwaymen and redskins, and never before had I taken aim at a buffalo with a gun. To the surprise of the westmen^{**}, I was skilful and brave, quite different from what was expected of a true greenhorn. As if this had all just been yesterday, I recalled the red roan, which I broke for that first journey, which was consequently given to me as a gift by my patron Mister Henry, the *gunsmith*. I suddenly felt the twenty-five-shot carbine on my back, which the old rifle-maker had created especially for me, because I reminded him of his long lost son. And I remembered the first time I returned, my fame as Old Shatterhand preceding me –

In the meantime the city had drastically changed. The run-down harbor from before, where many a ship owner had collected his freight fees with the help of a revolver, had become a quaint little city with clean freight yards and smoke-belching chimneys. And had I not also become someone completely different? The *greenhorn* of yesterday had grown into

* Translator’s note: From this point in the text on, any English nouns and short sentences that appear in italics in this translation signify a word or passage that was written in English in the original text (Please note that this does not pertain to English place names or character names, and pronouns written in italics are for the purpose of emphasis).

** Translator’s note: “Westman”, although not an actual word in English, is a term found in Karl May’s works (*Westmann* or pl. *Westmänner*, *Westleute*).

an author of several dozen, highly praised travel books, praised not only by the experts, but also by a wide readership. So my revisiting of St. Louis understandably gave me great satisfaction, as it supplied me with an excessive feeling of strength and power in my battle against those envious and hateful back home. How I had grown in the years since then, and how trivial and insignificant their accusations had remained! Here on the shore of the mighty Mississippi, this gigantic, never-tiring river, I first realized how banal and unimportant their yapping was. As they attempted to fool millions of my enthusiastic readers, I supposedly was never in those lands, about which I had written. Rather, they alleged that everything I had described as personal experience was simply plagiarized from somewhere. Whoever makes such a claim, exposes his inadequacy as a literary connoisseur from the very start. Has Goethe ever been accused of being a swindler, because he never committed suicide himself, and thus could not have been in a position to present the letters of the sorrowful Werther? Whoever does not know how to read my travel narratives should not blame me for that. It is as if someone dared to accuse Defoe of not supplying precise enough coordinates for the Robinson island. As if these things were of any importance!

As a young private-tutor I once came to the Mississippi. Sure, Henry the old rifle-maker had died in the meantime, a man to whom I was so very grateful. The sons of the honorable horse-dealer, Corner, from whom I received my red roan, still ran the business of their father. They, in the meantime, had become respected businessmen themselves. From the family of German immigrants, with whom I lived and whose children I taught, only “Little Emmy” remained in the area – back then she was five years old. In the meantime, she had become a grandmother several times over and had been widowed. (She had married my then-replacement for the position of private-tutor, a man named Black). We tracked her

down on the farmyard of one of her daughters and Emmy led us through her miniature kingdom. Upon our departure she gave my wife a kitchen knife, which her mother, as she assured us through her tears, had used to cut Peterli* in the old homeland. Klara looked at me, baffled, and before giving her thanks she wanted to know what was meant by Peterli. I nodded to her encouragingly, “It’s what we call Petersilie back home, my love.”

Following aforementioned riding adventures toward the West, I had often crossed the surroundings of St. Louis on later visits while hunting. The extended woodlands in the lower reaches of the Missouri would also have given me this chance now. However, alarming telegrams from home unmistakably called me back. My publisher, Mr. Fehsenfeld, insisted that things not be made more complicated by my elongated absence than they already were. My enemies, he cabled, had obviously gained ground on me through careful preparation of a new battle. By now there was a palpable readiness in the press to interpret my silence as an admission of guilt and my disappearance from the scene of disputes as an escape. In his telegrams he urgently requested that I return to Germany as soon as the congress ended.

I booked the return passage. Before we boarded the train, which was supposed to carry us from the Mississippi to the East Coast, Klara and I had yet another unforgettable encounter. On our last evening in the hotel, a Mister Alexander D. Fisher had himself announced to us; he wished to speak with me. Now, the name Fisher, in both Germany and in America, is very common, but no concentrated recollection whatsoever could help: I knew of no Alexander D. by this name. Who could describe my astonishment, as I was greeted in the loud hotel lobby by an old friend, whom I had not seen since Winnetou’s death: the stout

* Translator’s note: Peterli> diminutive of “Peter”: southern German transformation of ‘Petersilie’ (from Grimm’s *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, vol. 7, 1889), meaning ‘parsley’ in English

Fred Walker. In those days he had hunted the leader of a band of *rail-troublers* and *bush-headers* in the service of a renowned detective agency. And this agency was, if I remember correctly, stationed in St. Louis. No wonder then, that I had met him here of all places. That is what I thought, anyway.

Smiling, we shook each other's hand. I immediately sent for Little Heart. My wife was surprised to be introduced to a Mister Walker, as she had recently witnessed my confusion back in the room, as we puzzled over the name Fisher.

“Oh yeah,” Walker explained, the moment Klara mentioned this to him, “that’s all part of the job. I just didn’t have any other business card on hand.”

“So, you’re still in the same line of work? Still a detective on the trail of highwaymen?”

“Yes and no. The same line of work, yes, but after highwaymen, no. And also not in the Wild West. Since there isn’t much of the old frontier left, westmen now have to resolve their differences before an orderly court of law.”

“So you’re a lawyer? The portly Walker, an attorney! Or is it – judge?” I looked at him in disbelief.

“What’s wrong with you, Charles? If I were a lawyer, would I have to adopt another name every now and then? To be honest, there are just too many people around here.” Good naturedly, he directed us, with both arms outstretched, to a quieter corner of the Foyer. “No, no, Fred Walker is still the same hawk-eye you got to know in the Rockies.”

“The same one I left behind with those German farm families, at whose rescue from unexpected imprisonment Winnetou finally met death. What was the name of the place again?”

“Helldorf Settlement. Are you getting old, Charles?”

“Right, Helldorf. But spare us more torture.”

“I am –” Walker leaned forward to Klara and me, and whispered, “ – currently on the move under secret instructions from our President Roosevelt. Teddy Roosevelt, as we like to say.”

“I’ve heard that he’s quite a westman. He’s reported to have the most unusual things in his trophy collection. Is it all true?”

“It’s all true, Charles, it’s all true. Grizzly hides and lynxes and mountain lions and bighorn sheep and the impressive racks of old moose, as many as you can imagine. He shot them all himself. And yet –“

“So that’s it –“ interrupted Little Heart with eyes wide open, “you’re his *scout*, so to speak, looking for his next hunting possibility.”

“Oh no, Ma’am. Or at most in a very figurative sense. What the president does in his free time is not my business. I am, rather, one of his closest foreign policy advisors. With a secret mission. And my hunting ground is the world. Since there is no longer any frontier to the Indian land, westmen settle their *Showdowns* in court. Many things have changed since then.”

“I understand. The simple ‘*Go West!*’ mentality is gone. In other words, this land must look around for new possibilities of expansion.”

“You hit the nail on the head, Charles. As always. We are all over the world, with intrigue and influence, and in emergency situations also with money or even through intervention. You must know, my dear lady, that I have lived through some difficult

situations with your husband, and that we've helped each other out of some real troubles. That's why I'm not mincing words."

"So what are you doing in St. Louis, Fred? I mean – with all your new found global reach."

"This is, let's just say, more of a private, little side trip before it all starts up again. I just came from Paris, from a secret conference of the Russian Czar's enemies."

"You mean – nihilists, anarchists? Bomb-throwers?"

"Yes, ma'am. Nihilists, too. Teddy has far-reaching ambitions. He must be informed of everything, if he wants to play along. Now the topic is how everything stands with the Czar. Since Russia and Japan find themselves at war –"

It was clear to me, that Walker was not going to discuss the hottest details, so as soon as he broke off his sentence, I didn't inquire any further. Even Little Heart demonstrated the utmost sensitivity at this point, and on her request, Walker confessed to us the reason of his private side trip to St. Louis: "An old flame of mine – Liz. We knew each other back when I was with you, Charles, out West with your friend Winnetou."

"And she has waited for you all these years? Won't you introduce us to your Liz, Fred? I mean – although the time is now quite short," Klara insisted.

"You are leaving tomorrow?"

"With the early train to Cincinnati. There we have a connection to New York."

"Than nothing can come of this. Liz had to leave suddenly today for a week in Memphis. I brought her to the steamboat only a moment ago, and the farewell took quite a while. To Cincinnati, you say?"

"Yes, why?"

“I have to take that train, too. I gotta go to Washington.”

“Well, then we have time enough to chat.”

“But, one question you must answer for me right now, Fred,” my wife interjected.

“And that would be?”

“So you never married your Liz, did you?”

“When could we, ma’am? One of us is always on the move. Sometimes the both of us, as you can see.”

“Oh, is she just as much of a traveler as you? And like my Scharlih?”

“So you’re not the traveling-type?”

“I’m only now getting the hang of it.”

Walker nodded absent-mindedly. “Tell me, Charles, things were discussed at your geographic congress... an arctic continent about the size of Australia – what do you think of that?”

“Oh – what these pen-pushers and map-dreamers won’t come up with next! Someone somewhere on the north coast of Alaska found a piece of driftwood in the wrong place, and now that means, that the currents have shifted due to a huge land mass—“

“That no one has yet seen! This idea is enticing, I have to admit.”

“These people can’t hold their ink and they just keep writing. What makes this situation so complicated is that serious polar explorers are among them. I believe, even your Peary, for example.”

“You believe Peary is serious?”

“Don’t you?”

“Between you and me, I have my doubts. He’s too bombastic for me and when he’s alone with Teddy, he acts like a charlatan. Too often he tells the president what the guy wants to hear. And because of this, of course, he gets what he wants. However, for professional reasons I have to take him seriously. If there actually is another continent of this size to be discovered on Earth, even if it’s on the Pole, than America must be involved. If we are, then we don’t need to conquer such a continent. You don’t think very highly of this, as I see it.”

“No, no I don’t. Neither of fantasies of that sort nor of conquests in general.”

Suddenly, a great many connections became clear to me. Peary’s leave of absence from his routine duties in the *Navy*, and the official order to discover the North Pole, instead. Roosevelt must be crazy about the engineer; this man was his cheapest dreadnought. “I can plainly see, Fred, the three of us won’t grow tired of one another on our train trip.” With that we parted, trusting that we would see each other again soon.

And who did not appear the next morning on the platform? Fred Walker. Instead of his company, we enjoyed that of a physician from Brooklyn, Dr. Frederick Cook. Like myself, he took part in the congress and also gave a lecture, however I had not yet had the chance to meet him. This was now made up for extensively, as the rarely undulating landscape of the Ohio River valley flew past the compartment window.

“Are you also a physician?” he asked, as we became acquainted, and I responded: “No. I earned my doctorate in the humanities.” Cook was the son of German immigrants by the name of ‘Koch’. His father – already a physician – left the old home near Hannover after the Revolution of ’48 and was able to found a new existence in the State of New York. The family of young Cook (he was a little older than Peary) had also lost its provider one day,

and Cook had to contribute at an early age to their communal survival. By the age of thirteen he was working in a glass factory.

To Klara, Cook was extremely polite, a real *gentleman*. The despair of his loneliness after the loss of his first wife, who had died in childbirth, had made him a polar explorer, he explained jovially. His dreams of foreign lands, in which he sought consolation day and night, lit up one day like a flash in the focus of a convex lens, as he read in the “New York Herald” about the possibility of participation in Peary’s first expedition to northern Greenland. He immediately hurried to Peary, to secure himself a place in this undertaking. Success. Peary appointed him expedition-doctor and anthropologist without hesitation. Later, upon the publication of Cook’s ethnological research, which had been completed during the journey, friction seriously began between the two. The long-trusted relationship from the first venture onto the ice was never able to recover. After that he went his own way.

“Oh, so you’ve known Commander Peary that long, my dear doctor?” Klara’s question sounded somewhat stiff, given the bitterness and insult, which all of a sudden was palpable in the stale air of our narrow compartment.

“Yes, ma’am. As a matter of fact, he was just a lowly lieutenant back then, an engineer on top of that, simply put: a civil employee, someone who the true *Navy* heroes didn’t even take seriously. However, Peary was ambitious beyond all measure. And ruthless toward everyone.”

“Do you mean, even toward his mother? I only had a short opportunity to converse with him, but his mother seemed to...”

“You’re right about that. Excepting his mother. He truly thought of her as a goddess. She died when he was back in Greenland, after my time with him. I had just turned back

from the other side of the globe, from the Antarctic ice-desert. In the meantime, it had become clear to me that the polar question – whether north or south – was no place for adventure, as many make it out to be. And also not a pure matter of business. My experiences with Peary had suggested this all too easily.”

“What is the polar question then?” I asked. I would have gladly had more information on the origins of the two men’s differences. The hint that Peary was driven by business had already reached my ears during the congress.

“The question of the Pole is a scientific problem. For the most part, anyway.”

“Not also a – gamble?”

Cook answered evasively. His exact words, I forget. But I do remember the adventure on board the steamer “Belgica”, which he mentioned at this opportunity. Shortly before the turn of the century, Cook wintered-over on this ship in the Antarctic. His name, like that of the young Norwegian Roald Amundsen, who also took part on that expedition, became known over night among the experts worldwide: the first wintering-over in the region of the South Pole – not voluntary, of course, but the first nonetheless. The ship was fully unfit for such intentions, it was simply a modified sealer. At that time I had only heard fragments about the event, it did not particularly interest me back then. Through a chain of inconvenient occurrences, the “Belgica” froze solid in the pack ice. Had Cook weighed his options as a gambler, he would have hardly gotten himself involved in such a risky undertaking.

“Is Peary still so ambitious to this day? And – so totally ruthless?” Little Heart seemed to guess my train of thought and discreetly guided the conversation back to the project, which interested the two of us for the coming year.

“Yes! Yes! Still just like that. Ambitious and ruthless. One of these days in the *Navy*, believe you me, he’ll bring these traits with him to an Admiralty.”

“I will remind you of this prophecy, doctor.”

“To know that, is uncommonly flattering for...” Cook never finished his sentence. Ear-splitting clamor filled the air, at first the blast of a detonation, then the noise of splintering glass, wood, tin, and the grinding of twisted rails and bridge supports to the limits of torsion, before they burst apart with a loud, whip-crack report. By my estimation, we had just reached the first Ohio River Bridge.

Our car rose up and then crashed, the others following, into the depths. It ripped me out of my seat with indescribable power. I attempted, right hand outstretched to my Little Heart, to maintain balance. My wife had just been sitting at my side, but my hand, when it finally obeyed my will, grasped in the emptiness. Suddenly I saw the one of our oversea-trunks flying at me at eye-level. Upon that, I lost consciousness.

When I awoke, I laid, wound from head to toe in white bandages, on a hospital bed. Klara sat next to me, dressed in hat, veil, and blouse. Smiling, she laid her left hand on my tightly bandaged arm. “What happened?” I said, and as soon as the words had left my mouth, I realized how dumb my question must have sounded.

“Russian terrorists blew up the Ohio River Bridge before Cincinnati. Just as our train was making the crossing.”

“Russians? The Ohio River Bridge? Why?”

“They had targeted your friend, as the newspapers see it.”

“The portly Walker?”

“Yes. He may have gotten himself too deeply involved in things when he was in Paris; things that didn’t concern him. Anyway, this seems to have been the opinion of the people who blew up our train. I can’t quite work this all out in my head. Because Walker – or Fisher, or whatever his name is – was not even with us on the train at all back then. At least, the two of us know that for sure.”

“Back then? – What do you mean by that? When did this all happen?”

“Four weeks ago, Scharlih. Half of that time you drifted between life and death. But now, according to the doctors, the worst is over.”

“And you, Little Heart? What happened to you?”

“I only had a few scratches. Those healed a long time ago.”

She smiled at me. I smiled back, as best I could.

“And – Doctor Cook?” I asked anxiously.

“You have him to thank for your life. He – despite several broken ribs and a terribly bleeding wound on his forehead – pulled you from the wreckage. In the meantime he has recovered and awaits us in New York.”

And so my past caught up with me, taking the shape of my old trail-companion Fred Walker. Where would it be lurking next time? Was there no escape at all?

CHAPTER II

An Order from the Great Father

The messages from home grew more and more demanding. Involuntarily, I had lost much precious time. Meanwhile, Fehsenfeld wired that my enemies had targeted more than just my writing as a danger for youths, as pornography and generally immoral. Now, they had announced the publication of Saxon police files, in order to harp on what I assumed were long forgotten previous convictions from my younger years. With that, my believability was supposed to have doubt generally cast upon it – if they succeeded, no one would ask anymore, if I had ever been to Kurdistan or not. A convict, what can be expected of such a man! This is how people would now react. I cabled back immediately, and asked who “they” were, and informed my publisher, that the doctors believed I should remain in America for a few more weeks, if not months. Yes, at present I was not even suited for the remainder of the train ride to the East Coast.

The answer came immediately. Fehsenfeld promised to try his best even without me; he did not, however, guarantee success. Libel suits – I would no longer be able to get around such things – were not something that a representative could fight out. That is what these questions of honor were all about. Concerning names – in addition to the lawyers of my former publishers and the well-known muckrakers of the press at large – one in particular, a journalist from Charlottenburg near Berlin, was notoriously emerging in the papers: Rudolf Lebius. He was the one who threatened the publication of documents from the Saxon police

archive. In order to really push the infamy over the top, he even announced that he would make my divorce papers public.

I knew Lebius. A shady type, and capable of anything. He would neither stop at character assassination nor the falsifying and fabrication of documents to reach his goal. Only a year ago he attempted to blackmail me. Back then it concerned a ten thousand Mark “loan”, which he demanded from me. Should I not cooperate, he threatened to give “horribly incriminating material,” as he called it, to the press. Now he was following through, because I certainly did not give him any money back then, and instead threw him out.

Due to the train accident, my hands were tied for the time being. My injuries were not causing me pain any more, but I felt – with the additional paralysis from the brisance of the latest news – tired and limp. I slept plenty. From my bed I looked through my hospital window onto broad meadows on both sides of the Ohio. From this point on, the river ran its course to the southwest and unstoppably to the Mississippi. As soon as my injury subsided and I could take my first steps, my wife took me by the arm and pulled me gently to the outermost corner with windows. “There!” she said. “You shouldn’t think that you dreamt all of this.” Little Heart pointed to the remains of the bridge, which had escaped my sight until now. An arc of iron jutted diagonally out from the water’s surface into the lead-gray sky.

The days were full of depression. This feeling, to be helpless and at the mercy of the effects of untamable powers, away from the pulsing goings-on of the world, crept over me like seldom before in my life as a traveler. In my youth, oh yes, I did know this feeling well. I had tried again and again to overcome it through deeds, and in doing so many a time I chose the wrong path. My enemies attempted to use this against me. And although I have since become a completely different man, I felt insecure. My homeland so far away, robbed of

each possibility to defend myself against the accusations, unclear about what the future held – I found that misfortunes concentrated in such an amount could stun even the most hardened westman. Without my wife I would have been overcome with sheer desperation in these first few weeks of convalescence. Seemingly fixed among all this uncertainty stood one thing alone: we were going to have to write off the invitation from Commander Peary to accompany him in the summer on the first leg of his way to the North Pole.

Little Heart found encouraging words for me every day. And as we finally reached the point, that the clinic let me go, she said to me with a wink: “Well, hurry up already, Scharlih. Otherwise we’ll miss the Cincinnati to New York train once again.”

We were picked up at the Pennsylvania Station in Manhattan. I was still not especially good on foot, and so Doctor Cook had arranged for a coach on the platform, directly outside our compartment door. He was accompanied by his wife Marie, a friendly, delicate character. Her appearance let nothing be revealed of her robustness with which she had to make all the decisions, alone over and over again during the long absences of the doctor on his journeys of discovery.

The two opened their home to us in a most friendly manner. “Think of yourselves as being taken in like the closest relatives,” Doctor Cook said, leading us to the guest room. Once there, he quietly asked: “Should we expect you for dinner in about an hour?”

With a smile under his moustache he waited, until I nodded, and then he silently withdrew. His face exhibited much warmth, warmth and amity. His heavy moustache looked much less martial than Peary’s violent seal beard, his eyes also lacked that piercing stare. Cook’s facial features possessed a friendliness that immediately brought gains for its

bearer. I had hardly heard the staircase creak underneath his footsteps when I turned to Klara and said: "It is embarrassing to be accepted so hospitably by this man."

"He invited us, so we are here. And we're staying here, until you are completely and totally recovered, Scharlih. What should be embarrassing about that?"

"Should I tell him, that Peary has invited me - I mean us - on his ship for the summer?"

"Given the current state of things, nothing will come of that anyway."

"We'll decide that later. What counts now, is the lone fact, that we will also be Peary's guests. At least, possibly."

"Poppycock. The doctor might hold absolutely no bitter feelings against Peary. What he has said thus far does not portray the Commander in a particularly favorable light, but what do you have to do with it? The two just can't get along. At least, not really. I mean - months long up there on the ice together, I don't imagine that that's too easy."

"Cook seems to be so very different from Peary. Peary is more of a gambler - and Cook isn't that at all. He's more a man of science."

"But the ambition, which knows no limits and no considerations - *that* they both have in common. I will always remember his eyes, as he told us in the train about the eternal ice. I don't know anymore if he was right then on the North Pole or the South Pole. In any case this crazy obsession flickered in his eyes - just like you, Scharlih, when you speak of Winnetou."

I had never spent so much time in New York as I did during this visit. I enjoyed the bustle of this unique metropolis on long walks with my Little Heart. We visited museums, parks, libraries, theaters, and many other public buildings. Through extensive coach rides I

understood the meaning of America as the melting pot of all nations. Everywhere loud, colorful throngs.

One afternoon, as I was enjoying the peace and quiet, the maid reported a visitor. The man, she said, refused to leave. It was, unexpectedly, Fred Walker.

I did not hide my surprise from him. “Look at this fellow – Alexander D.! That means no one has bombed Mister Fisher to the happy hunting ground yet.”

“I’m sorry you got the brunt of what was obviously meant for me, Charles.”

“Well it certainly wasn’t your fault. So, to what do I owe the honor today? But first explain how it came to pass, that you missed the train in St. Louis.”

“An urgent cable from Washington delayed my travel plans. Such things go with the territory in this job.” Just then, as Klara left the room for a short time, he answered the question more exactly: “The President is whirling with business, he mixes up all his engagements, he’s been doing this for months now. Teddy’s got something into his head – but I am not authorized to discuss this with you in more detail. He wants to do that himself.”

“With me?”

“Yes.”

“When would *this* be? And how did I receive such an honor?”

“President Roosevelt is one of your most enthusiastic admirers in this country, Charles. I thought you knew that.”

“We’ve only spoken about his being a westman.”

“Well, now you know. He has made an extra trip here from Washington, to meet with you. During your congress there was no opportunity – I mean, apart from all the official

activity. He puts great trust in the fact that secrecy will be kept. So not a word about this – to anyone.”

At this very moment the door opened, and Klara let in a maid with a tray. As soon as we were served, the three of us, balancing our steaming cups and standing around the little tea table, I said carefully: “I keep no secrets from my wife, Walker. Thus, lay it all out, old friend. If you don’t, I’ll tell her the reason for your being here myself.”

Walker took a sip. He looked at Klara with a steadfast gaze, whose open face turned toward him, set down his cup, and said: “Your husband has a fan of cosmic proportions in my boss, Ma’am. If I may say so.”

“You mean President Roosevelt – Teddy?” As soon as Walker nodded, she continued: “I felt it, Scharlih, right in the first moment. At our first meeting with our friend Walker, in St. Louis, as the conversation covered the President’s passion for the West, I knew it immediately: this relation of souls, this agreement of thoughts –“

“In other words: the President of the United States wishes to speak with Charles. And to be exact, immediately. This is why I appeared so unexpectedly.”

“This unexpectedness has slowly become part of my conception of you, Freddy. I may call you Freddy, right, my dear Walker?”

“No problem, Ma’am. I only have to ask, that you tell no one of the meeting between these two. Not even your host. Just tell them, I am –“

“Leave that to me, Freddy. I understood perfectly. Just tell me where you’re taking Scharlih. Upon *that* I insist.”

“Actually –“

“Then I won’t allow him to go.”

“Very well. The President has a suite at the Waldorf Astoria. I am to bring him there.”

As I prepared myself to depart – silently, I had been following the conversation of the two – Little Heart came over with a wool scarf. “Take good care of yourself, Scharlih,” she said. “New York also has frosty January evenings. And you’re still not quite fully recovered.”

I let Walker lead us out. On the staircase we met no one. Before the house waited a covered horse-drawn carriage. In a rapid trot we went over the Brooklyn Bridge, that masterwork of German architecture, which I had so often had the opportunity to admire in the past weeks. How much the United States owes to German efficiency and the German spirit of enterprise! With all due modesty, I can claim of myself to have contributed my part with arguments of action.

The vast hotel foyer lay quiet. Thick oriental carpets and luscious decorated plush swallowed every sound, and yes, even seemed to slow the movements of the few guests, who lingered in the hall. Without a word, Walker guided me to the elevator. He pushed a button, studied the play of little lights and pointers and said, summarizing his observations: “It won’t take long. I’ll give you over to the *Secret Service*. They’ve been informed.”

“And when will I see you again?”

“Shortly before the next bang, for certain,” he said laughing. “Who knows?”

I was not at all in the mood for jokes, and so I said as gloomily as possible, without sounding too bitter: “We had so much more to discuss.” Then the door to the compartment opened before me. Walker gently nudged me forward. I silently outstretched my hand to the

new escort, a young man in an impeccably pressed three-piece. He was clearly surprised. He quickly made a move with his left hand, waist-high, to his backside, before presenting me with his right, and murmured a meaningless salutation, like questions in this country about one's health often are.

The elevator glided soundlessly upwards. Only now did I take a look at the elevator boy and stared incredulously. It just wasn't possible – but yes: it was Franke. The little, round cap, held by one strap, had almost slid down to his ear. The entire outfit seemed a bit too tight. “Goodness, Franke, what are you doing here?” I let my surprise run free. “I expected to see you again as boss of the cellar or kitchen of this establishment, but not as a bell-hop!”

“Old Shatterhand – you –?!” Our opening astonishment was quickly overcome. As it turned out, Franke's efforts for rapid advancement had not brought him very far, at least not to the coordinates that were set during our last farewell. But that distressed him little. “The position of dishwasher I already have behind me,” he declared jovially. “And there's still time to play the millionaire.”

“As a solution in the interim you had, if I remember correctly, thought of something more businesslike. Or have you changed your plans?”

“No, not exactly that. Kara Ben Nemsi's adventures in the Orient are still my motivation. But what more could I want - at this job at least I'm always moving onward and upward. Half of the time, anyway.”

The cabin already slowed; we had reached our destination. In my haste I was not able to decipher on which floor we were.

“Take care, Franke. I wish you luck further on!”

“Thank you, Old Shatterhand! And my compliments to your lovely wife!” He bowed closely, then let the door open with a hiss. “But tell me please, where I could reach you.”

I gave him Cook’s address.

Taciturn I trudged behind my escort along the endless hallway. Before we turned the corner, the man suddenly stood still and asked in accent-free German: “How do you know the elevator boy, Herr Doktor? Or perhaps the gentleman would rather be referred to as Old Shatterhand? Or – as Kara Ben Nemsi Effendi?”

“It doesn’t matter to me. However, may I pose a counter-question?”

“And that would be?”

“What is the meaning of all this secrecy-foolishness surrounding my visit with the President of the U.S.A.? You know as well as I, that your boss handles things casually in Washington. That he unexpectedly turns up in hotel lobbies, in order to converse with petitioners. That he –“

“Don’t you worry – even at times like that we’re nearby.”

“Yes, for certain. I don’t doubt this. I hope that you are more discreet then.”

“I’m not allowed to respond to that. So, again - how do you know the elevator boy?”

“A countryman.”

“He had no idea, to whom I was bringing you?”

“No. In any case, not through me, as you have just seen. By the way, where does your excellent German come from?”

“Even on *that* I’m not allowed to give you an answer. Besides, it is absolutely unimportant. So, you assure me that the meeting in the elevator was coincidental.”

“I give you my solemn word of honor.”

“Danke. That’s enough for me.” He turned on his heel and walked on further without a word. I followed him, although something hesitated in me for a moment. He stopped short before a door with the number 1117, spun around and said: “Please wait here for a moment.” Then he went inside.

I took a look around me. The hallway was empty. Door openings carved the wall in regular intervals. The moment, for which I was told to wait, became longer and longer. Finally I approached the door, listened. Nothing. I cautiously pressed upon the door handle, the door opened without resistance. A rather sparsely furnished room with a customarily wide bed, a washroom, curtains yellowed from smoke, which fluttered in the draft of wind. No one was to be seen. I was immediately on my guard; for I had once again come into one of these highly shadowy situations on account of Walker. With such things I am quite superstitious.

Where was my escort? Room 1117 was clearly not the President’s suite in this noble establishment. Now I noticed a wrought iron stand next to the door with an ashtray full of cigarette butts. A half-smoked cigarette still smoldered, it had obviously just been put out. Someone must have waited for the Secret Service man who had escorted me. The window blew shut, the door pulled on my hand and would have slammed shut equally as loud, had I not given way a little under this pressure and then closed the door quietly.

I walked over to the window, and brushed the curtain aside. Pushed open the sash, only a hand’s width wide. Without being too agile, one could reach the iron fire escape ladder from the windowsill. How far it led downwards, I could not tell, I did not wish to open the window any wider. One could presumably reach the courtyard below by way of the

ladder. But I had not come here to involve myself with such neck-risking things. Someone wanted to bring me to the President of the United States, therefore I would see the President - even without help, if it had to be that way.

I bolted the sashes of the window shut and left the room. The door creaked softly. In the hallway I stood alone. I followed in the direction, which the disappeared escort had gone with me. The corridor ended abruptly, that is, it led into another hallway at a 90-degree angle. Here too, doors on both sides. To the right or to the left? Only for the length of an inhalation did I pause. The right shone with the daylight of a distant window, so I went left. After two-dozen paces I stood before a double door with a carved pattern and gold leaf inlay of flowers and grasses. The door had no number.

I knocked. "*Come on in,*" sounded a muffled voice out to me. I rose to the challenge, and stood before President Theodore Roosevelt. The moustache, underneath it the powerful protruding mouth; the full, round face over the ample, robust frame – it was unmistakably the President: Teddy.