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THE ADVENTURES OF ELIZABETH IN Rügen

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "ELIZABETH AND HER GERMAN GARDEN"

New York

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[Illustration: map of Rügen]

CONTENTS

THE FIRST DAY--From Miltzow to Lauterbach

THE SECOND DAY--Lauterbach and Vilm

THE THIRD DAY--From Lauterbach to GÃ¶hren

THE FOURTH DAY--From GÃ¶hren to Thiessow

THE FOURTH DAY (continued)--At Thiessow

THE FIFTH DAY--From Thiessow to Sellin

THE FIFTH DAY (continued)--From Sellin to Binz

THE SIXTH DAY--The Jagdschloss

THE SIXTH DAY (continued)--The Granitz Woods, Schwarze See, and KiekÃ¶wer

THE SEVENTH DAY--From Binz to Stubbenkammer

THE SEVENTH DAY (continued)--At Stubbenkammer

THE EIGHTH DAY--From Stubbenkammer to Glowe

THE NINTH DAY--From Glowe to Wiek

THE TENTH DAY--From Wiek to Hiddensee

THE ELEVENTH DAY--From Wiek Home

THE ADVENTURES OF ELIZABETH IN Rügen

THE FIRST DAY

FROM MILTZOW TO LAUTERBACH

Everyone who has been to school and still remembers what he was taught there, knows that Rügen is the biggest island Germany possesses, and that it lies in the Baltic Sea off the coast of Pomerania.

Round this island I wished to walk this summer, but no one would walk with me. It is the perfect way of moving if you want to see into the life of things. It is the one way of freedom. If you go to a place on anything but your own feet you are taken there too fast, and miss a thousand delicate joys that were waiting for you by the wayside. If you drive you are bound by a variety of considerations, eight of the most important being the horses' legs. If you bicycle--but who that loves to get close to nature would bicycle? And as for motors, the object of a journey like mine was not the getting to a place but the going there.

Successively did I invite the most likely of my women friends, numbering at least a dozen, to walk with me. They one and all replied that it would make them tired and that it would be dull; and when I tried to remove the first objection by telling them how excellent it would be for the German nation, especially those portions of it that are still to come, if its women walked round Rügen more often, they stared and smiled; and when I tried to remove the second by explaining that by our own spirits are we deified, they stared and smiled more than ever.

Walking, then, was out of the question, for I could not walk alone. The grim monster Conventionalty whose iron claws are forever on my shoulder, forever pulling me back from the harmless and the wholesome, put a stop to that even if I had not been afraid of tramps, which I was. So I drove, and it was round Rügen that I drove because one hot afternoon when I was idling in the library, not reading but fingering the books, taking out first one and then another, dipping into them, deciding which I would read next, I came across Marianne North's *Recollections of a Happy Life*, and hit upon the page where she begins to talk of Rügen. Immediately interested--for is not Rügen nearer to me than any other island?--I became absorbed in her description of the bathing near a place called Putbus, of the deliciousness of it in a sandy cove where the water was always calm, and of how you floated about on its crystal surface, and beautiful jelly-fish, stars of purest colours, floated with you. I threw down the book to ransack the shelves for a guide to Rügen. On the first page of the first one I found was this remarkable paragraph:--

'Hearest thou the name Rügen, so doth a wondrous spell come over thee. Before thine eyes it rises as a dream of far-away, beauteous fairylands. Images and figures of long ago beckon thee across to the marvellous places where in grey prehistoric times they dwelt, and on which they have left the shadow of their presence. And in thee stirs a mighty desire to wander over the glorious, legend-surrounded island. Cord up, then, thy light bundle, take to heart Shylock's advice to put money in thy purse, and follow me without fear of the threatening sea-sickness which may overtake thee on the short crossing, for it has never yet done anyone more harm than imposing on him a rapidly-passing discomfort.'

This seemed to me very irresistible. Surely a place that inspired such a mingling of the lofty and the homely in its guide-books must be well worth seeing? There was a drought just then going on at home. My eyes were hot with watching a garden parch browner day by day beneath a sky of brass. I felt that it only needed a little energy, and in a few hours I too might be floating among those jelly-fish, in the shadow of the cliffs of the legend-surrounded island. And even better than being surrounded by legends those breathless days would it be to have the sea all round me. Such a sea too! Did I not know it? Did I not know its singular limpidity? The divineness of its blue where it was deep, the clearness of its green where it was shallow, lying tideless along its amber shores? The very words made me thirsty--amber shores; lazy waves lapping them slowly; vast spaces for the eye to wander over; rocks, and seaweed, and cool, gorgeous jelly-fish. The very map at the beginning of the guide-book made me thirsty, the land was so succulently green, the sea all round so bland a blue. And what a fascinating island it is on the map--an island of twists and curves and inland seas called Boddensee; of lakes, and woods, and frequent ferries; with lesser islands dotted about its coasts; with bays innumerable stretching their arms out into the water; and with one huge forest, evidently magnificent, running nearly the whole length of the east coast, following its curves, dipping down to the sea in places, and in others climbing up chalk cliffs to crown them with the peculiar splendour of beeches.

It does not take me long to make up my mind, still less to cord up my light bundle, for somebody else does that; and I think it was only two days after I first found Marianne North and the guide-book that my maid Gertrud and I got out of a suffocating train into the freshness that blows round ryefields near the sea, and began our journey into the unknown.

It was a little wayside station on the line between Berlin and Stralsund, called Miltzow, a solitary red building on the edge of a pine-wood, that witnessed the beginning of our tour. The carriage had been sent on the day before, and round it, on our arrival, stood the station authorities in an interested group. The stationmaster, everywhere in Germany an elaborate, Olympic person in white gloves, actually helped the porter to cord on my hold-all with his own hands, and they both lingered over it as if loth to let us go. Evidently the coachman had told them what I was going to do, and I suppose such an enterprising woman does not get out at Miltzow every day. They packed us in with the greatest care, with so much care that I thought they would never have done. My hold-all was the biggest piece of luggage, and they corded it on in an upright position at our feet. I had left the choosing of its contents to Gertrud, only exhorting her, besides my pillow, to take a sufficiency of soap and dressing-gowns. Gertrud's luggage was placed by the porter on her lap. It was almost too modest. It was one small black bag, and a great part of its inside must, I knew, be taken up by the stockings she had brought to knit and the needles she did it with; yet she looked quite as respectable the day we came home as she did the day we started, and every bit as dean. My dressing-case was put on the box, and on top of it was a brown cardboard hat-box containing the coachman's wet-weather hat. A thick coat for possible cold days made a cushion for my back, and Gertrud's waterproof did the same thing for hers. Wedged in between us was the tea-basket, rattling inharmoniously, but preventing our slipping together in sloping places. Behind us in the hood were the umbrellas, rugs, guide-books, and maps, besides one of those round shiny yellow wooden band-boxes into which every decent German woman puts her best hat. This luggage, and some mysterious bundles on the box that the coachman thought were hidden by his legs but which bulged out unhideable on either side, prevented our looking elegant; but I did not want to look elegant, and I had gathered from the remarks of those who had refused to walk that Rügen was not a place where I should meet anyone who did.

Now I suppose I could talk for a week and yet give no idea whatever of the exultation that filled my soul as I gazed on these arrangements. The picnic-like simplicity of them was so full of promise. It was as though I were going back to the very morning of life, to those fresh years when shepherd boys and others shout round one for no reason except that they are out of doors and alive. Also, during the years that have come after, years that may properly be called riper, it has been a conviction of mine that there is nothing so absolutely bracing for the soul as the frequent turning of one's back on duties. This was exactly what I was doing; and oh ye rigid female martyrs on the rack of daily exemplariness, ye unquestioning patient followers of paths that have been pointed out, if only you knew the wholesome joys of sometimes being less good!

The point at which we were is the nearest from which Rügen can be reached by persons coming up from the south and going to drive. No one ever gets out there who is bound for Rügen, because no one ever drives to Rügen. The ordinary tourist, almost exclusively German, goes first to Stralsund, is taken across the narrow strip of water, train and all, on the steam ferry, and continues without changing till he reaches the open sea on the other side of the island at Sassnitz. Or he goes by train from Berlin to Stettin and then by steamer down the Oder, crosses the open sea for four hours, and arrives, probably pensive for the boats are small and the waves are often big, at Gån̄hren, the first stopping-place on the island's east coast.

We were not ordinary tourists, and having got to Miltzow were to be independent of all such wearinesses as trains and steamers till the day we wanted to come back again. From Miltzow we were going to drive to a ferry three miles off at a place called Stahlbrode, cross the mile of water, land on the island's south shore, and go on at once that afternoon to the jelly-fish of Miss North's Putbus, which were beckoning me across to the legend-surrounded island far more irresistibly than any of those grey figures the guide-book talked about.

The carriage was a light one of the victoria genus with a hood; the horses were a pair esteemed at home for their meekness; the coachman, August, was a youth who had never yet driven straight on for an indefinite period without turning round once, and he looked as though he thought he were going to enjoy himself. I was sure I was going to enjoy myself. Gertrud, I fancy, was without these illusions; but she is old, and has got out of the habit of being anything but

resigned. She was the sop on this occasion thrown to the Grim One of the iron claws, for I would far rather have gone alone. But Gertrud is very silent; to go with her would be as nearly like being alone as it is possible to be when you are not. She could, I knew, be trusted to sit by my side knitting, however bumpy the road, and not opening her lips unless asked a question. Admirable virtue of silence, most precious, because most rare, jewel in the crown of female excellences, not possessed by a single one of those who had refused to walk! If either of them had occupied Gertrud's place and driven with me would she not, after the way of women, have spent the first half of the time telling me her secrets and the other half being angry with me because I knew them? And then Gertrud, after having kept quiet all day, would burst into activities at night, unpack the hold-all, produce pleasant things like slippers, see that my bed was as I like it, and end by tucking me up in it and going away on tiptoe with her customary quaint benediction, bestowed on me every night at bedtime: 'The dear God protect and bless the gracious one,' says Gertrud as she blows out the candle.

'And may He also protect and bless thee,' I reply; and could as ill spare my pillow as her blessing.

It was half-past two in the afternoon of the middle Friday in July when we left the station officials to go back to their dull work and trotted round the corner into the wide world. The sky was a hot blue. The road wound with gentle ups and downs between fields whitening to harvest. High over our heads the larks quivered in the light, shaking out that rapturous song that I can never hear without a throb of gratitude for being alive. There were no woods or hills, and we could see a long way on either side, see the red roofs of farms dustered wherever there was a hollow to protect them from the wild winds of winter, see the straight double line of trees where the high road to Stralsund cut across ours, see a little village a mile ahead of us with a venerable church on a mound in the middle of it gravely presiding over the surrounding wide parish of corn. I think I must have got out at least six times during the short drive between Miltzow and the ferry pretending I wanted flowers, but really to enjoy the delight of loitering. The rye was full of chickory and poppies, the ditches along the road where the spring dampness still lingered were white with the delicate loveliness of cow-parsley, that most spiritual of weeds. I picked an armful of it to hold up against the blue of the sky while we were driving; I gave Gertrud a bunch of poppies for which she thanked me without enthusiasm; I put little posies of chickory at the horses' ears; in fact I felt and behaved as if I were fifteen and out for my first summer holiday. But what did it matter? There was nobody there to see.

Stahlbrode is the most innocent-looking place—a small cluster of cottages on grass that goes down to the water. It was quite empty and silent. It has a long narrow wooden jetty running across the marshy shore to the ferry, and moored to the end of this jetty lay a big fishing-smack with furred brown sails. I got out and walked down to it to see if it were the ferry-boat, and whether the ferryman was in it. Both August and the horses had an alarmed, pricked-up expression as they saw me going out into the jaws of the sea. Even the emotionless Gertrud put away her stocking and stood by the side of the carriage watching me. The jetty was roughly put together, and so narrow that the carriage would only just fit in. A slight wooden rail was all the protection provided; but the water was not deep, and heaved limpidly over the yellow sand at the bottom. The shore we were on was flat and vividly green, the shore of Rügen opposite was flat and vividly green; the sea between was a lovely, sparkling blue; the sky was strewn across with loose clusters of pearly clouds; the breeze that had played so gently among the ears of corn round Miltzow danced along the little waves and splashed them gaily against the wooden posts of the jetty as though the freshness down there on the water had filled it with new life. I found the boat empty, a thing of steep sides and curved bottom, a thing that was surely never intended for the ferrying across of horses and carriages. No other boat was to be seen. Up the channel and down the channel there was nothing visible but the flat green shores, the dancing water, the wide sky, the bland afternoon light.

I turned back thoughtfully to the cottages. Suppose the ferry were only used for ferrying people? If so, we were in an extremely tiresome fix. A long way back against the sky I could see the line of trees bordering the road to Stralsund, and the whole dull, dusty distance would have to be driven over if the Stahlbrode ferry failed us. August took off his hat when I came up to him, and said ominously, 'Does the gracious one permit that I speak a few words?'

'Speak them, August.'

'It is very windy.'

'Not very.'

'It is far to go on water.'

'Not very.'

'Never yet have I been on the sea.'

'Well, you are going on it now.'

With an expression made up of two parts fright and one resignation he put on his hat again and relapsed into a silence that was grim. I took Gertrud with me to give me a countenance and walked across to the inn, a new red-brick house standing out boldly on a bit of rising ground, end ways on to the sea. The door was open and we went in, knocking with my sunshade on the floor. We stirred up no life of any sort. Not even a dog barked at us. The passage was wide and clean with doors on each side of it and an open door at either end--the one we had come in by followed by the afternoon sun, and the other framing a picture of sky with the sea at the bottom, the jetty, the smack with folded sails, and the coast of Rügen. Seeing a door with *_Gaststube_* painted on it I opened it and peeped in. To my astonishment it was full of men smoking in silence, and all with their eyes fixed on the opening door. They must have heard us. They must have seen us passing the window as we came up to the house. I concluded that the custom of the district requires that strangers shall in no way be interfered with until they actually ask definite questions; that it was so became clear by the alacrity with which a yellow-bearded man jumped up on our asking how we could get across to Rügen, and told us he was the ferryman and would take us there.

'But there is a carriage--can that go too?' I inquired anxiously, thinking of the deep bottom and steep sides of the fishing-smack.

'_Alles, Alles_' he said cheerily; and calling to a boy to come and help he led the way through the door framing the sea, down a tiny, sandy garden prickly with gooseberry bushes, to the place where August sat marvelling on his box.

'Come along!' he shouted as he ran past him.

'What, along that thing of wood?' cried August. 'With my horses? And my newly-varnished carriage?'

'Come along!' shouted the ferryman, half-way down the jetty.

'Go on, August,' I commanded.

'It can never be accomplished,' said August, visibly breaking out into a perspiration.

'Go on,' I repeated sternly; but thought it on the whole more discreet to go on myself on my own feet, and so did Gertrud.

'If the gracious one insists----' faltered August, and began to drive gingerly down to the jetty with the face of one who thinks his last hour well on the way.

As I had feared, the carriage was very nearly smashed getting it over the sides of the smack. I sat up in the bows looking on in terror, expecting every instant to see the wheels wrenched off, and with their wrenching the end of our holiday. The optimistic ferryman assured us that it was going in quite easily--like a lamb, he declared, with great boldness of imagery. He sloped two ineffectual planks, one for each set of wheels, up the side of the boat, and he and August, hatless, coatless, and breathless, lifted the carriage over on to them. It was a horrid moment. The front wheels twisted right round and were as near coming off as any wheels I saw in my life. I was afraid to look at August, so right did he seem to have been when he protested that the thing could not be accomplished. Yet there was Rügen and here were we, and we had to get across to it somehow or turn round and do the dreary journey to Stralsund.

The horses, both exceedingly restive, had been unharnessed and got in first. They were held in the stern of the boat by two boys, who needed all their determination to do it. Then it was that I was thankful for the boat's steep sides, for if they had been lower those horses would certainly have kicked themselves over into the sea; and what should I have done then? And how should I have faced him who is in authority over me if I returned to him without his horses?

'We take them across daily,' the ferryman remarked, airily jerking his thumb in the direction of the carriage.

'Do so many people drive to Rügen?' I asked astonished, for the plank arrangements were startlingly makeshift.

'Many people?' cried the ferryman. 'Rightly speaking, crowds.'

He was trying to make me happy. At least it reassured August to hear it; but I could not suppress a smile of deprecation at the size of the fib.

By this time we were under weigh, a fair wind sending us merrily over the water. The ferryman steered; August stood at his horses' heads talking to them soothingly; the two boys came and sat on some coiled ropes close to me, leaned their elbows on their knees and their chins on their hands, and fixing their blue fisher-boy eyes on my face kept them there with an unwinking interest during the entire crossing. Oh, it was lovely sitting up there in the sun, safe so far, in the delicious quiet of sailing. The tawny sail, darned and patched in divers shades of brown and red and orange, towered above us against the sky. The huge mast seemed to brush along across the very surface of the little white clouds. Above the rippling of the water we could hear the distant larks on either shore. August had put on his scarlet stable-jacket for the work of lifting the carriage in, and made a beautiful bit of colour among the browns of the old boat at the stern. The eyes of the ferryman lost all the alertness they had had on shore, and he stood at the rudder gazing dreamily out at the afternoon light on the Rügen meadows. How perfect it was after the train, after the clattering along the dusty road, and the heat and terror of getting on board. For one exquisite quarter of an hour we were softly lapped across in the sun, and for all that beauty we were only asked to pay three marks, which included the horses and carriage and the labour of getting us in and out. For a further small sum the ferryman became enthusiastic and begged me to be sure to come back that way. There was a single house on the Rügen shore where he lived, he said, and from which he would watch for us. A little dog came down to welcome us, but we saw no other living creature. The carriage conducted itself far more like a lamb on this side, and I drove away well pleased to have got over the chief difficulty of the tour, the soft-voiced ferryman wishing us Godspeed, and the two boys unwinking to the last.

So here we were on the legend-surrounded island. 'Hail, thou isle of fairyland, filled with beckoning figures!' I murmured under my breath, careful not to appear too unaccountable in Gertrud's eyes. With eager interest I looked about me, and anything less like fairyland and more like the coast of Pomerania lately left I have seldom seen. The road, a continuation of the road on the mainland, was exactly like other roads that are dull as far as a rambling village three miles farther on called Garz--persons referring to the map at the beginning of this book will see with what a melancholy straightness it proceeds to that village--and after Garz I ceased to care what it was like, for reasons which I will now set forth.

There was that afternoon in the market-place of Garz, and I know not why, since it was neither a Sunday nor a holiday, a brass band playing with a singular sonorousness. The horses having never before been required to listen to music, their functions at home being solely to draw me through the solitudes of forests, did not like it. I was astonished at the vigour of the dislike they showed who were wont to be so meek. They danced through Garz, pursued by the braying of the trumpets and the delighted shouts of the crowd, who seemed to bray and shout the louder the more the horses danced, and I was considering whether the time had not come for clinging to Gertrud and shutting my eyes when we turned a corner and got away from the noise on to the familiar rattle of the hard country road. I gave a sigh of relief and stretched out my head to see whether it were as straight a bit as the last. It was quite as straight, and in the distance bearing down on us was a black speck that swelled at an awful speed into a motor car. Now the horses had not yet seen a motor car. Their nerves, already shaken by the brass band, would never stand such a horrid sight I thought, and prudence urged an immediate getting out and a rushing to their heads. 'Stop, August!' I cried. 'Jump out, Gertrud--there's a dreadful thing coming--they're sure to bolt---'

August slowed down in apparent obedience to my order, and without waiting for him to stop entirely, the motor being almost upon us, I jumped out on one side and Gertrud jumped out on the other. Before I had time to run to the horses' heads the motor whizzed past. The horses strange to say hardly cared at all, only mildly shying as August drove them slowly along without stopping.

'That's all right,' I remarked, greatly relieved, to Gertrud, who still held her stocking. 'Now we'll get in again.'

But we could not get in again because August did not stop.

'Call to him to stop,' I said to Gertrud, turning aside to pick some unusually big poppies.

She called, but he did not stop.

'Call louder, Gertrud,' I said impatiently, for we were now a good way behind.

She called louder, but he did not stop.

Then I called; then she called; then we called together, but he did not stop. On the contrary, he was driving on now at the usual pace, rattling noisily over the hard road, getting more and more out of reach.

'Shout, shout, Gertrud!' I cried in a frenzy; but how could anyone so respectable as Gertrud shout? She sent a faint shriek after the ever-receding August, and when I tried to shout myself I was seized with such uncontrollable laughter that nothing whatever of the nature of a noise could be produced.

Meanwhile August was growing very small in the distance. He evidently did not know we had got out when the motor car appeared, and was under the pleasing impression that we were sitting behind him being jogged comfortably towards Putbus. He dwindled and dwindled with a rapidity distressing to witness. 'Shout, shout,' I gasped, myself contorted with dreadful laughter, half-wildest mirth and half despair.

She began to trot down the road after him waving her stocking at his distant back and emitting a series of shrill shrieks, goaded by the exigencies of the situation.

The last we saw of the carriage was a yellow glint as the sun caught the shiny surface of my bandbox; immediately afterwards it vanished over the edge of a far-away dip in the road, and we were alone with Nature.

Gertrud and I stared at each other in speechless dismay. Then she looked on in silence while I sank on to a milestone and laughed. There was nothing, her look said, to laugh at, and much to be earnest over in our tragic predicament, and I knew it but I could not stop. August had had no instructions as to where he was driving to or where we were going to put up that night; of Putbus and Marianna North he had never heard. With the open ordnance map on my lap I had merely called out directions, since leaving Miltzow, at cross-roads. Therefore in all human probability he would drive straight on till dark, no doubt in growing private astonishment at the absence of orders and the length of the way; then when night came he would, I supposed, want to light his lamps, and getting down to do so would immediately be frozen with horror at what he saw, or rather did not see, in the carriage. What he would do after that I could not conceive. In sheerest despair I laughed till I cried, and the sight of Gertrud watching me silently from the middle of the deserted road only made me less able to leave off. Behind us in the distance, at the end of a vista of _chaussées_ trees, were the houses of Garz; in front of us, a long way in front of us, rose the red spire of the church of Casnewitz, a village through which, as I still remembered from the map now driving along by itself, our road to Putbus lay. Up and down the whiteness of this road not a living creature, either in a cart or on its legs, was to be seen. The bald country, here very bald and desolate, stretched away on either side into nothingness. The wind sighed about, whisking little puffs of derisive dust into our eyes as it passed. There was a dreadful absence of anything like sounds.

'No doubt,' said Gertrud, 'August will soon return?'

'He won't,' I said, wiping my eyes; 'he'll go on forever. He's wound up. Nothing will stop him.'

'What, then, will the gracious one do?'

'Walk after him, I suppose,' I said, getting up, 'and trust to something unexpected making him find out he hasn't got us. But I'm afraid nothing will. Come on, Gertrud,' I continued, feigning briskness while my heart was as lead, 'it's nearly six already, and the road is long and lonely.'

'_Ach_' groaned Gertrud, who never walks.

'Perhaps a cart will pass us and give us a lift. If not we'll walk to that village with the church over there and see if we can get something on wheels to pursue August with. Come on--I hope your boots are all right.'

'_Ach_' groaned Gertrud again, lifting up one foot, as a dog pitifully lifts up its wounded paw, and showing me a black cashmere boot of the sort that is soft and pleasant to the feet of servants who are not required to use them much.

'I'm afraid they're not much good on this hard road,' I said. 'Let us hope something will catch us up soon.'

'_Ach_' groaned poor Gertrud, whose feet are very tender.

But nothing did catch us up, and we trudged along in grim silence, the desire to laugh all gone.

'You must, my dear Gertrud,' I said after a while, seeking to be cheerful, 'regard this in the light of healthful exercise. You and I are taking a pleasant afternoon walk together in Rügen.'

Gertrud said nothing; at all times loathing movement out of doors she felt that this walking was peculiarly hateful because it had no visible end. And what would become of us if we were forced to spend the night in some inn without our luggage? The only thing I had with me was my purse, the presence of which, containing as it did all the money I had brought, caused me to cast a careful eye at short intervals behind me, less in the hope of seeing a cart than in the fear of seeing a tramp; and the only thing Gertrud had was her half-knitted stocking. Also we had had nothing to eat but a scrappy tea-basket lunch hours before in the train, and my intention had been to have food at Putbus and then drive down to a place called Lauterbach, which being on the seashore was more convenient for the jelly-fish than Putbus, and spend the night there in an hotel much recommended by the guide-book. By this time according to my plans we ought to have been sitting in Putbus eating _Kalbsschnitzel_. 'Gertrud,' I asked rather faintly, my soul drooping within me at the thought of the _Kalbsschnitzel_, 'are you hungry?'

Gertrud sighed. 'It is long since we ate,' she said.

We trudged on in silence for another five minutes.

'Gertrud,' I asked again, for during those five minutes my thoughts had dwelt with a shameful persistency on the succulent and the gross, 'are you _very_ hungry?'

'The gracious one too must be in need of food,' evaded Gertrud, who for some reason never would admit she wanted feeding.

'Oh she is,' I sighed; and again we trudged on in silence.

It seemed a long while before we reached that edge over which my bandbox had disappeared flashing farewell as it went, and when we did get to it and eagerly looked along the fresh stretch of road in hopes of seeing August miraculously turned back, we gave a simultaneous groan, for it was as deserted as the one we had just come along. Something lay in the middle of it a few yards on, a dark object like a little heap of brown leaves. Thinking it was leaves I saw no reason for comment; but Gertrud, whose eyes are very sharp, exclaimed.

'What, do you see August?' I cried.

'No, no--but there in the road--the tea-basket!'

It was indeed the tea-basket, shaken out as it naturally would be on the removal of the bodies that had kept it in its place, come to us like the ravens of old to give us strength and sustenance.

'It still contains food,' said Gertrud, hurrying towards it.

'Thank heaven,' said I.

We dragged it out of the road to the grass at the side, and Gertrud lit the spirit-lamp and warmed what was left in the teapot of the tea. It was of an awful blackness. No water was to be got near, and we dared not leave the road to look for any in case August should come back. There were some sorry pieces of cake, one or two chicken sandwiches grown unaccountably horrible, and all those strawberries we had avoided at lunch because they were too small or too much squashed. Over these mournful revels the church spire of Casnewitz, now come much closer, presided; it was the silent witness of how honourably we shared, and how Gertrud got the odd sandwich because of her cashmere boots.

Then we buried the tea-basket in a ditch, in a bed of long grass and cow-parsley, for it was plain that I could not ask Gertrud, who could hardly walk as it was, to carry it, and it was equally plain that I could not carry it myself, for it was as mysteriously heavy as other tea-baskets and in size very nearly as big as I am. So we buried it, not without some natural regrets and a dim feeling that we were flying in the face of Providence, and there it is, I suppose, grown very rusty, to this day.

After that Gertrud got along a little better, and my thoughts being no longer concentrated on food I could think out what was best to be done. The result was that on reaching Casnewitz we inquired at once which of the cottages was an inn, and having found one asked a man who seemed to belong there to let us have a conveyance with as much speed as possible.

'Where have you come from?' he inquired, staring first at one and then at the other.

'Oh--from Garz.'

'From Garz? Where do you want to go to?'

'To Putbus.'

'To Putbus? Are you staying there?'

'No--yes--anyhow we wish to drive there. Kindly let us start as soon as possible.'

'Start! I have no cart.'

'Sir,' said Gertrud with much dignity, 'why did you not say so at once?'

'_Ja, ja, FrÄulein_, why did I not?'

We walked out.

'This is very unpleasant, Gertrud,' I remarked, and I wondered what those at home would say if they knew that on the very first day of my driving-tour I had managed to lose the carriage and had had to bear the banter of publicans.

'There is a little shop,' said Gertrud. 'Does the gracious one permit that I make inquiries there?'

We went in and Gertrud did the talking.

'Putbus is not very far from here,' said the old man presiding, who was at least polite. 'Why do not the ladies walk? My horse has been out all day, and my son who drives him has other things now to do.'

'Oh we can't walk,' I broke in. 'We must drive because we might want to go beyond Putbus--we are not sure--it depends---'

The old man looked puzzled. 'Where is it that the ladies wish to go?' he inquired, trying to be patient.

'To Putbus, anyhow. Perhaps only to Putbus. We can't tell till we get there. But indeed, indeed you must let us have your horse.'

Still puzzled, the old man went out to consult with his son, and we waited in profound dejection among candles and coffee. Putbus was not, as he had said, far, but I remembered how on the map it seemed to be a very nest of cross-roads, all radiating from a round circus sort of place in the middle. Which of them would August consider to be the straight continuation of the road from Garz? Once beyond Putbus he would be lost to us indeed.

It took about half an hour to persuade the son and to harness the horse; and while this was going on we stood at the door watching the road and listening eagerly for sounds of wheels. One cart did pass, going in the direction of Garz, and when I heard it coming I was so sure that it was August that I triumphantly called to Gertrud to run and tell the old man we did not need his son. Gertrud, wiser, waited till she saw what it was, and after the quenching of that sudden hope we both drooped more than ever.

'Where am I to drive to?' asked the son, whipping up his horse and bumping us away over the stones of Casnewitz. He sat huddled up looking exceedingly sulky, manifestly disgusted at having to go out again at the end of a day's work. As for the cart, it was a sad contrast to the cushioned comfort of the vanished victoria. It was very high, very wooden, very shaky, and we sat on a plank in the middle of so terrible a noise that when we wanted to say anything we had to shout. 'Where am I to drive to?' repeated the youth, scowling over his shoulder.

'Please drive straight on until you meet a carriage.'

'A what?'

'A carriage.'

'Whose carriage?'

'My carriage.'

He scowled round again with deepened disgust. 'If you have a carriage,' he said, looking at us as though he were afraid we were lunatics, 'why are you in my cart?'

'Oh why, why are we!' I cried wringing my hands, overcome by the wretchedness of our plight; for we were now beyond Casnewitz, and gazing anxiously ahead with the strained eyes of Sister Annes we saw the road as straight and as empty as ever.

The youth drove on in sullen silence, his very ears seeming to flap with scorn; no more good words would he waste on two mad women. The road now lay through woods, beautiful beechwoods that belong to Prince Putbus, not fenced off but invitingly open to everyone, with green shimmering depths and occasional flashes of deer. The tops of the great beeches shone like gold against the sky. The sea must have been quite close, for though it was not visible the smell of it was everywhere. The nearer we got to Putbus the more civilised did the road become. Seats appeared on either side at intervals that grew more frequent. Instead of the usual wooden sign-posts, iron ones with tarnished gilt lettering pointed down the forest lanes; and soon we met the first of the Putbus lamp-posts, also iron and elaborate, wandered out, as it seemed, beyond the natural sphere of lamp-posts, to light the innocent country road. All these signs portended what Germans call *Badegäste*--in English obviously bath-guests, or, more elegantly, visitors to a bathing resort; and presently when we were nearer Putbus we began to pass them strolling in groups and couples and sitting on the seats which were of stone and could not have been good things for warm bath-guests to sit on.

Wretched as I was I still saw the quaintness and prettiness of Putbus. There was a notice up that all vehicles must drive through it at a walking pace, so we crawled along its principal street which, whatever else it contained, contained no sign of August. This street has Prince Putbus's grounds on one side and a line of irregular houses, all white, all old-fashioned, and all charming, on the other. A double row of great trees forms a shady walk on the edge of the grounds, and it is bountifully supplied with those stone seats so fatal, I am sure, to many an honest bath-guest. The grounds, trim and shady, have neat paths winding into their recesses from the road, with no fence or wall or obstacle of any sort to be surmounted by the timid tourist; every tourist may walk in them as long and as often as he likes without the least preliminary bother of gates and lodges.

As we jolted slowly over the rough stones we were objects of the liveliest interest to the bath-guests sitting out on the pavement in front of the inns having supper. No sign whatever of August was to be seen, not even an ordnance map, as I had half expected, lying in the road. Our cart made more noise here than ever, it being characteristic of Putbus that things on wheels are heard for an amazing time before and after their passing. It is the drowsiest little town. Grass grows undisturbed between the cobbles of the street, along the gutters, and in the cracks of the pavement on the sidewalk. One or two shops seem sufficient for the needs of all the inhabitants, including the boys at the school here which is a sort of German Eton, and from what I saw in the windows their needs are chiefly picture-postcards and cakes. There is a white theatre with a colonnade as quaint as all the rest. The houses have many windows and balconies hung about with flowers. The place did not somehow seem real in the bright flood of evening sunlight, it looked like a place in a picture or a dream; but the bath-guests, pausing in their eating to stare at us, were enjoying themselves in a very solid and undreamlike fashion, not in the least in harmony with the quaint background. In spite of my forlorn condition I could not help reflecting on its probable charms in winter under the dear green of the cold sky, with all these people away, when the frosted branches of the trees stretch across to deserted windows, when the theatre is silent for months, when the inns only keep as much of themselves open as meets the requirements of the infrequent commercial traveller, and the cutting wind blows down the street, empty all day long. Certainly a perfect place to spend a quiet winter in, to go to when one is tired of noise and bustle and of a world choked to the point of suffocation with strenuous persons trying to do each other good. Rooms in one of those spacious old houses with the large windows facing the sun, and plenty of books--if I were that abstracted but happy form of reptile called a bookworm, which I believed I am prevented from being only by my sex, the genus, I am told, being persistently male, I would take care to spend at least one of my life's winters in Putbus. How divinely quiet it would be. What a place for him who intends to pass an examination, to write a book, or who wants the crumples got by crushing together too long with his fellows to be smoothed out of his soul. And what walks there would be, to stretch legs and spirits grown stiff, in the crisp wintry woods where the pale sunshine falls across unspoilt snow. Sitting in my cart of sorrow in summer sultriness I could feel the ineffable pure cold of winter strike my face at the mere thought, the ineffable pure cold that spurs the most languid mind into activity.

Thus far had I got in my reflections, and we had jolted slowly down about half the length of the street, when a tremendous datter of hoofs and wheels coming towards us apparently at a gallop in starkest defiance of regulations, brought me back with a jerk to the miserable present.

'Bolted,' remarked the surly youth, hastily drawing on one side.

The bath-guests at supper flung down their knives and forks and started up to look.

'_Halt! Hah!_' cried some of them, '_Es ist verboten! Schritt! Schritt!_'

'How can he halt?' cried others; 'his horses have bolted.'

'Then why does he beat them?' cried the first.

'It is August!' shrieked Gertrud. 'August! August! We are here! Stop! Stop!'

For with staring eyes and set mouth August was actually galloping past us. This time he did hear Gertrud's shriek, acute with anguish, and pulled the horses on to their haunches. Never have I seen unhappy coachman with so white a face. He had had, it appeared, the most stringent private instructions before leaving home to take care of me, and on the very first day to let me somehow tumble out and lose me! He was tearing back in the awful conviction that he would find Gertrud and myself in the form of corpses. 'Thank God!' he cried devoutly on seeing us, 'Thank God! Is the gracious one unhurt?'

Certainly poor August had had the worst of it.

Now it is most unlikely that the bath-guests of Putbus will ever enjoy themselves quite so much again. Their suppers all grew cold while they crowded round to see and listen. August, in his relief, was a changed creature. He was voluble and loud as I never could have believed. Jumping off his box to turn the horses round and help me out of the cart, he explained to me and to all and any who chose to listen how he had driven on and on through Putbus, straight round the circus to the continuation of the road on the north side, where sign-posts revealed to him that he was heading for Bergen, more and more surprised at receiving no orders, more and more struck by the extreme silence behind him. 'The gracious one,' he amplified for the benefit of the deeply-interested tourists, 'exchanges occasional observations with FrÃ¼ulein'--the tourists gazed at Gertrud--'and the cessation of these became by degrees noticeable. Yet it is not permissible that a well-trained coachman should turn to look, or interfere with a _Herrschaft_ that chooses to be silent--'

'Let us get on, August,' I interrupted, much embarrassed by all this.

'The luggage must be seen to--the strain of the rapid driving----'

A dozen helpful hands stretched out with offers of string.

'Finally,' continued August, not to be stopped in his excited account, manipulating the string and my hold-all with shaking fingers--' finally by the mercy of Providence the map used by the gracious one fell out'--I knew it would--'as a peasant was passing. He called to me, he pointed to the road, I pulled up, I turned round, and what did I see? What I then saw I shall never--no, never forget--no, not if my life should continue to a hundred.' He put his hand on his heart and gasped. The crowd waited breathless. 'I turned round,' continued August, 'and I saw nothing.'

'But you said you would never forget what you saw,' objected a dissatisfied-looking man.

'Never, never shall I forget it.'

'Yet you saw nothing at all.'

'Nothing, nothing. Never will I forget it.'

'If you saw nothing you cannot forget it,' persisted the dissatisfied man.

'I say I cannot—it is what I say.'

'That will do, August,' I said; 'I wish to drive on.'

The surly youth had been listening with his chin on his hand. He now removed his chin, stretched his hand across to me sitting safely among my cushions, and said, 'Pay me.'

'Pay him, Gertrud,' I said; and having been paid he turned his horse and drove back to Casnewitz scornful to the last.

'Go on, August,' I ordered. 'Go on. We can hold this thing on with our feet. Get on to your box and go on.'

The energy in my voice penetrated at last through his agitation. He got up on to his box, settled himself in a flustered sort of fashion, the tourists fell apart staring their last and hardest at a vision about to vanish, and we drove away.

'It is impossible to forget that which has not been,' called out the dissatisfied man as August passed him.

'It is what I say—it is what I say!' cried August, irritated.

Nothing could have kept me in Putbus after this.

Skirting the circus on the south side we turned down a hill to the right, and immediately were in the country again with cornfields on either side and the sea like a liquid sapphire beyond them. Gertrud and I put a coat between us in place of the abandoned tea-basket, and settled in with an appreciation of our comforts that we had not had before. Gertrud, indeed, looked positively happy, so thankful was she to be safely in the carriage again, and joy was written in every line of August's back. About a mile and a half off lay Lauterbach, a little straggling group of houses down by the water; and quite by itself, a mile to the left of Lauterbach, I could see the hotel we were going to, a long white building something like a Greek temple, with a portico and a flight of steps the entire length of its façade, conspicuous in its whiteness against a background of beechwoods. Woods and fields and sea and a lovely little island a short way from the shore called Vilm, were bathed in sunset splendour. Lauterbach and not Putbus, then, was the place of radiant jelly-fish and crystal water and wooded coves. Probably in those distant years when Marianne North enjoyed them Lauterbach as an

independent village with a name to itself did not exist. A branch railway goes down now to the very edge of the sea. We crossed the line and drove between chestnut trees and high grassy banks starry with flowers to the Greek hotel.

How delightful it looked as we got out of the deep chestnut lane into the open space in front of it before we were close enough to see that time had been unkind. The sea was within a stone's throw on the right beyond a green, marshy, rushy meadow. On the left people were mowing in a field. Across the field the spire of a little Lutheran church looked out oddly round the end of the pagan portico. Behind and on either side were beeches. Not a soul came out as we drew up at the bottom of the steps. Not a soul was to be seen except the souls with scythes in the meadow. We waited a moment, thinking to hear a bell rung and to see flying waiters, but no one came. The scythes in the meadow swished, the larks called down that it was a fine evening, some fowls came and pecked about on the sunny steps of the temple, some red sails passed between the trunks of the willows down near the water.

'Shall I go in?' inquired Gertrud.

She went up the steps and disappeared through glass doors. Grass grew between the stones of the steps, and the walls of the house were damp and green. The ceiling of the portico was divided into squares and painted sky-blue. In one corner paint and plaster had come off together, probably in wild winter nights, and this and the grass-grown steps and the silence gave the place a strangely deserted look. I would have thought it was shut up if there had not been a table in the portico with a reassuring red-check cloth on it and a coffee-pot.

Gertrud came out again followed by a waiter and a small boy. I was in no hurry, and could have sat there contentedly for any time in the pleasant evening sunshine. The waiter assured me there was just one room vacant for me, and by the luckiest of chances just one other leading out of it for the Fräulein. I followed him up the steps. The portico, open at either end, framed in delicious pictures. The waiter led me through a spacious boarded hall where a narrow table along one side told of recent supper, through intricate passages, across little inner courts with shrubs and greenery, and blue sky above, and lilac bushes in tubs looking as though they had to pretend they were orange trees and that this was Italy and that the white plaster walls, so mouldy in places, were the marble walls of some classic baths, up strange stairs that sloped alarmingly to one side, along more passages, and throwing open one of the many small white doors, said with pride, 'Here is the apartment; it is a fine, a big, a splendid apartment.'

The apartment was of the sort that produces an immediate determination in the breast of him to whom it is offered to die sooner than occupy it. Sleep in its gloomy recesses and parti-coloured bed I would not. Sooner would I brave the authorities, and taking my hold-all for a pillow go out to the grasshoppers for the night. In spite of the waiter's assertion, made for the glory of the house, that this was the one room unoccupied, I saw other rooms, perhaps smaller but certainly vacant, lurking in his eye; therefore I said firmly, 'Show me something else.'

The house was nearly all at my disposal I found. It is roomy, and there were hardly a dozen people staying in it, I chose a room with windows opening into the portico, through whose white columns I would be able to see a series of peaceful country pictures as I lay in bed. The boards were bare and the bed was covered with another of those parti-coloured quilts that suggest a desire to dissemble spots rather than wash them out. The Greek temple was certainly primitive, and would hardly appeal to any but the simplest, meekest of tourists. I hope I am simple and meek. I felt as though I must be as I looked round this room and knew that of my own free will I was going to sleep in it; and not only sleep in it but be very happy in it. It was the series of pictures between the columns that had fascinated me.

While Gertrud was downstairs superintending the bringing up of the luggage, I leaned out of one of my windows and examined the delights. I was quite close to the blue and white squares of the portico's ceiling; and looking down I saw its grass-grown pavement, and the head of a pensive tourist drinking beer just beneath me. Here again big lilac bushes planted at intervals between the columns did duty for orange trees. The north end framed the sky and fields and distant church; the south end had a picture of luminous water shining through beech leaves; the pair of columns in front enclosed the chestnut-lined road we had come along and the outermost white houses of Putbus among dark trees against the sunset on high ground behind; through those on the left was the sea, hardly sea here at all the bay is so

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