

M E A S U R I N G
T H E W O R L D

T H E J O U R N E Y

In September 1828, the greatest mathematician in the country left his hometown for the first time in years, to attend the German Scientific Congress in Berlin. Naturally he had no desire to go. He had been declining to accept for months, but Alexander von Humboldt had remained adamant, until in a moment of weakness and the hope that the day would never come, he had said yes.

So now Professor Gauss was hiding in bed. When Minna told him he must get up, the coach was waiting and it was a long journey, he wrapped his arms around the pillow and tried to make his wife disappear by closing his eyes. When he opened them again and Minna was still there, he told her she was a hindrance, and limited, and the misfortune of his old age. When that didn't work either, he pushed back the coverlet and set his feet on the floor.

Bad-temperedly, he performed the most minimal ablutions and went downstairs. In the parlor, his son Eugen was waiting with a bag packed. As Gauss caught sight of him, he flew into a rage: he broke a jug that was standing on the windowsill, stamped his foot, and struck out wildly. He wasn't even to be calmed when Eugen to one side of him and Minna to the other laid their hands on his shoulders and swore that he would

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be well taken care of, he would soon be home again, and everything would be over in no time, just like a bad dream. Only when his ancient mother, disturbed by the noise, emerged from her room to pinch his cheek and ask what had happened to her brave boy did he pull himself together. Without warmth he said goodbye to Minna, and absentmindedly stroked the heads of his daughter and youngest son. Then he allowed himself to be helped into the coach.

The journey was a torture. He called Eugen a failure, took the knobbed stick away from him, and jabbed it full force at his foot. For a time he stared out of the window, a frown on his face, then asked when his daughter was finally going to get married. Why didn't anyone want her, what was the problem?

Eugen pushed back his long hair, kneaded his red cap with both hands, and didn't want to answer.

Out with it, said Gauss.

To be honest, said Eugen, his sister wasn't exactly pretty.

Gauss nodded; the answer seemed a plausible one. He said he wanted a book.

Eugen gave him the one he had just opened: Friedrich Jahn's *German Gymnastics*. It was one of his favorites.

Gauss tried to read, but seconds later he was already glancing up to complain about the newfangled leather suspension on the coach; it made you feel even sicker than usual. Soon, he explained, machines would be carrying people from town to town at the speed of a shot. Then you'd do the trip from Göttingen to Berlin in half an hour.

Eugen shrugged.

It was both odd and unjust, said Gauss, a real example of the pitiful arbitrariness of existence, that you were born into a particular time and held prisoner there whether you wanted it

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or not. It gave you an indecent advantage over the past and made you a clown vis-à-vis the future.

Eugen nodded sleepily.

Even a mind like his own, said Gauss, would have been incapable of achieving anything in early human history or on the banks of the Orinoco, whereas in another two hundred years each and every idiot would be able to make fun of him and invent the most complete nonsense about his character. He thought things over, called Eugen a failure again, and turned his attention to the book. As he read, Eugen in his distress turned his face fixedly to the window, to hide his look of mortification and anger.

German Gymnastics was all about exercise equipment. The author expounded at length on this or that piece of apparatus which he had invented for swinging oneself up or around on. He called one the pommel horse, another the beam, and another the vaulting horse.

The man was out of his mind, said Gauss, opened the window, and threw the book out.

That was his book, cried Eugen.

Quite so, said Gauss, dropped off to sleep, and didn't stir until they reached the stop at the frontier that evening and the horses were being changed.

While the old horses were being unhitched and the new ones harnessed up, they ate potato soup in an inn. The only other guest, a thin man with a long beard and hollow cheeks, inspected them furtively from the next table. Everything pertaining to the body, said Gauss, who to his irritation had been dreaming about gym apparatus, was the true source of all humiliation. He had always considered it a sign of God's malicious sense of humor that a spirit such as his should be trapped

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in a sickly body while a common or garden-variety creature like Eugen was, to all intents and purposes, never ill.

He had had a severe attack of smallpox when he was a child, said Eugen. He had almost died. You could still see the scars!

True, said Gauss, he'd forgotten. He pointed to the post horses outside the window. It was actually quite funny that the rich needed twice as much time to make a journey as the poor. If you used post horses, you could change them after every section. If you had your own, you had to wait until they were fresh again.

So what, said Eugen.

Naturally, said Gauss, if you didn't think that much, this would seem obvious. As would the fact that young men carry sticks, and old men don't.

Students carry a knobbed stick, said Eugen. It had always been that way and always would be.

Probably, said Gauss, and smiled.

They spooned up their soup in silence until the gendarme from the frontier post came in to ask for their passports. Eugen gave him his permit: a certificate from the Court which said that although he was a student he was harmless and was permitted to set foot on Prussian soil if accompanied by his father. The gendarme looked at him suspiciously, inspected the pass, nodded, and turned to Gauss. Gauss had nothing.

No passport, asked the gendarme, astonished, no piece of paper, no official stamp, nothing?

He had never needed such a thing, said Gauss. The last time he crossed the border from Hannover had been twenty years ago. There hadn't been any problems then.

Eugen tried to explain who they were, where they were going, and at whose bidding. The Scientific Congress was tak-

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ing place under the auspices of the crown. As guest of honor, his father's invitation came, so to speak, directly from the king.

The gendarme wanted a passport.

There was no way he could know, said Eugen, but his father was honored in the most distant countries, he was a member of all Academies, had been known since his first youth as the Prince of Mathematics.

Gauss nodded. People said it was because of him that Napoleon had decided not to bombard Göttingen.

Eugen went white.

Napoleon, repeated the gendarme.

Indeed, said Gauss.

The gendarme demanded his passport again, louder than before.

Gauss laid his head down on his arms and didn't move. Eugen nudged him but it did no good. He didn't care, said Gauss, he wanted to go home, he didn't give a hoot.

The gendarme fidgeted uneasily with his cap.

Then the man from the next table joined in. All this would end! Germany would be free, and good citizens would live unmolested and travel sound in mind and body, and would have no further need of bits of paper.

The incredulous gendarme asked for his passport.

That was exactly what he meant, cried the man, and dug around in his pockets. Suddenly, he leapt to his feet, knocking over his chair, and bolted outside. The gendarme gaped at the open door for several seconds before pulling himself together and going in pursuit.

Gauss slowly raised his head. Eugen suggested that they set off again immediately. Gauss nodded and ate the rest of his soup in silence. The little gendarme's hut was empty, both officers having gone after the man with the beard. Eugen and the

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coachman together pried the barrier up into the air. Then they drove onto Prussian soil.

Gauss was in good order now, almost cheerful, and talking about differential geometry. It was almost impossible to imagine where the investigation into curved space would lead next. Eugen should be glad he was so mediocre, sometimes such questions could be terrifying. Then he talked about how bitter his youth had been. His own father had been hard and dismissive, so Eugen should think himself lucky. He had started to count before he could talk. Once his father had made an error when he was counting out his monthly pay, and this had made Gauss start to cry. As soon as his father caught the mistake, he immediately fell quiet again.

Eugen looked impressed, even though he knew the story wasn't true. His brother Joseph had made it up and spread it around. His father must have heard it recounted so often that he had begun to believe it himself.

Gauss's conversation turned to chance, the enemy of all knowledge, and the thing he had always wished to overcome. Viewed from up close, one could detect the infinite fineness of the web of causality behind every event. Step back and the larger patterns appeared: Freedom and Chance were a question of distance, a point of view. Did he understand?

Sort of, said Eugen wearily, looking at his pocket watch. It didn't keep very good time, but he thought it must be between four-fifty and five in the morning.

But the laws of probability, Gauss went on, pressing both hands against his aching back, weren't conclusive. They were not part of the laws of nature, and there could be exceptions. Take an intellect like his own, for example, or a win at a game of chance, which any simpleton could undeniably pull off at any time. Sometimes he actually theorized that even the laws

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of physics were merely statistical, hence they allowed for exceptions: ghosts or thought transference.

Eugen asked if this was a joke.

He couldn't answer that himself, said Gauss, closed his eyes, and went into a deep sleep.

They reached Berlin the next day in the late afternoon. Thousands of little houses in a chaotic sprawl, a settlement overflowing its banks in the swampiest spot in Europe. The first splendid buildings were beginning to go up: a cathedral, some palaces, a museum to house the finds from Humboldt's great expedition.

In a few years, said Eugen, this would be a metropolis like Rome, Paris, or St. Petersburg.

Never, said Gauss. Horrible place!

The coach bumped over badly laid cobblestones. Twice the horses shied away from growling dogs, and in the side streets the wheels almost stuck fast in the wet sand. Their host lived in the Packhof at number 4, in the middle of the city, right behind the building site of the new museum. To make sure they didn't miss it, he had drawn a very precise plan with a fine pen. Someone must have seen them from a distance and announced their arrival, for a matter of seconds after they pulled into the courtyard, the main door flew open and four men were running towards them.

Alexander von Humboldt was a little old gentleman with snow-white hair. Behind him came a secretary with an open pad of writing paper, a flunkey in livery, and a young man with whiskers carrying a stand with a wooden box on it. As if rehearsed, they took up their positions. Humboldt stretched out his arms towards the door of the coach.

Nothing happened.

From inside the vehicle came sounds of hectic speech. No,

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cried someone, no! A dull blow rang out, then a third no! After which there was nothing for a while.

Finally the door swung open and Gauss clambered carefully down into the street. He shrank back as Humboldt seized him by the shoulders and cried what an honor it was, what a great moment for Germany, for science, for him personally.

The secretary was taking notes, and the man behind the wooden box hissed, Now!

Humboldt froze. This was Monsieur Daguerre, he whispered without moving his lips. A protégé of his, who was working on a piece of equipment which would fix the moment on a light-sensitive silver iodide plate and snatch it out of the onrush of time. Please hold absolutely still!

Gauss said he wanted to go home.

Just a moment, whispered Humboldt, a mere fifteen minutes, tremendous progress had been made already. Until recently it had taken much longer, when they tried it first he had thought his back wouldn't hold out under the strain. Gauss wanted to pull himself free, but the little old man held him with surprising strength and murmured, Bring word to the king. The flunkey was off at a run. Then, probably because that was what was going through his mind at that moment: Take a note. Check possibility of breeding seals in Warnemünde, conditions seem propitious, give me proposal tomorrow. The secretary scribbled.

Eugen, who was only just climbing out of the coach with a slight limp, made his apologies for the late hour of their arrival.

There was no late here, and no early, murmured Humboldt. Here there was only work, and the work got done. Luckily it was still light. Not to move.

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A policeman entered the courtyard and asked what was going on.

Later, hissed Humboldt, his lips pressed together.

This was an unauthorized gathering, said the policeman. Either everyone went their separate ways or this would become police business.

He was a chamberlain, Humboldt hissed.

Excuse me? The policeman bent forward.

Chamberlain, Humboldt's secretary repeated. Member of the Court.

Daguerre ordered the policeman to get out of the picture.

Frowning, the policeman stepped back. First of all, anyone could claim the same thing, and secondly, the ban on gatherings applied to everyone. And that one there, pointing to Eugen, was clearly a student. Which made it particularly ticklish.

If he didn't immediately make himself scarce, said the secretary, he would find himself in difficulties he couldn't even begin to imagine.

This was no way to address an officer, said the policeman nervously. He would give them five minutes.

Gauss groaned and pulled himself free.

Oh no, cried Humboldt.

Daguerre stamped his foot. Now the moment had been lost forever!

Just like all the others, said Gauss calmly. Like all the others.

And indeed, when Humboldt inspected the exposed copper plate with a magnifying glass that same night, while Gauss snored so loudly in the room next door that he was audible throughout the entire apartment, he could recognize absolutely nothing on it. Only after a time did he think he saw a maze of

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ghostly outlines begin to emerge, the blurred sketch of something like an underwater landscape. In the middle, a hand, three shoes, a shoulder, the cuff of a uniform and the lower portion of an ear. Or then again, not? With a sigh he threw the plate out of the window and heard a dull crash as it landed in the courtyard. Seconds later, like everything else at which he had ever failed, he had forgotten it.

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Alexander von Humboldt was famous in all of Europe for an expedition to the tropics he had led twenty-five years earlier. He had been in New Spain, New Granada, New Barcelona, New Andalusia, and the United States; he had discovered the natural canal that connects the Orinoco and the Amazon; he had climbed the highest mountain in the known world; he had collected thousands of plants and hundreds of animals, some living, the majority dead; he had talked to parrots, disinterred corpses, measured every river, every mountain, and every lake in his path, had crawled into burrows and had tasted more berries and climbed more trees than anyone could begin to imagine.

He was the younger of two brothers. Their father, a wealthy man of the minor nobility, had died early. When seeking advice on how to educate her sons, his mother had turned to no less a figure than Goethe.

The latter's response was that a pair of brothers in whom the whole panoply of human aspirations so manifested itself, thus promising that the richest possibilities both of action and aesthetic appreciation might become exemplary reality, presented as it were a drama capable of filling the mind with hope and feeding the spirit with much to reflect upon.

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Nobody could make head or tail of this sentence. Not their mother, not Kunth the majordomo, a rail of a man with large ears. He took it to mean, he said finally, that it was a kind of experiment. The one should be educated to be a man of culture, and the other a man of science.

And which was which?

Kunth thought. Then he shrugged his shoulders and suggested that they toss a coin.

Fifteen highly paid experts came to lecture them at university level. For the younger brother it was chemistry, physics, and mathematics, for the elder it was languages and literature, and for them both it was Greek, Latin, and philosophy. Twelve hours a day, seven days a week, with no time off and no holidays.

The younger brother, Alexander, was taciturn and frail; he needed encouragement in everything he did and his marks were mediocre. When left to his own devices, he wandered in the woods, collecting beetles and ordering them in categories he made up himself. At the age of nine he followed Benjamin Franklin's design and built a lightning conductor and attached it to the roof of the castle they lived in near the capital. It was only the second anywhere in Germany; the other was in Göttingen, mounted on physics professor Lichtenberg's roof. These were the only two places where one was safe from the heavens.

The elder brother looked like an angel. He could talk like a poet and from the earliest age wrote precocious letters to the most famous men in the country. Everyone who met him was dazzled, almost overcome. By thirteen he had mastered two languages, by fourteen four, by fifteen seven. He had never been punished; nobody could even remember him doing any-

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thing wrong. With English envoys he talked about economic policy, with the French the dangers of insurrection. Once he locked his younger brother in a cupboard in a distant room. When a servant found the little boy half-unconscious the next day, he swore he'd locked himself in; he knew nobody would believe the truth. Another time he discovered a white powder in his food. He knew enough about chemistry to identify it as rat poison. With trembling hands he pushed the plate away. From the other side of the table his elder brother watched him knowingly, his pale eyes impenetrable.

Nobody could deny that the castle was haunted. Nothing spectacular, just footsteps in empty corridors, sounds of children crying out of nowhere, and sometimes a shadowy man who asked in a rasping voice to buy shoelaces, little toy magnets, or a glass of lemonade. But the stories about the spirits were even eerier than the spirits themselves. Kunth gave the two boys books to read full of monks and open graves and hands reaching up out of the depths and potions brewed in the underworld and séances where the dead talked to terrified listeners. This kind of thing was just becoming fashionable and was still so novel that there was no familiarity that could inure people to the feelings of horror. And horror was necessary, according to Kunth, encountering the dark side of things was part of growing up; anyone innocent of metaphysical anxiety would never achieve German manhood. Once they stumbled on a story about Aguirre the Mad, who had renounced his king and declared himself emperor. He and his men traveled the length of the Orinoco in a journey that was the stuff of nightmares, past riverbanks so thick with undergrowth that it was impossible to land. Birds screamed in the language of extinct tribes, and when one looked up, the sky reflected cities

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whose architecture never came from human hands. Hardly any scholars had ever penetrated this region, and there was no reliable map.

But he would, said the younger brother. He would make the journey.

Naturally, the elder brother replied.

He really meant it!

Yes he understood that, said the elder brother and summoned a servant to note down the day and the exact time. The day would come when they would be glad they had fixed this moment.

Their teacher in physics and philosophy was Marcus Herz, Immanuel Kant's favorite pupil and husband of the famed beauty Henriette. He poured two substances into a beaker: the liquid did nothing for a moment, then suddenly changed color. He poured hydrogen out of a little tube, held a flame to its mouth, and there was a joyous explosion of fire. Half a gram, he said, produced a twelve-centimeter flame. Whenever things were frightening, it was a good idea to measure them.

Henriette held a salon every week for intellectual sophisticates who talked of God and their feelings, wept a little, wrote one another letters, and called themselves the Assembled Virtues. No one could remember how this name had come about. Their conversations were kept secret from outsiders, but all impulses of the soul were to be shared completely openly with other Assembled Virtues. If the soul failed to experience impulses, they had to be invented. The two brothers were the youngest. This too was an essential part of their upbringing, said Kunth, and they must never miss a single gathering. It served to educate the emotions. Specifically, he encouraged them to write to Henriette. A neglect of one's sentimental education early in life could bear the most unfortunate fruit. It

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went without saying that every letter must be shown to him first. As expected, the elder brother's letters were finer.

Henriette's replies were courteous, and written in an unsure child's hand. She herself was barely nineteen. A book that the younger brother had lent to her was returned unread: *Man a Machine* by La Mettrie. A proscribed work, an abominable pamphlet! She could not bring herself to so much as open it.

What a pity, said the younger brother to the elder. It was a notable book. The author was insistent that man was a machine, a highly sophisticated automaton.

And no soul, answered the elder brother. They were walking through a park that surrounded the castle; a thin layer of snow coated the bare trees.

No, the younger boy contradicted him. With a soul. With intimations and a poetic feel for expanse and beauty. Nonetheless this soul itself was no more than a part, even if the most complex one, of the machine. And he asked himself if this didn't correspond to the truth.

All human beings are machines?

Perhaps not all, said the younger boy thoughtfully. But we are.

The pond was frozen over, and the late afternoon dusk was turning the snow and the icicles to blue. He had something to tell him, said the older boy. People were worried about him. His silences, his reserve. His laborious progress at his lessons. A great experiment would either stand or fall with them. Neither of them had the right to let go of things. He paused for a moment. The ice looks quite solid.

Really?

Yes of course.

The younger boy nodded, took a deep breath, and stepped onto the ice. He wondered if he should recite Klopstock's ode

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to skating. Arms swinging wide, he glided to the middle and turned in a circle. His brother was standing bent slightly forward on the bank, watching him.

Suddenly everything was silent. He couldn't see anything any more and the cold knocked him almost unconscious. Only now did he realize that he was underwater. He kicked out. His head banged against something hard, the ice. His sheepskin hat came off and floated away, his hair was loose and his feet hit bottom. Now his eyes were accustoming themselves to the darkness. For a moment he saw a frozen landscape: trembling stalks, things growing above them, transparent as a veil, a lone fish, there for a moment then gone, like a hallucination. He made swimming motions, rose in the water, banged into the ice again. He realized he only had a few more seconds to live. He groped, and at the moment when he ran out of air, he saw a dark patch above him, the opening; he dragged himself up, gasped in air, breathed out again and spat, the sharp angles of the ice cut into his hands, he heaved himself out, rolled away, pulling his legs up after him, and lay there, panting and sobbing. Turning onto his stomach, he belly-flopped toward the bank. His brother was still standing there, bent forward the way he had been, hands in his pockets, his cap pulled down over his face. He reached out a hand and helped him to his feet.

That night the fever started. He was aware of voices and didn't know whether they belonged to figures in his dreams or the people who were standing round his bed, and he could still feel the cold of the ice. A man who must be the doctor was pacing up and down the room, and said it's up to you, you'll either make it or you won't, it's your decision, all you have to do is hold on, you know. But when he tried to answer, he could no longer remember what had been said; instead he was

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looking at the wide expanse of a sea under skies flickering with electricity, and when he opened his eyes again it was noon two days later, the winter sun was hanging all pale in the window and his fever had broken.

From now on his marks improved. He concentrated when he worked and began a habit of balling his fists while thinking, as if there were an enemy to conquer. He had changed, Henriette said in a letter to him, and now he made her a little fearful. He asked permission to spend a night in the empty room which was the most frequent source of nocturnal sounds. In the morning he was white and quiet, and the first vertical line had appeared in his brow.

Kunth decided that the elder brother should study jurisprudence, and the younger, public administration. Of course he traveled with them when they went to university at Frankfurt-on-the-Oder; he accompanied them to lectures and oversaw their progress. It was not a good higher education. If someone incompetent wanted to earn his doctorate, the elder boy wrote to Henriette, he could come here in full confidence. And for some unknown reason there was also a large dog which attended lectures most of the time, scratching incessantly and making noises.

It was the botanist Willdenow who introduced the younger boy to his first dried plants from the tropics. They had protuberances that looked like feelers, buds like eyes, and leaves with upper surfaces that felt like human skin. They seemed familiar to him from his dreams. He dissected them, made careful sketches, tested their reaction to acids and alkalis, and worked them up cleanly into preparations.

He knew now, he said to Kunth, what he wanted to concern himself with: Life.

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He couldn't give his approval, said Kunth. One had more tasks on earth than mere existence. Life in and of itself did not supply the content for existence.

That wasn't what he'd meant, he replied. He wanted to investigate Life, to understand its strange grip on the world. He wanted to uncover its tricks!

So he was allowed to stay and study with Willdenow. Next semester the elder brother transferred to the University of Göttingen. While he was finding his first friends there, trying his first alcohol, and touching his first woman, the younger boy was writing his first scientific paper.

Good, said Kunth, but not yet good enough to be printed under the name of Humboldt. Publication would have to wait.

During the holidays he visited his elder brother. At a reception given by the French consul, he met Kästner the mathematician, his friend Privy Councilor Zimmerman, and Professor Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, the most important experimental physicist in Germany. The latter, a hunchback, a clotted mass of flesh and intellect, with a flawlessly beautiful face, pressed his hand softly and stared up at him with a twinkle. Humboldt asked him if it was true he was working on a novel.

Yes and no, said Lichtenberg with a look that suggested he could see something beyond Humboldt's understanding. The work was called *About Gunkel*, had no story, and was making no progress.

Writing a novel, said Humboldt, seemed to him the perfect way to capture the most fleeting essence of the present for the future.

Aha, said Lichtenberg.

Humboldt blushed. It must be a foolish undertaking for an author, as was becoming the fashion these days, to choose some already distant past as his setting.

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Lichtenberg observed him with narrowed eyes. No, he said. And yes.

On the way home, the brothers saw a second slice of silver, only slightly larger, alongside the newly risen moon. A hot-air balloon, the elder explained. Pilâtre de Rozier, a collaborator of the Montgolfier brothers, was in nearby Brunswick for the moment. The whole town was talking about it. Soon everyone would be going up in the air.

But they wouldn't want to, said the younger boy. They would be too afraid.

Shortly before leaving, he was introduced to the famous Georg Forster, a thin man with a cough and an unhealthy pallor. He had circumnavigated the globe with Cook and seen more than any German had ever seen; now he was a legend, his book was world-famous, and he worked as the librarian in Mainz. He told tales of dragons and the living dead, of supremely well-mannered cannibals, of days when the sea was so clear that one seemed to be rocking over an abyss, of storms so fierce that one didn't even dare pray. Melancholy enveloped him like a fine mist. He had seen too much, he said. That was the meaning of the simile about Odysseus and the Sirens. It was no good tying oneself to the mast; even when one escaped, one couldn't recover from the brush with the unknown. He could hardly sleep any more, he said, his memories were too strong. Recently he had had the news that his captain, the great saturnine Cook, had been boiled and eaten on Hawaii. He rubbed his forehead and looked at the buckles on his shoes. Boiled and eaten, he said again.

He too wanted to go on voyages, said Humboldt.

Forster nodded. Quite a few had that wish. And everyone of them regretted it later.

Why?

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Because one could never come back.

Forster recommended him to the school of mining in Freiberg. It was where Abraham Werner worked. The earth's interior, he taught, was cold and hard. Mountain ranges were created by the chemical precipitations left as the primordial oceans shrank. The fire in volcanoes didn't come from deep in the earth, it was fed by burning coalfields. The core of the earth was solid rock. This theory was called Neptunism and was championed by both churches and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe. In the chapel at Freiberg Werner had masses said for the souls of his opponents who still denied the truth. Once he had broken the nose of a doubting student, and supposedly bitten off the ear of another years before. He was one of the last alchemists: member of secret lodges, expert in the signs that commanded the obedience of demons. He had the power to reassemble what had been destroyed, to re-create what had been burned from its smoke, and to make pulverized objects take shape again; he had also talked to the Devil and made gold. But he didn't give the impression of being an intelligent man. He leaned back, squeezed his eyes shut, and asked Humboldt if he was a Neptunist and believed in a cold earth's core.

Humboldt said yes.

Then he should get married.

Humboldt went red.

Werner puffed out his cheeks, looked conspiratorial, and asked if he had a sweetheart.

That was only an impediment, said Humboldt. One got married when one had nothing essential to do in life.

Werner stared at him.

Or so it was said, added Humboldt hurriedly. Of course that was wrong!