



SÁNJE - DREAM is a succession of images, sounds or emotions that the mind experiences during sleep. The content and purpose of dreams are not fully understood, though they have been a topic of speculation and interest throughout recorded history.

(Wikipedia)

A selection of awards received by Sanje:

★ *Best Young Translator
of 2012: Ana Barič
Moder for the translation
of Les fleurs bleues*

★ *International award
for Outstanding Merits in
Investigative Journalism
2012 presented by CEI
and SEEMO: Matej Šurc
& Blaž Zgaga for the
trilogy In the Name
of the State*

★ *Best Young Translator
of 2011: Stana Anželj
for the translation of Die
Stadt der Träumenden
Bücher by Walter Moers*

★ *Most Beautiful
Original Slovenian
Children's Book of 2010
(Fran Milčinski – Ježek,
Tina Volarič: Zgodba o
zamorčku Bambuleju in
vrtoglavi žirafi)*

★ *Slovenian Publisher
of the Year 2010*

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Sanje

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★ *Special Prize for Best Illustrated Book of 2009*
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★ *Best Young Translator of 2008: Katja Zakrajšek for the translation of The Book of Salt by Monique Truong,*

★ *Sovre Award – the highest national prize translation awarded to Nives Vidrih (the following translation was mentioned in the explanation of the jury: Sestra by Jachym Topol, Sanje, 2008)*

★ *Praise for best bookcover at Brumen, Biennale of Visual Messages, 2007 (Sestra, design by Matej Koren)*

★ *Best Debut Novel of 2006 (Ime tvoje zvezde je Bilhadi by Magda Reja)*

★ *Best Design of 2006 (Marjana by Katarina Lavš)*

★ *Best Design of 2005 (Faust by J.W.Goethe, the first complete translation in Slovenian)*

★ *Best Design of the Year 2004 (Idiot by F. M. Dostoevsky)*

★ *Best Design of 2001 (a series of audiobooks based on poetry by France Prešeren)*



Vladimir Bartol

(1903–1967)

writer, playwright, essayist, and critic. Born in Trieste, Vladimir Bartol was one of Slovenia's leading intellectuals and an author of plays, short stories and theater reviews. During the 1920s, he studied at the universities of Paris and Ljubljana, concentrating on philosophy, world religions, psychology (he was among the first to introduce Freud's teachings in the former Yugoslavia) and biology. During World War II, he participated in the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation of former Yugoslavia.

Alamut, the second of his two novels, represents the culminating point of his ideas and experiences of totalitarianism during the years before and after World War II. Vladimir Bartol did not live to experience the tremendous success of his novel *Alamut*, even though he had suspected and predicted it. Over the years, *Alamut* has been published more than 70 times. The success dreamt of by the author is thus becoming a reality. It is striking that in his diary, Bartol predicted his first international success with astonishing precision: "I will be understood by the public in 50 years" ... 1938 – and the first success of *Alamut* in France in 1988.

"I had a feeling I was writing for a public who was going to live 50 years later..."

"I finished Alamut at 5.45 a.m. Pleased. These final days I kept trembling for someone not to steal it from me, for a fire not to start, or for something else not to happen. Towards the end I fancied that someone could even have killed me or I could have met with an accident, Alamut was chiefly completed. Yet it was not until I put down the last letter that I felt really at ease. Let someone kill me – in Alamut, I am going to be immortal."

– Vladimir Bartol, Diary, Sunday, 24 July 1938

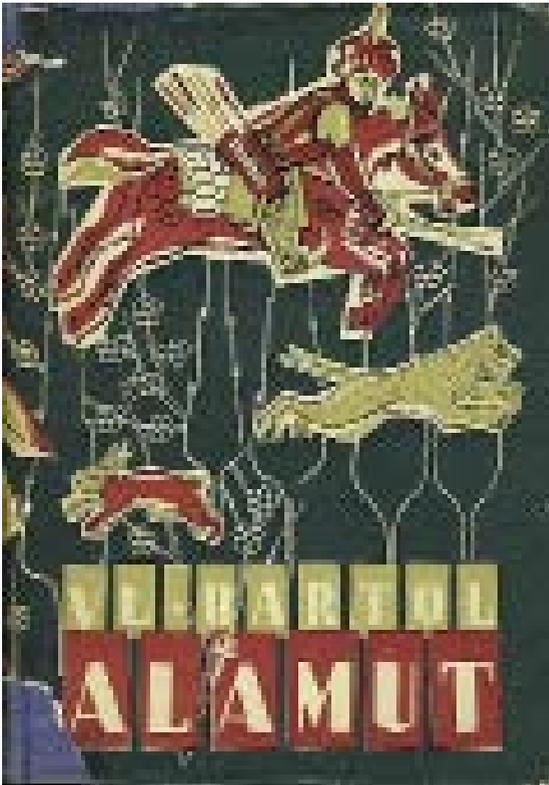
Bartol died on 12 September 1967 in Ljubljana, 64 years old, with most of his work out of print and was at the time virtually unknown among his countrymen.

Besides *Alamut* his major works are *Lopez* (1932, drama), *Al Araf* (1934, collection of short stories), *Tržšaške humoreske* (1952), *Mladost pri Svetem Ivanu* (1955–56, autobiography). Most of his works are currently being rediscovered and republished by Sanje.

About the translator of Bartol's work into English:

Michael Biggins has translated works by a number of Slovenia's leading contemporary writers. He currently curates the library collections for Russian and East European studies and teaches in the Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, both at the University of Washington in Seattle.

“Is it true that
Christians and
Jews eat little
children?”



*Edition of Alamut
from 1958*



English translation
available
(by Michael Biggins)

Alamut

original title: *Alamut*

novel

440 pages

first published in 1938, present edition published in 2001

no 1 bestseller — over 55,000 copies sold in Slovenia alone

translated into over 30 languages, including English, French, German, Italian Spanish, Portuguese, Croatian, Serbian, Czech, Slovak, Hungarian, Turkish, Greek, Korean, Arabic, Hebrew, and Persian.

rights sold: Libella (France), Koridor (Turkey), Castelvechi (Italy), Matica makedonska (Macedonia), Kitos knygos (Lithuania)

... unveils the
secret inner
workings of
fundamentalism
and terrorism

The best selling Slovenian novel ever, *Alamut* is a book about political and historical considerations of fanaticism as well as a gripping adventure story based on the life and legend of the original “assassin” and world’s first political terrorist, 11th century Ismaili leader Hasan ibn Sabbah. An oriental tapestry, rich with detail of the lives and rites of a lost world, *Alamut* is ultimately a reflection on all forms of despotism. In magnificent prose reminiscent of Flaubert’s *Salammbô*, Vladimir Bartol – an author and philosopher interested in the history of religions, especially Islam – unveils the secret inner workings of fundamentalism and terrorism as well as developing existentialist themes of freedom, power and the absurd. Literary historians regard *Alamut* as an encyclopaedia of philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, and scientific ideas, taking the form of an exotically decorated novel, posing questions on the boundary between truth and fiction. But in a world marked by 9/11, *Alamut*, exploring how forms of violence in history prefigure those of our own time, has also gained a more immediate significance.

Praise for *Alamut*

If Osama bin Laden did not exist, Vladimir Bartol would have invented him.

L'Express

Like Borges, [Bartol] raises questions but offers few answers ... and will leave you with an inexhaustible restlessness and uncertainty.

Ricardo Arturo Ríos Torres, La Prensa

You cannot read Alamut like an ordinary book. It is an adventure story from 1938 which transforms itself... into a nightmare novel of the new century.

Olivier Maison, Journal de la Culture

Alamut is... a finely wrought, undiscovered minor masterpiece that offers... a wealth of meticulously planned and executed detail and broad potential for symbolic, intertextual and philosophical interpretation.

Michael Biggins, Afterword to the English translation

Alamut portrays even the most Machiavellian individuals as human – ruthless or murderous, but also subject to human virtues, vices, and tragedies... a thoroughly compelling novel cover to cover.

Midwest Book Review

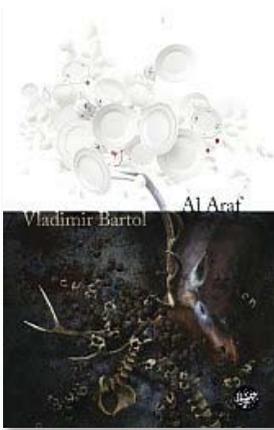
A novel first published in 1938, but now, with its 34th publication, it seems as if written anew... A novel about the profound rationality of irrational religious sects.

Bernard Nežmah, Mladina

And now, this novel, this pop classic – rooted in the journal of Marco Polo, translated into a great many languages, valued everywhere, from Spain to Germany, from France to Italy, from Bosnia to the Czech Republic, and from Turkey to Iran, but long outcast in Slovenia – is here again, printed once more, yet it is fresher, more topical, and more visionary than ever before.

Marcel Štefancič Jr., Premiera

An adventure story which transforms itself into a nightmare novel of the new century.



sample translation
available in English
(by Michael Biggins)

Al Araf

original title: *Al Araf*

short stories

344 pages

first published in 1934, present edition published in 2013

translated into English by Michael Biggins, to be published in 2014

rights available: world

When we stepped
outside, we barely
caught a last
glimpse of the
blond demon as
he limped around
the corner and
out of sight.

After the epic breadth of *Alamut*, these short stories reveal a different Bartol, an ingenious storyteller. From story to story, the characters and plots add up to create a portrait of the modern man. The stories, owing much to Bartol's own experience and to his thorough knowledge of psychology, biology, history and especially philosophy, also abound in fantasy and romance. They keep slipping across genre boundaries, from erotic-romantic prose through adventure or crime story to science fiction, always to return to the urgent themes of the collection *Al Araf* as a whole: problems of knowledge, power, freedom. *Al Araf* is both a picture of the apocalyptic schizophrenia of contemporary man and a map of his future.

Mangialupi and others

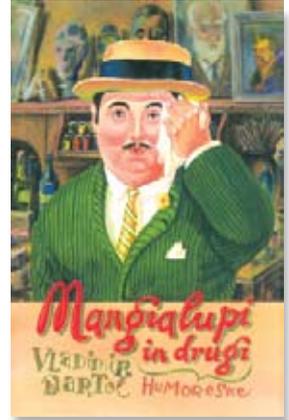
original title: *Mangialupi in drugi*

short stories

176 pages

first published in 2003

rights available: world



Slovenian
humorous prose
writing at its best

The stories are set in Bartol's native town Trieste, north-Adriatic port where two nations live side by side, in the time of Anglo-American administration of the region after the Second World War. The turbulent post-war atmosphere, full of political uncertainty, was a breeding-ground for conflict between the two ethnic groups, Slovenian and Italian, incarnated in the stories here in the earnest Slovenian journalist Pertot and his antithesis, the gung-ho Italian businessman Mangialupi. As eminent critics have pointed out, Bartol's management of character and plot in *Mangialupi* represents Slovenian humorous prose writing at its best. In the stories quasi-art, quasi-politics and quasi-love suggest the true mechanisms of human life; Bartol's humour echoes Fellini's satire, revealing human weaknesses, but with sympathy and understanding.

Alamut

Nothing is true, everything is permitted.
—The Supreme Ismaili Motto

OMNIA IN NUMERO ET MENSURA

(an excerpt from Chapter 3. Page 83-88)

Since that night Miriam became more trusting toward Halima. In their free time she would teach her writing and have her practice her reading. They both enjoyed this process. Halima would muster all her ability to avoid embarrassing herself in front of her teacher, and as a result she made quick progress. Miriam was generous with praise. As an incentive she would tell her stories from her childhood, about life in her father's house in Aleppo, about the battles between the Christians and the Jews, about the wide seas and the ships that came from far-off lands. Through all this they grew quite close, becoming like older and younger sisters.

One evening when Miriam entered the bedroom and undressed, she said to Halima, "Stop pretending you're asleep. Come over here."

"What? Over there? Me?" Halima asked, startled.

"Or maybe you don't want to? Come on. I have something to tell you."

Trembling all over, Halima crawled in beside her. She lay on the very edge of the bed for fear of giving away her excitement, and out of some incomprehensible reluctance to touch her. But Miriam pulled her close anyway, and only at this point did Halima feel free to press close.

"I'm going to tell you about the sorrows of my life," Miriam began. "You already know that my father was a merchant in Aleppo. He was very rich and his ships sailed far to the west, laden with precious wares. As a child I had everything my heart desired. They dressed me in exquisite silks, adorned me with gold and gems, and three slaves were at my command. I got used to giving commands and it only seemed natural that everybody should submit to me."

"How happy you must have been!" Halima sighed.

"Would you believe that I wasn't particularly?" Miriam replied. "At least it strikes me

that way now. My every wish was fulfilled immediately. But what kind of wishes? Only those that could be satisfied with money. The silent, secret ones that a girl's heart loves to dream about so much had to stay buried deep inside me. You see, I'd learned the limits of human powers early on. When I wasn't yet fourteen, a series of misfortunes befell my father, one after the other. It began with my mother's death, which sent my father into a period of profound grief. He didn't seem to care about anything anymore. From his first wife he had three sons who had become merchants in their own right. One of them lost his entire fortune and the other two stepped in to rescue him. They dispatched their ships to the shores of Africa and waited for their earnings. But then came the news that a storm had destroyed their vessels. All three of them turned to their father. He reunited with them and they sent more ships to the Frankish kingdom. But pirates seized them and overnight we became beggars."

"Oh, you'd have been better off poor from the beginning!" Halima exclaimed.

Miriam smiled. She drew Halima closer to her and continued.

"All these misfortunes struck us before two years had passed. And then Moses, a Jew who was considered the richest man in Aleppo, came to visit my father. He said to him, 'Look here, Simeon'—that was my father's name. 'You need money, and I need a wife.' 'Go on, get out,' my father laughed at him. 'You're so old your son could be my daughter's father. It would be more seemly for you to be thinking of death.' Moses refused to let himself be put off—at that time, you see, the whole town was saying I was the prettiest girl in Aleppo. 'You can borrow from me as much as you want,' he continued. 'Just give me Miriam. She'll be fine with me.' My father took all this talk of courtship as a joke. But when my half-brothers found out about it, they begged him to strike a deal with Moses. Father's situation was hopeless. He was also a good Christian and didn't want to give his child to a Jew. But as frail and depressed as he was after all those misfortunes, he finally relented and let Moses take me as his wife. No one ever asked me about it. One day they signed a contract and I had to move into the Jew's house."

"Poor, poor Miriam," Halima said through tears.

"You know, in his way my husband loved me. I would have preferred a thousand fold for him to hate me or be indifferent. He tormented me with his jealousy—he locked me inside my chambers, and because he could tell that I found him disgusting and was cold to him, he'd gnash his teeth and threaten to stab me. There were times when I thought he was crazy, and I was terribly afraid of him."

Miriam fell silent, as though she had to gather her strength for what she was about to say.

Halima sensed a secret approaching and she trembled. She pressed her cheeks, burning like white-hot iron, to Miriam's breast and she held her breath.

"My husband," Miriam resumed presently, "had a habit that deeply injured my modesty. The fact that I had finally become his property after all completely impaired his faculties. He would tell his business associates about me, describe my virtues, my modesty, my physical features in the most vivid terms, and boast that he had become master of the greatest beauty far and wide. Obviously he wanted them to envy him. You see, he would tell me repeatedly of an evening about how his friends had gone green with envy when he described my virtues and his enjoyment of them. You can imagine, Halima, how much I hated him then, and how revolting I found him. When I had to go to him, I felt as though I were going to my execution. But he would laugh and make fun of the greenhorns, as he called his younger associates, and say, 'Ah, but for money everything is available, my dear. Even an old hen won't look twice at a poor man, no matter how handsome he is.' All this talking made me terribly angry and bitter. Oh, if I'd known just one of those greenhorns then, I would have shown Moses how much he was deluding himself! But what happened was the last thing I would have expected. One day one of my maid servants pressed a tiny letter into my hand. I unrolled it and my heart began to race at its very first words. Even today I remember it down to the last syllable. Listen and I'll tell you what it said."

Halima trembled in rapt attention, and Miriam continued.

"The letter said: 'Sheik Mohammed to Miriam, the flower of Aleppo, the silver-shining moon delighting the night and illuminating the world! I love you and have loved you endlessly ever since I heard Moses, your accursed jailer, exalt your beauty and virtues to the heavens. Just as wine goes to an infidel's head and intoxicates him, so has word of your perfection intoxicated my heart. Oh, silver-shining moon. If you knew how many nights I have spent in the desert dreaming of your virtues, how vividly you've stepped before my eyes, and how I've watched you like the rosy dawn ascending. I thought that distance would cure me of longing for you, but it has only intensified it. Now I have returned and bring you my heart. Know, flower of Aleppo, that sheik Mohammed is a man and does not fear death. And that he comes close to inhale the air that you exhale. Farewell!'

"At first I thought the letter was a trap. I called the servant who had delivered the letter to me and insisted that she tell me everything honestly. She started crying and showed me the silver piece that some son of the desert had given her as payment for delivering the letter to me. What sort of son of the desert? I asked. Young, and handsome too. My

whole body trembled. I was already falling in love with Mohammed. Of course, I thought, how would he have dared to write me the letter otherwise, if he weren't young and handsome? And then I suddenly became afraid that he might be disappointed when he saw me. I reread that letter over a hundred times. By day I kept it next to my breast, and at night I carefully locked it away in a chest. Then came a second one, even more passionate and beautiful than the first. I was aflame with my secret love. And finally Mohammed arranged a nighttime meeting on the terrace outside my window. That's how familiar he already was with my surroundings. Oh, Halima, how can I explain to you how I felt then? That day I changed my mind a dozen times. I'll go, I won't go—back and forth endlessly, it seemed. Finally I decided not to go, and I held to that all the way up until the appointed time, when I went out onto the terrace, as if obeying a secret command. It was a marvelous night. Dark and moonless, although the sky was littered with tiny shining stars. I felt feverish and chilled by turns. I waited on the terrace like that for some time. I was just starting to think, what if all this is just a ruse? what if someone wanted to play a trick on me and taunt old Moses? when I heard a voice whispering, 'Don't be afraid. It's me, sheik Mohammed.' A man in a gray cloak vaulted over the railing as light as a feather, and, before I knew it, he had me in his arms. I felt as though worlds were being born and I was seeing infinity. He didn't ask if I wanted to go with him. He took me by the waist and carried me as he climbed down a ladder into the garden. On the other side of the fence I could see several horsemen. They took hold of me so he could scale the wall. Then he pulled me up into the saddle with him. Off we galloped, out of the city and into the dark of night."

"And all that happened to you?" Halima gasped. "Lucky, lucky Miriam!"

"Oh, don't say that, Halima. It breaks my heart when I think of what happened after that. We rode all night. The moon rose from behind the hills and shone on us. I felt horrible and wonderful all at the same time, like when you listen to a fairy tale. For a long time I didn't dare look in the face of the horseman who had me in his embrace. I only gradually relaxed and turned my eyes toward him. His gaze, like an eagle's, was fixed on the road ahead of us. But when he turned to look at me, it became soft and warm like a deer's. I fell in love with him so hard that I would have died for him on the spot. He was a magnificent man, my sheik Mohammed. He had a black mustache and a short, thick beard. And red lips. Oh, Halima! While we were on the road I became his wife ... They chased us for three days. My stepbrothers, my husband's son and a whole pack of armed townsmen. Later I found out that, as soon as they discovered I'd escaped, they

interrogated all the servants. They discovered Mohammed's letter, and my husband Moses had a stroke, the pain and humiliation were so great. Both families immediately took up arms, mounted their horses, and set out in pursuit. We had gotten quite a ways out into the desert when we caught sight of the band of riders on the horizon. Mohammed only had seven men with him. They called out for him to drop me so that his horse could gallop faster. But he just brushed them off. We changed horses, but even so our pursuers kept getting closer and closer. Then Mohammed called on his friends to turn their horses around and charge at our pursuers. He set me down on the ground and, saber in hand, led the seven in their charge. The groups of horsemen collided, and superior numbers prevailed. One of my half brothers was killed, but so was Mohammed. When I saw that I howled in agony and started to run. They caught me right away and bound me to the saddle, and they tied Mohammed's dead body to the horse's tail."

"Horrible, horrible," Halima moaned, covering her face in her hands.

"I can't tell you what I felt then. My heart became hard as stone and stayed open to one passion alone—The passion for revenge. I still had no inkling of the humiliation and shame that awaited me. When we arrived back in Aleppo I found my husband dying. Still, when he saw me, his eyes came to life. At that moment he seemed like a demon to me. His son tied me to the deathbed and lashed me with a whip. I gritted my teeth and kept silent. When Moses died I felt relieved. It was as though the first part of the revenge had been fulfilled.

"I'll only briefly describe what they did with me then. When they felt they'd tortured me enough, they took me to Basra and sold me there as a slave. That's how I became the property of Our Master. And he promised to take revenge for me on the Jews and the Christians."

Halima was silent a long time. In her eyes Miriam had grown to the stature of a demigod, and she felt that through their friendship she had also gained immeasurably.

Finally she asked, "Is it true that Christians and Jews eat little children?"

Miriam, still lost in her terrible memories, suddenly shook loose from them and laughed aloud.

"It's not out of the question," she said. "They're heartless enough."

"How lucky that we're among true believers!"

Al Araf

(Short stories. Chapter 2)

The Birth of a Gentleman

I had rented a room in some Parisian hotel that was off the beaten path. I had just changed clothes to go visit an elderly lady, when Walter and Berthold came storming in to take me to see some new acquaintance of theirs. And because I enjoy doing things that it would otherwise never have occurred to me to do, I followed them into the metro, which drew us underground and toward the opposite side of the city.

When we reemerged in the daylight, we veered off into some side street, where we entered a hotel that was very much like the one I was staying in. On the sixth floor Walter knocked on a door with number such and such on it, and when no one answered, he pulled out a key and opened it himself. Then all three of us stepped into a small, humbly appointed room.

My two friends flung themselves down on the bed as though they'd come home. It squealed beneath them, as if injured by their sudden weight. I sat down on a chair that started rocking beneath me suspiciously, and I felt like a customer at an inn who has nothing to pay for all the food and drink he's just made disappear.

It wasn't until then that I learned the name of the room's occupant: Sergei Mihailovich, Mag. iur., currently an employee at some factory, who earned his living from that and giving English lessons. Today, however, they had come to collect money for a pair of shoes that Walter, on whom they'd been too tight, had sold to him. They had brought me along as the resident "psychologist," to have a look at this curious creature.

Just as we were beginning to enjoy our conversation, the door flew open and someone came flying into the room with a deafening laugh, as though some enormous spring had sent him flying at us straight out of hell. Walter tried to introduce me, but the stranger waved dismissively, as if to say that was the last thing he cared about.

"Wissen Sie, meine Herren," he began in German, trilling his r's and hushing his sibilants in a typical Russian accent. "Gentlemen, I'll have you know that last night I met two ladies whom I'm scheduled to meet again this evening at eight. I assure you, both of them are top-quality goods. So I'm in a hurry and you'll excuse me if I change while we talk...."

He kept chortling as he spoke, and it was then I noticed him furtively yet persistently scrutinizing me. I listened in amazement and my friends winked at me, as if to say didn't we tell you he was a character. I couldn't fathom how someone who so resembled a tramp could talk about his exploits with beautiful women. Even his face, with its diabolically

sharp features, struck me as anything but attractive, and least of all to women. He even had a slight limp, the result of his Siberian exile, when his toes had been frostbitten. Without showing the slightest modesty, he undressed right in front of us, talking continuously, as his lively gray eyes glinted under their upward arching eyebrows and darted glances first at one of us, then the other. As he pulled his tattered shoes off, a shock of blond, slicked hair fell over his brazen forehead.

“You do realize, gentlemen,” he resumed his monologue (because the three of us only listened), “that I find it especially gratifying whenever I can bring two ladies to my room.... But don’t assume that I’m a common womanizer. Nothing could be further from the truth.... I divide admirers of women into three fundamentally different categories, the lowest of which consists of those solely intent on fleshly delights. They are the largest category and they have my profoundest, most heartfelt scorn....

“The second, but also quite numerous type is the one I call the ‘category of decorative epicureans.’ These are creatures who can only enjoy a woman in a particular setting where everything around them has to be tastefully, beautifully appointed, with every detail striking a gracious note. I also have nothing but disdain for them. But then there are those – quite few in number, and I count myself one of them – whose enjoyment derives from a combination of intellectual circumstances, who are not really in it for the woman at all, or for the ambient décor, but who seek their pleasure in something far more exquisite....”

By this point he was removing his last rags. I had to look away so he wouldn’t feel embarrassed with me watching. But it became obvious that he had read my thoughts, because he laughed at me so scornfully that I instantly changed my mind and defiantly fixed my eyes on his stockings, which had undergone countless darnings yet were now again as riddled with holes as a sieve. In the process our eyes met again, and because I refused to look away, he twisted his mouth into a superior smirk, as though meaning to convey to me that, despite my neatly trimmed sideburns, in comparison with him I was just a devil of a lower order. The whole time he continued speaking without a pause.

“... for when I bring two ladies home, gentlemen, my pleasure is not even about to begin when I snuff out the light. That’s just a necessary step, a means, so to speak, that leads me to my real, purely intellectual pleasure. And the essence of that resides in my educated estimate of how things will align, certain probabilistic calculations that have to do with the sequencing of objects, their alignment each time, and so on.... So, as you see, it’s a purely intellectual pleasure....’

Once again he guffawed, and I noticed that his sharp, white teeth curved slightly back, giving him the look of a yawning panther I had once seen in some zoo. He stood before us as naked as Adam before he gained knowledge. He stretched his muscular limbs until the bones popped in their joints. Then he turned on the faucet and started washing himself under it, gasping loudly and splattering water all around. Then he vigorously dried himself off with a towel.

When he finished this chore, he stretched again. He paced the room with his slightly

limping gait, then he lit a cigarette that Berthold offered him and he sat down on the bed between my two friends. With a look of utmost pleasure he blew clouds of smoke, as naked as some demon that had infiltrated our group from out of the underworld. Suddenly he tossed the cigarette aside. "Now, gentlemen," he began anew, "it's time for the most important thing, the true creative act, so to speak. Because my task is no less than to assemble out of the most imperfect parts the whole that every true gentleman constitutes.... Here's a pair of stockings I bought on the way home (I paid three francs fifty for them), very cheap material, but the color is choice, especially when you look at them under electric light...."

He opened a package and took out a pair of stockings with a modern pattern on them, but of the most inferior quality. Then he opened some drawer and took out a shirt that was ripped in numerous places and began putting it on. Throughout, he continued his monologue.

"The chest placards are untouched, gentlemen, and in a shirt that's the only really essential thing...."

He took a pair of dark, ironed trousers out of a cupboard. These had some suspicious looking tatters that flopped down at one end. When he put them on, I noticed that they were ripped in several places around the waist, with whole swaths dangling down. He took a box of safety pins out of the desk drawer and started pinning them up.

"So, gentlemen," he said as he did this, "all these imperfections will vanish as soon as the jacket goes on. But now it's time for the vest, and that poses its own problems.... But we can only ever count on what we have available at hand...."

He put on the vest, which was missing practically its entire back. Both pieces that remained of it had been connected with ordinary string. But even the front had just two buttons left – the uppermost and bottommost. He secured the rest of it with two enormous safety pins. Then he fastened on a collar and knotted a tie, which looked to me like nothing more than a piece of dark, worn-out cloth. But as soon as its lower part vanished beneath the vest, it looked entirely presentable.

"A fresh collar and a clean necktie," he continued explaining, "are the principal, most obvious signs of a true gentleman. Because they're the first things that a person notices, and they're the pedestal on which the seat of human wisdom rests."

Once again he burst out in his devilish laughter. Then he reached for a pair of almost new shoes that peaked out from under the bed and he began putting them on, moaning as he did so. Suddenly he cast them aside and leaped furiously to his feet. He glared at Walter and started shouting at him.

"How dare you insist that I pay you for that torture device! Do you realize I could report you to the authorities and demand compensation for the pain that these damn shoes of yours just caused me?"

Walter went red in the face with embarrassment, but the Russian waved his hand dismissively and set about the painful task again. This time he succeeded in getting

the shoes on. He put some polish on them and started buffing them with a rag in big, energetic strokes, almost instantly giving them a cheerful shine.

“Next to the collar and tie, shoes are every true gallant’s most important prop. Because when they gleam, so does the whole person, and like it or not, one feels more enterprising and self-assured ...”

At this point he walked up to a wall mirror that was broken in several places and he carefully combed his smooth, blond hair in front of it. He took a dark, still fairly decent jacket out of the cupboard and put it on. I noticed that it really did conceal the shortcomings of the vest and trousers. He sprinkled a few drops of some pleasant-smelling cologne onto a silken handkerchief. After this he slapped some pink powder on his face, and it was then I noticed to my amazement that all the harsh features had vanished from his face and that he must have been still quite young.

He took the mirror off the wall and inspected himself in it from head to toe. With his muscular build he really did somehow seem unusually aristocratic and elegant. Most closely of all he inspected his face, which now struck me as strangely handsome and refined. He experimented with several different facial expressions in front of the mirror, ultimately assuming the pose of a vaguely melancholy young man.

But then he suddenly guffawed riotously, causing us onlookers to flinch, and he hooted victoriously, “Voilà un vrai gentleman!”

From under the sink he pulled out a full bottle of wine, which he emptied, seemingly in one gulp.

“Your health, gentlemen!” he exclaimed. Then he slid into an overcoat, put on a new fedora hat and left the room. We followed him out, and then he locked the door behind us. He bade us farewell again, almost as an afterthought, then raced down the stairs with his slightly limping gait, paying us no more regard. We eventually followed him and it wasn’t until we were in the entryway that Walter remembered what he had come for. “He still hasn’t paid me for those shoes, the devil!” he shouted angrily. When we stepped outside, we barely caught a last glimpse of the blond demon as he limped around the corner and out of sight.

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<http://english.traduki.eu/>

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