

Strange News From Another Planet

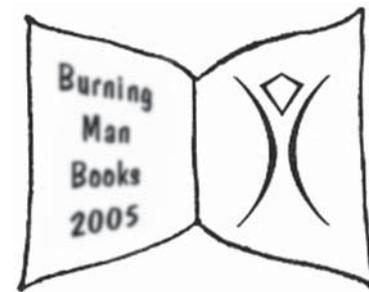


By Herman Hesse

Edited by Raymond Soulard, Jr. & Cassandra Kramer

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This volume in remembrance
of a gone Boston bookshop
& discoveries made within . . .



In one of the southern provinces of our beautiful planet there was a horrible catastrophe. An earthquake, accompanied by terrible thunderstorms and floods, caused great destruction to three large villages and their gardens, fields, forests, and farms. Many people and animals were killed, and saddest of all, the villagers lacked enough flowers to make wreaths for the dead and adorn their graves in the appropriate way.

Of course, the people took care of everything else that had to be done. Immediately after the horrible event, messengers rushed through the neighboring regions carrying pleas for aid and charity, and from all the towers of the entire province, chanters could be heard singing those stirring and deeply touching verses known for ages as the “Salutation to the Goddess of Compassion.” It was impossible for anyone listening to these chants to resist them.

Large groups of rescuers and helpers came right away from all the towns and cities, and those unfortunate people who had lost the roofs over their heads were overwhelmed by kind invitations and took refuge in the dwellings of relatives, friends, and strangers. Food and clothes, wagons and horses, tools, stones, and wood, and many other useful things were brought from all over. The old men, women, and children were comforted, consoled, and led away to shelters by kindly hands. The injured were carefully washed and bandaged. And while some people were still searching for victims of the quake under the ruins, others had already begun to clear away the fallen roofs, to prop up the wobbly walls with beams, and to prepare everything necessary for the quick reconstruction of the villages. Still, a cloud of horror from the accident hung in the air, and the dead were a reminder to everyone that this was a time of mourning and austere silence. Yet a joyful readiness and a certain vibrant festive mood could also be detected in all the faces and voices of the people, for they were inspired by their common action and zeal and the certainty that they were all doing something unusual and necessary, something beautiful and deserving of thanks. Initially people had worked in silence and awe, but cheerful voices and the soft sounds of singing could soon be heard here and there. As one might well imagine, two ancient proverbs were among the favorites that were sung: “Blessed are those who bring

help to those who have been recently overcome by need. Don't they drink the good deed as a parched garden drinks the first rainfall, and shouldn't they respond with flowers of gratitude?" and "The serenity of God flows from common action."

However, it was just then that they discovered they did not have enough flowers for the burials. To be sure, the first dead bodies to be found had been buried and adorned with flowers and branches gathered from the destroyed gardens. Then the people began fetching all the flowers in the vicinity. But as luck would have it, they were in a special dilemma because the three destroyed villages had been the ones with the largest and most beautiful gardens of flowers during this time of year. It was here that visitors came each year to see the narcissus and crocuses because they could not be found anywhere else in such immense quantities. Moreover, they were always cultivated with great care in remarkably different colors. Yet all this had now been devastated and ruined. So the people were in a quandary—they did not know how to follow the customary rites regarding the burial of the dead. Tradition required that before burial each human being and each animal be adorned lavishly with flowers of the season, and that the burial ritual be all the richer and more resplendent, the more sudden and more sorrowful that death had struck.

The Chief Elder of the province, who was one of the first to appear with help in his wagon, soon found himself so overwhelmed by questions, requests, and complaints that he had difficulty keeping his composure. But he took heart. His eyes remained bright and friendly; his voice was clear and polite; and under his white beard his lips never lost the silent, kind smile for a moment—something that suited him as a wise counselor.

"My friends," he said, "a calamity has struck that was most likely sent by the gods to test us. Of course, whatever has been destroyed here, we shall be able to rebuild for our brothers and give it all back to them, and I thank the gods that I've been able to experience in my old age how you all stopped whatever you were doing and came here to help. But where are we going to find the flowers to adorn all these dead people and celebrate their transformation in a beautiful and reverent manner? As long as we are alive and well, we

must make sure that not a single one of these weary pilgrims be buried without their rightful floral tribute. Don't you all agree?"

"Yes," they cried. "We all agree."

"I knew it," said the Elder in his fatherly voice. "Now I want to tell you, my friends, what we must do. We must carry all the remains that cannot be buried today to the large summer temple high in the mountains, where snow is still on the ground. They will be safe there and will not decompose before we fetch flowers for them. Only one person can really help us obtain so many flowers at this time of the year, and that is the King. Therefore one of us must be sent to the King to request his assistance."

And again all the people nodded and cried out, "Yes, yes, to the King!"

"So be it," the Elder continued, and everyone was pleased to see his pleasant smile glistening from beneath his white beard. "But whom shall we send to the King? He must be young and robust because he shall travel far on our best horse. Furthermore, he must be handsome and kind and have sparkling eyes, so that the King's heart will not be able to resist him. He needn't say much, but his eyes must be able to speak. Clearly, it would be best if we sent a child, the handsomest child in the community. But how could he possibly undertake such a journey? You must help me, my friends, and if there is anyone here who wants to volunteer to be the messenger, or if you know somebody suitable for this task, please tell me."

The Elder stopped and looked around with his bright eyes, but nobody stepped forward. Not a single voice could be heard. When he repeated the question a second and then a third time, a young man suddenly emerged from the crowd. He was sixteen years old, practically still a boy, and he fixed his eyes on the ground and blushed as he greeted the Elder.

As soon as the Elder looked at him, he realized the young man was the perfect messenger. So he smiled and said, "It's wonderful that you want to be our messenger. But why is it that, among all those people, you should be the one to volunteer?"

The young man raised his eyes to the old man and said, "If there is no one else here who wants to go, then I should be the one to

go.”

Someone from the crowd shouted, “Send him, Elder. We know him. He comes from our village, and the earthquake destroyed his flower garden, which was the most beautiful in the region.”

The Elder gave the young man a friendly look and asked, “Are you sad about what happened to your flowers?”

The young man responded very softly, “Yes, I’m sorry, but that is not why I volunteered. I had a dear friend and also a splendid young horse, my favorite, and both were killed by the earthquake. Now they are lying in our hall, and we must have flowers so that they can be buried.”

The Elder blessed the young man by placing his hands on his head, and the best horse was soon brought out for him. Immediately the young man sprang onto the horse’s back, slapped it on the neck, and nodded farewell to the people. Then he dashed out of the village and headed straight across the wet and ravaged fields.

The young man rode the entire day, and in order to reach the distant capital and see the King as soon as he could, he took the path over the mountains. In the evening, as it began to turn dark, he led his horse by the reins up a steep path through the forest and rocks.

A large dark bird, a kind that the young man had never seen before, flew ahead of him, and he followed it until the bird landed on the roof of a small open temple. The young man left his horse and walked through wooden pillars into the simple sanctuary. There he found a sacrificial altar, but it was only a solid block made of a black stone not usually found in that region. On it was an obscure symbol of a deity that the messenger did not recognize—a heart that was being devoured by a wild bird.

He paid tribute to the deity by offering a bluebell flower that he had plucked at the foot of the mountain and stuck in the lapel of his coat. Thereafter he lay down in a corner of the temple, for he was very tired and wanted for sleep.

However, he could not fall asleep as easily as he was accustomed to at home each evening. Perhaps it was the bluebell on the stone itself, or something else, but whatever it was, something odd disturbed him by exuding a penetrating and scintillating aroma.

Furthermore, the eerie symbol of the god glimmered like a ghost in the dark hall, and the strange bird sat on the roof and vigorously flapped its gigantic wings from time to time so that it seemed as if a storm were brewing.

Eventually the young man got up in the middle of the night, went outside the temple, and looked up at the bird, which raised and lowered its wings.

“Why aren’t you sleeping?” asked the bird.

“I don’t know,” the young man replied. “Perhaps it’s because I’ve suffered.”

“What exactly have you suffered?”

“My friend and my favorite horse were both killed.”

“Is dying so bad?” the bird asked disdainfully.

“Oh, no, great bird, it’s not so bad. It’s only a farewell. But that’s not the reason why I’m sad. The bad thing is that we cannot bury my friend and my splendid horse because we no longer have any flowers.”

“There are worse things than that,” said the bird, ruffling its feathers indignantly.

“No, bird, there is certainly nothing worse than this. Whoever is buried without a floral tribute cannot be reborn the way his heart desires. And whoever buries his dead people without celebrating the floral tribute will continue to see their shadows in his dreams. You see, I already cannot sleep anymore because my dead people are still without flowers.”

The bird rasped and screeched with its bent beak, “Young boy, you know nothing about suffering if this is all you’ve experienced. Haven’t you ever heard about the great evils? About hatred, murder, and jealousy?”

As he listened to these words, the young man thought he was dreaming. Then he collected himself and said discreetly, “Yes, bird, I can remember. These things are written in the old stories and tales. But they have nothing to do with reality, or perhaps it was that way once upon a time in the world before there were flowers and gods that are good. Who in the world still thinks about such things as that now?”

The bird laughed softly with its raspy voice. Then it stretched itself taller and said to the boy, "And now you want to go to the King, and I'm to show you the way?"

"Oh, you already know!" the young man joyfully exclaimed. "Yes I'd appreciate it if you'd lead me there."

Then the great bird floated silently to the ground, spread out its wings without making a sound, and ordered the young man to leave his horse behind and fly with him to the King. In response, the messenger sat down on the bird's back and prepared himself for the ride.

"Shut your eyes," the bird commanded, and the young man did as he was told, and they flew through the darkness of the sky silently and softly like the flight of an owl. The messenger could hear only the cold wind roaring in his ears, and they flew and flew the entire night.

When it was nearly morning, they came to a stop, and the bird cried out, "Open your eyes!" The young man opened his eyes and saw that he was standing on the edge of a forest. Beneath him was a plain that glistened so brightly in the early hours that its light blinded him.

"You'll find me here in the forest again," the bird announced, whereupon he shot into the sky like an arrow and soon disappeared into the blue.

A strange feeling came over the young messenger as he began wandering from the forest into the broad plain. Everything around him was so different and changed that he did not know whether he was awake or dreaming. Meadows and trees were just as they were at home. The sun shone, and the wind played in the fresh grass. But there were no people or animals, no houses or gardens to be seen. Rather, it appeared that an earthquake had taken its toll here just as in the young man's home country, for ruins, broken branches, uprooted trees, wrecked fences, and lost farm equipment were spread all over the ground. Suddenly he saw a dead man lying in the middle of a field. He had not been buried and was horribly decomposed. The young man felt a deep revulsion at the sight of the dead body, and nausea swelled up within him, for he had never seen anything

like it. The dead man's face was not even covered and seemed to have already been ravaged by the birds in its decayed condition. So the young man plucked some green leaves and flowers, and with his face turned away, he covered the visage of the dead man with them.

An inexpressible, disgusting, and stifling smell hung in the tepid air and seemed glued to the entire plain. Again the young man saw a corpse lying in the grass, with ravens circling overhead. There was also a horse without its head, and bones from humans and animals, and they all lay abandoned in the sun. There seemed to have been no thought of a floral tribute and burial. The young man feared that an incredible catastrophe had caused the death of every single person in this country, and that there were so many dead that he would never be able to pick enough flowers to cover their faces. Full of dread, with half-closed eyes, he wandered farther. The stench of carrion and blood swept toward him from all sides, and an even stronger wave of unspeakable misery and suffering rose from a thousand different piles of corpses and rubble. The messenger thought that he was caught in an awful dream. Perhaps it was a warning from the divine powers, he thought, because he own dead were still without their floral tribute and burial. Then he recalled what the mysterious bird had said to him the night before on the temple roof, and he thought he heard its sharp voice once more claiming, "There are much worse things."

Now he realized that the bird had carried him to another planet and that everything he saw was real and true. He remembered the feeling he had experienced when he had occasionally listened to ghastly tales of primeval times. It was this same exact feeling that he had now—a horrid chill, and behind the chill a quiet, pleasant feeling of comfort, for all this was infinitely far away from him and had long since passed. Everything here was like a horror story. This whole strange world of atrocity, corpses, and vultures seemed to have no meaning or order. In fact, it seemed subject to incomprehensible laws, insane laws, according to which bad, foolish, and nasty things occurred instead of beautiful and good things.

In the meantime he noticed a live human being walking across the field, a farmer or a hired hand, and he ran quickly toward him, calling out. When the young man approached, he was horrified, and

his heart was overcome by compassion, for this farmer was terribly ugly and no longer resembled anything like a child of the sun. He seemed more like a man accustomed to thinking only about himself and to seeing only false, ugly, and horrible things happen everywhere, like a man who lived constantly in ghastly nightmares. There was not a trace of serenity or kindness in his eyes and in his entire face and being, no gratitude or trust. This unfortunate creature seemed to be without the least trace of virtue.

But the young man pulled himself together and approached the man with great friendliness, as though the man had been marked by misfortune. He greeted him in brotherly fashion and spoke to him with a smile. The ugly man stood as though paralyzed, looking bewildered with his large, bleary eyes. His voice was rough and without music, like the growl of a primitive creature. But it was impossible for him to resist the young man's cheerful and trustworthy look. After he had stared at the stranger for a while, the farmer expressed a kind of smile or grin on his rugged and crude face—ugly enough, but gentle and astonished, like the first little smile of a reborn soul that has just risen from the lowest region of the earth.

“What do you want from me?” the man asked the young stranger.

The young man responded according to the custom of his native country: “I thank you, friend, and I beg you to tell me whether I can be of service to you.”

When the farmer did not reply but only stared and smiled with embarrassment, the messenger said to him, “Tell me, friend, what is going on here? What are all these horrible and terrible things?” And he pointed all around him.

The farmer had difficulty understanding him, and when the messenger repeated his question, the farmer said, “Haven't you ever seen this before? This is war. This is a battlefield.” He pointed to a dark pile of ruins and cried, “That was my house.” And when the stranger looked into his murky eyes with deep sympathy, the farmer lowered them and looked down at the ground.

“Don't you have a king?” the young man asked, and when the farmer said yes, he asked further, “Where is he?”

The man pointed to a small, barely visible encampment in the distance. The messenger said farewell by placing his hand on the man's forehead, then departed. In response, the farmer felt his forehead with both hands, shook his heavy head with concern, and stared after the stranger for a long time.

The messenger walked and walked over rubble and past horrifying sights until he arrived at the encampment. Armed men were standing here and there or scurrying about. Nobody seemed to notice him, and he walked between the people and the tents until he found the largest and most beautiful tent, which belonged to the King. Once there, he entered.

The King was sitting on a simple low cot inside the tent. Next to him lay his coat, and behind him in deep shadow crouched his servant, who had fallen asleep. The King himself sat bent over in deep thought. His face was handsome and sad; a crop of gray hair hung over his tan forehead. His sword lay before him on the ground.

The young man greeted the King silently with sincere respect, just as he would have greeted his own King, and he remained standing with his arms folded across his chest until the King glanced at him.

“Who are you?” he asked severely, drawing his dark eyebrows together, but his glance focused on the pure and serene features of the stranger, and the young man regarded him with such trust and friendliness that the King's voice grew milder.

“I've seen you once before,” he said, trying to recall. “You resemble somebody I knew in my childhood.”

“I'm a stranger,” said the messenger.

“Then it was a dream,” remarked the King softly. “You remind me of my mother. Say something to me. Tell me why you are here.”

The young man began: “A bird brought me here. There was an earthquake in my country. We want to bury our dead, but there are no flowers.”

“No flowers?” said the King.

“No, no more flowers at all. And it's terrible, isn't it, when people want to bury their dead and the floral tribute cannot be celebrated? After all, it's important for people to experience their transformation in glory and joy.”

Suddenly it occurred to the messenger that there were many dead people on the horrible field who had not yet been buried, and he held his breath while the King regarded him, nodded, and sighed deeply.

“I wanted to seek out our King and request he send us many flowers,” the messenger continued. “But as I was in the temple on the mountain, a great bird came and said he wanted to bring me to the King, and he carried me through the skies to you. Oh, dear King, it was the temple of an unknown deity on whose roof the bird sat, and this god had a most peculiar symbol on his altar—a heart that was being devoured by a wild bird. During the night, however, I had a conversation with that great bird, and it is only now that I understand its words, for it said that there is much more suffering and many more terrible things in the world than I knew. And now I am here and have crossed the large field and have seen endless suffering and misfortune during this short time—oh, much more than there is in our most horrible tales. So now I’ve come to you, oh King, and I would like to ask you if I can be of any service to you.”

The King, who listened attentively, tried to smile, but his handsome face was so serious and bitter and sad that he could not.

“I thank you,” he said. “You’ve already been of service to me. You’ve reminded me of my mother. I thank you for this.”

The young man was disturbed because the King could not smile. “You’re so sad,” he said. “Is it because of this war?”

“Yes,” said the King.

The young man had the feeling that the King was a noble man who was deeply depressed, and he could not refrain from breaking a rule of courtesy and asking him a straightforward question: “But tell me, please, why are you waging such wars on your planet? Who’s to blame for all this? Are you yourself responsible?”

The King stared at the messenger for a long time. He seemed indignant and angry at the audacity of this question. However, he was not able to maintain his gloomy look as he peered into the bright and innocent eyes of the stranger.

“You’re a child,” said the King, “and there are things that you can’t understand. The war is nobody’s fault. It occurs by itself, like

thunder and lightning. All of us who must fight wars are not the perpetrators. We are only their victims.”

“Then you must all die very easily?” the young man asked. “In my country death is not at all feared, and most people go willingly to their death. Many approach their transformation with joy. But nobody would ever dare to kill another human being. It must be different on your planet.”

“People are indeed killed here,” said the King, shaking his head. “But we consider it the worst of crimes. Only in war are people permitted to kill because nobody kills for his own advantage. Nobody kills out of hate or envy. Rather, they do what the society demands of them. Still, you’d be mistaken if you believed that my people die easily. You just have to look into the faces of our dead, and you can see that they have difficulty dying. They die hard and unwillingly.”

The young man listened to all this and was astounded by the sadness and gravity in the lives of the people on this planet. He would have liked to ask many more questions, but he had a clear sense that he would never grasp the complex nature of all these obscure and terrible things. Indeed, he felt no great desire now to understand them. Either these sorrowful people were creatures of an inferior order, or they had not been blessed by the light of the gods and were still ruled by demons. Or perhaps a singular mishap was determining the course of life on this planet. It seemed to him much too painful and cruel to keep questioning the King, compelling him to provide answers and make confessions that could only be bitter and humiliating for him. He was sorry for these people—people who lived in gloom and dread of death and nevertheless killed each other in droves. These people, whose faces took on ignoble, crude countenances like that of the farmer, or who had expressions of deep and terrible sorrow like that of the King. They seemed to him to be rather peculiar—and almost ridiculous, to be ridiculous and foolish in a disturbing and shameful way.

There was one more question, however, that the young man could not repress. Even if these poor creatures were backward, children behind the times, sons of a latter-day planet without peace; even if their lives ran their course as a convulsive cramp and ended in desperate

slaughter; even if they let their dead lie on the fields and perhaps even ate them—for horror tales were told about such things occurring in primeval times—they must still have a presentiment of the future, a dream of the gods, some spark of soul in them. Otherwise this entire unpleasant world would be only a meaningless mistake.

“Forgive me, King,” the young man said with a flattering voice. “Forgive me if I ask you one more question before I leave your strange country.”

“Go ahead,” replied the King, who was perplexed by this stranger, for the young man seemed to have a sensitive, mature, and insightful mind in many ways, but in others he seemed to be a small child whom one had to protect and was not to be taken seriously.

“My foreign King,” spoke the messenger, “you’ve made me sad. You see, I’ve come from another country, and the great bird on the temple roof was right. There is infinitely more misery here than I could have imagined. Your life seems to be a dreadful nightmare, and I don’t know whether you are ruled by gods or demons. You see, King, we have a legend—I used to believe that it was all fairy-tale rubbish and empty smoke. It is a legend about how such things as war and death and despair were common in our country at one time. These terrible words, which we have long since stopped using in our language, can be read in collections of our old tales, and they sound awful to us and even a little ridiculous. Today I’ve learned that these tales are all true, and I see you and your people dying and suffering what I’ve known only from the terrible legends of primeval times. But now tell me, don’t you have in your soul a sort of intimation that you’re not doing the right thing? Don’t you have a yearning for bright, serene gods, for sensible and cheerful leaders and mentors? Don’t you ever dream in your sleep about another, more beautiful life where nobody is envious of others, where reason and order prevail, where people treat other people only with cheerfulness and consideration? Don’t you know anything about what we at home call music and divine worship and blessedness?”

As he listened to these words, the King’s head sank, and when he raised it again, his face had been transformed, and it glowed radiantly with a smile, even though there were tears in his eyes.

“Beautiful boy,” said the King, “I don’t know for certain whether you’re a child, a sage, or perhaps a god. But I can tell you that we sense all this and cradle it in our souls, all that you have mentioned. We have intimations of happiness, freedom, and gods. Indeed, we have a legend about a wise man who lived long ago and who perceived the unity of the worlds as harmonious music of the heavenly spheres. Does this answer suffice? You may be, you see, a blessed creature from another world, or you may even be God Himself. Whatever the case may be, you have no happiness in your heart, no power, no will that does not live as a presentiment, a reflection, a distant shadow in our hearts, too.”

Suddenly the King stood up, and the young man was surprised, for the King’s face was soaked in a bright, clear smile for a moment like the first rays of the sun.

“Go now,” he cried to the messenger. “Go, and let us fight and murder! You’ve made my heart soft. You’ve reminded me of my mother. Enough, enough of this, you dear handsome boy. Go now, and flee before the next battle begins! I’ll think of you when the blood flows and the cities burn, and I’ll think of the world as a whole, and how our folly and fury and ruthlessness cannot separate us from it. Farewell, and give my regards to your planet, and give my regards to your deity, whose symbol is a heart being devoured by a wild bird. I know this heart, and I know the bird very well. And don’t forget, my handsome friend from a distant land: When you think of your friend, the poor King in war, do not think of him as he sat on the cot plunged in deep sorrow. Think of him with tears in his eyes and blood on his hands and how he smiled!”

The King raised the flap of the tent with his own hand so as not to wake up the servant, and he let the stranger out. The young man crossed the plain again steeped in thought, and as he went, he saw a large city blazing in flames on the horizon in the evening light. He climbed over dead people and the decayed carcasses of horses until it grew dark and he reached the edge of the forest.

Suddenly the great bird swooped down from the clouds and took the young man on its wings, and they flew through the night silently and softly like the flight of the owl.

When the young man awoke from a restless sleep, he lay in the small temple in the mountains, and his horse stood before the temple in the wet grass, greeting the day with a neigh. However, the messenger recalled nothing of the great bird and his flight to a foreign planet, nothing of the King and the battlefield. All this remained only as a shadow in his soul, a tiny, obscure pain as if from a sharp thorn. It hurt, just as sympathy hurts when nothing can be done, just as a little unfulfilled wish can torment us in dreams until we finally encounter the person we have secretly loved, with whom we want to share our joy and whose smile we wish to see.

The messenger mounted his horse and rode the entire day until he came to the capital, where he was admitted to the King. And he proved to be the right messenger, for the King received him with a greeting of grace by touching his forehead and remarking, "Your request was fulfilled before I even heard it."

Soon thereafter the messenger received a charter from the King that placed all the flowers of the whole country at his command. Companions and messengers went with him to the villages to pick them up. Joined by wagons and horses, they took a few days to go around the mountain on the flat country road that led back to his province and community. The young man led the wagons and carts, horses and donkeys, all loaded with the most beautiful flowers from gardens and greenhouses that were plentiful in the north. There were enough flowers to place wreaths on the bodies of the dead and to adorn their graves lavishly, as well as enough to plant a memorial flower, a bush, and a young tree for each dead person, as custom demanded. And the pain caused by the death of his friend and his favorite horse subsided in the young man and turned into silent, serene memories after he adorned and buried them and planted two flowers, two bushes, and two fruit trees over their graves.

Now that he had done what he had desired and fulfilled his obligations, the memory of that journey through the night began to stir in his soul, and he asked his friends and relatives to permit him to spend a day all alone. So he sat under the Tree of Contemplation one whole day and night. There he unfolded, clean and unwrinkled in his memory, the images of all that he had seen on the foreign planet.

One day later on, he went to the Elder, requested a private talk with him, and told him all that had happened.

The Elder sat and pondered everything as he listened. Then he asked, "Did you see all this with your eyes, my friend, or was it a dream?"

"I don't know," said the young man. "I believe it may have been a dream. However, with your permission, may I say that it seems to me there is hardly a difference whether I actually experienced everything in reality. A shadow of sadness has remained within me, and a cool wind from that other planet continues to blow upon me, right into the midst of the happiness of my life. That is why I am asking you, my honorable Elder, what to do about this."

"Return to the mountains tomorrow," the Elder said, "and go up to the place where you found the temple. The symbol of that god seems odd to me, for I've never heard of it before. It may well be that he is a god from another planet. Or perhaps the temple and its god are so old that they belong to an epoch of our earliest ancestors, to those days when there are supposed to have been weapons, fear, and dread of death among us. Go to that temple, my dear boy, and bring flowers, honey, and song."

The young man thanked the Elder and followed his advice. He took a bowl of honey, such as was customarily presented to honored guests at the first festival of the bees in early summer, and carried his lute with him. In the mountains he found the place where he had once picked the bluebell, and he found the steep rocky path in the forest that led up the mountain, where he had recently gone on foot leading his horse. However, he could not find the place of the temple or the temple itself, the black sacrificial stone, the wooden pillars, the roof, or the great bird on the roof. He could not find them on that day, nor on the next, and nobody he asked knew anything about the kind of temple that he described. So he returned to his home, and when he walked by the Shrine of Lovely Memories, he went inside and offered the honey, played the lute and sang, and told the god of lovely memories all about his dream, the temple and the bird, the poor farmer, and the dead bodies on the battlefield. And

most of all, he told about the King in his war tent. Afterward, he returned to his dwelling with a light heart, hung the symbol of the unity of the world in his bedroom, and recuperated from the events of the past few days in deep sleep. The next morning he helped his neighbors remove the last traces of the earthquake from the gardens and fields, singing as they worked.