

## **“Incipit vita nova”**

From *“One Hour After Midnight”* (1897) by Hermann Hesse

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In my life, as in most people's lives, there is a point of change into something special, a place of horror, darkness, loss and loneliness, a day of unheard-of numbness and emptiness, from whose evening new stars in the sky and new eyes in us emerge.

Then I walked freezing under the ruins of my youthful world, over broken thoughts and twitching, distorted dreams, and what I looked at fell into dust and ceased to be alive. Friends passed me by, which I was ashamed to know, thoughts looked at me that I had thought the day before yesterday and had become so distant and strange as if they had been a hundred years old and had never been my property.

Everything moved away from me, I was soon surrounded by an enormous emptiness and calm. I no longer had anything close, no favourites, no neighbourhood, and my life rose up in me as a shaking disgust. As if every measure were overcrowded, every altar desecrated, every sweetness fouled, every height overgrown. As if every glimmer of purity had been darkened and every hint of beauty had already been distorted and trampled. to worship and hate. Everything that was sacred, unchallenged and reconciling in me had lost sight and voice. All the guards in my life fell asleep. All bridges had broken off and all distant areas had been robbed of their blueness.

When everything that was tempting and lovable had disappeared from me and I awoke, exhausted and inexpressibly deprived of spirit and poor, to the consciousness of my misery, then I lowered my eye, rose with heavy limbs and wandered out of all the habits of my past like a judged man, who leaves his apartment at night without saying goodbye and without locking the doors behind him.

Who has ever looked at the ground of loneliness? Who can say they know the land of renunciation? My eyes were dizzy as I bent down over the abyss, they fell without finding an end. I wandered through the land of renunciation until my knees broke with fatigue, and the road still lay in front of my step in undiminished eternity. A quiet, sad night arched over me, comforting and sleepy. Slumber and dream came to me like friends to a homecoming man, loosening a deadly burden from my shoulders like a bundle of journeys.

Have you been shipwrecked and seen land and a swimmer approaching you? Have you already been terminally ill and convalescingly took your first drink of fresh garden air and felt the sweet billowing of the renewing blood? Like these saved and those recovered, a vortex of gratitude, calm, light, and wellbeing flooded me as I realized that night that inscrutable beings were kindly bowing to me.

Heaven looked different than it had ever been before. The position and return of the stars entered into a predetermined alliance of friends with my innermost life, and the eternal linked something in me clearly and beneficially with its laws. I felt a golden foundation laid in my life, which I had set up out of the desert, a power and a law according to which, as I felt with marvellous astonishment, everything old and new in me will in future be arranged in noble crystal forms and with all things and wonders of the world make charitable alliances.

*Incipit vita nova.*

I have become a new one, still a miracle to myself, resting and active at the same time, receiving and giving, an owner of goods, the most valuable of which I may not yet know.

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