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THE SILENT MILL

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SILENT MILL**

BY

HERMANN SUDERMANN

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THE SILENT MILL

No one can tell how many years ago it is was since the "Silent Mill" first received its name. As long as I can remember it has been an old, tumble-down structure, an ancient relic of long-forgotten times.

Old, and weather-beaten, and roofless, its crumbling walls stretch upwards toward the sky, giving free access to every gust of wind. Two large, round stones that once, maybe, bravely fulfilled their task, have broken through the rotten wood-work and, obeying the natural law of gravitation, have wedged themselves deep into the ground.

The large mill-wheel hangs awry between its moulding supports. The paddles are broken off, and only the spokes stick up into the air, like arms stretched forth to implore the "coup de grâce."

Moss and lichen have clothed all in green, and here and there some water-cress puts forth its sickly green, sodden growth. From a half-broken pipe the water runs slowly down, trickles in sleepy monotony onto the spokes and breaks there, filling the surrounding air with fine, drizzling spray. Under a gray thicket of alders the little rivulet lies hidden in malodorous slothfulness, washed full of water-weeds and frog-spawn, choked up with mare's tail and flowering rushes. Only in the middle there trickles still a tiny stream of thick, black water, in which the little palegreen leaves of the duck-weed lazily drift along.

But those long years ago the mill-stream flowed right gayly and jauntily; snow-white foam gleamed at the weir; the merry chatter of the wheels resounded as far as the village; in long rows the carts drove in and out of the mill-yard; and far into the distance there echoed the mighty

voice of the old miller.

Rockhammer was his name, and all who saw him felt that he did honor to it, too. What a man he was! He had it in him to blast rocks. Of course there was no such thing as trying to bully or contradict him, for it only served to make him perfectly wild with rage: he would clench his fists; the veins on his temples would swell up like thick thongs; and when he started swearing into the bargain, every being trembled before him, and the very dogs fled in terror to their kennels. His wife was a meek, gentle, yielding creature. How could it be otherwise? Not for twenty-four hours would he have endured at his side a more sturdy-natured being, who might have attempted to preserve even the shadow of an independent will. As it was, the two lived together fairly well, happily one might almost have said, had it not been for his fatal temper, which broke forth wildly at the slightest provocation and caused the quiet woman many a tearful hour.

But she shed most tears when misfortune's hand fell heavily upon her children. Three had been born to them--bonny, healthy, sturdy boys. They had clear, blue eyes, flaxen hair and, above all, "a pair of promising fists," as their father was wont to declare with pride, though the youngest, who was still in his cradle, could as yet only make use of his to suck at them. The two elder boys, however, were already splendid fellows. How defiantly they looked about them, how haughtily they took up their stand! With their heads thrown back and their hands in their trousers pockets, each seemed to assert: "I am my father's son. Who'll dare me?"

They fought each other all day long and it was their father himself who always goaded them on. And if their mother in her terror intervened and begged them to be at peace with one another, she got laughed at into the bargain for her fears. The poor woman lived in constant anxiety about her wild boys, for she saw to her terror that both had inherited their father's violent temper. Once already she had only just arrived in the nick of time, when Fritz, then eight years old, was about to attack his brother, two years older than himself, with a large kitchen knife; and a half a year later the day really dawned on which her dark presentiments were realized.

The two boys had been fighting in the yard, and Martin, the elder one, wild with rage because Fritz had beaten him, had hurled a stone at him and hit him so unfortunately at the back of his head that he fell down bleeding and immediately lost the power of speech. They could stanch the blood, and the wound healed up, but his speech did not return. Indifferent to all around, the boy sat there and let them feed him: he had become an idiot.

It was a hard blow for the miller's family. The mother wept whole nights through, and even he, the energetic hard-working man, went about for a long time as if in a dream.

But the perpetrator of the disastrous deed was the one most impressed by it. The defiant, boisterously happy boy was hardly recognizable. His exuberance of spirits had disappeared; he spent his days in silent brooding, obeyed his mother to the letter and, whenever possible, avoided joining in the games of his school-fellows.

His love for his unfortunate brother was touching. When he was at home, he never stirred from his side. With superhuman patience he accustomed himself to the brutalized habits of the idiot, learned to understand his inarticulate sounds, fulfilled his every wish, and looked on smilingly when he destroyed his dearest toy.

The invalid boy got so used to his companionship that he would not be without him. When Martin was at school, he cried incessantly and preferred to go hungry rather than take food and drink from anyone else.

For three years he dragged on this miserable existence; then he began to ail and died.

Though his death certainly came as a relief to the whole household, all mourned his loss sincerely, and Martin especially was inconsolable. During the first months he wandered out daily to the cemetery and often had to be torn by force away from the grave. Only very gradually he grew calmer, chiefly through intercourse with the youngest boy, Johannes, to whom he now appeared to transfer the intense love which he had lavished upon his dead brother.

As long as the invalid lived, he had taken little notice of Johannes, for he seemed to think it almost sinful to give even the merest fraction of his affection to any one else. Now that death had robbed him of the poor unfortunate, an invincible longing drew him towards his younger brother--as if by his love for him he might fill the agonizing void which the loss of his victim had left in him as if he might atone toward the living for what he had inflicted on the dead.

Johannes was at that time a fine lad of five, already quite a little man, who was to have his first pair of stout boots at next fair-time. He seemed to have inherited nothing of his father's harsh, defiant nature; he took much more after his gentle, quiet mother, to whom he clung specially as her pet, and whose very idol he was. Not hers alone, though, for all in the house spoiled and petted him, their sunbeam, their source of joy.

Indeed, none who saw him could help loving him! His long, fair hair gleamed like so many sunbeams, and in his eyes, which could twinkle so merrily and at other times gaze so dreamily, there lay depths of goodness and love. He attached himself fervently to his elder brother, who had so long neglected him; but the disparity in their ages--they were nearly nine years apart--did

not allow of purely brotherly relations between them.

Martin was already at the close of his boyhood; his serious, thoughtful mien and measured, old-fashioned speech made him appear older than he was. Besides, he was already destined to commence work in the following year. Under these circumstances it was only natural that he should assume a somewhat fatherly tone towards his younger brother, and though he was not ashamed to join in his childish games and to be driven as his patient horse with a "gee-up" and a "whoa," through the mill-yard and across the fields, there was even in this more of the smiling indulgence of a kindly tutor than of the spontaneous pleasure of an older playmate.

The affectionate-natured boy, craving for love and sympathy, gave himself up heart and soul to his big brother. He recognized his boundless authority more even than that of his father and mother, who were further removed from his childish sphere--and when school-days commenced and Martin proved such a patient helper in word and deed whenever lessons were hard, then the younger boy's veneration for his elder brother knew no bounds. Old Rockhammer was the only one who was not pleased with the closeness of their friendship. They were too sweet; they "slobbered" each other too much, they had much better "live like cats and dogs together" as a proof that they were really "one's own flesh and blood." But their gentle mother was all the happier. Her prayer to the Almighty by day and night was to protect her children and nevermore to allow the flame of wrath to burst forth in Martin. And her supplication seemed to have been heard. Only once more was her soul filled with horror through an outburst of rage in her son.

Johannes--then nine years old--had been playing with a whip near some carts standing in the yard ready to take away flour. Suddenly one of the horses took fright; and the driver, a coarse, drunken fellow, tore the whip out of the boy's hand, and gave him a cut with it across his face and neck.

At the same instant Martin, lithe as a tiger, rushed out of the mill; the veins on his temples swollen, his fists clenched, got hold of the man and began to throttle him so that he was already black in the face. Then his mother threw herself with a loud scream of terror between the two. "Think of Fritz!" she cried, throwing up her arms in an agony of horror; and the infuriated boy let his hands drop as if paralyzed, tottered back and fell down sobbing on the threshold of the mill.

Since then his temper seemed to have died out entirely, and even when he was once insulted and attacked on the highroad, he kept his knife, which the people of those parts are quick to use, quietly in his pocket.

The years sped on. Shortly after Martin came of age, the old miller closed his eyes. His wife soon followed him. She did not recover after his death, and quietly and without complaining, she withered away. It was as if she could not exist without the scoldings which she had had to take daily from her husband for twenty-three years.

The two brothers now dwelt alone in the orphaned mill. So it was no wonder that they clung to each other even more closely, and that each lived only for the other!

And yet they were very different outwardly and inwardly. Martin, thick-set and short-necked, was awkward and silent in the presence of strangers. His bushy, lowering eyebrows gave his face a dark look, and his words came with difficulty and by fits and starts as if speaking were in itself torture--in fact one might have taken him for a hard misanthropist, if he had not had such an honest, hearty look in his eyes, and such a good-natured, almost childlike smile that it sometimes illumined his broad, coarsely-cut features like a ray of sunlight.

How utterly different was Johannes! His eyes beamed into the world so frankly and cheerfully; the corners of his mouth seemed constantly twitching with fun and merriment; and over his whole lithe, pliant figure was cast the glamour of youth. The lassies all noticed it, and sent many a glance after him, and many a blush, many a warm squeeze of the hand told him plainly, "You could easily win my love." Johannes did not care much about these matters. He was not yet "ripe for love," and preferred a game of skittles to a dance, and would rather sit with his silent brother beside the lock than walk with Rose or Gretel.

The two brothers had promised each other one still, solemn evening, that they would never part and that no third person should ever come between them in love or in hate.

But they had made their reckoning without taking into account the Royal Recruiting Commission. The time came for Johannes to serve in the army. He had to go far, far away, to Berlin, to the Uhlans of the Guard. It was a hard trial for both of them. Martin kept his trouble to himself as usual, but impetuous Johannes behaved as if he were absolutely inconsolable, so that he was well teased at parting by his comrades. His grief was, however, not of long duration. The fatigues of service as a recruit, the novelty of it all, the lively bustle of the metropolis, left him little time for dreaming and only now and then, as he lay in the calm dawn on his camp bed, a great longing came over him; the homely mill gleamed through the darkness like a lost Paradise and the clatter of the wheels sounded in his ears like heavenly music. But as soon as he heard the trumpet call, the vision passed away.

Martin fared worse at the mill, where he was now quite alone, for he could not reckon as

companions the millhands, or old David, an inheritance from his father. Friends he had never had either in the village or elsewhere. Johannes sufficed him and took their place entirely. He slunk about brooding in silence, his mind ever gloomier, his thoughts ever darkened, and at last melancholy took such hold of him that the vision of his victim began to haunt him. He was sensible enough to know that he could not go on living like this, and forcibly sought to distract his thoughts--went on Sundays to the village dance and visited the neighboring hamlets under pretense of trade interests. But as for the result of all this--well, one fine day at the commencement of his second year of service, Johannes got a letter from his brother. It ran as follows:

"MY DEAR BOY:

"I shall have to write it some time, even though you will be angry with me. I could not bear my loneliness any longer and have made up my mind to enter into the matrimonial state. Her name is Gertrude Berling, and she is the daughter of a wind-miller in Lehnort, two miles from here. She is very young and I love her very much. The wedding is to be in six weeks. If you can, get leave of absence for it.

"Dear brother, I beg of you, do not be vexed with me. You know you will always have a home at the mill whether there is a mistress there or not. Our fatherly inheritance belongs to us both, in any case. She sends you her kind regards. You once met each other at a shooting-match, and she liked you very much, but you took no notice of her, and she sends you word she was immensely offended with you.

"Farewell,

"Your faithful brother,

"MARTIN."

Johannes was a very spoiled creature. Martin's engagement appeared to him as high treason against their brotherly love. He felt as if his brother had deceived him and meanly deprived him of his due rights. Henceforth a stranger was to rule where hitherto he alone had been king, and his position at the mill was to depend on her favor and good will. Even the friendly message from the wind-miller's daughter did not calm or appease him. When the day of the wedding came, he took no leave, but only sent his love and good wishes by his old schoolfellow Franz Maas, who was just left off from military service.

Six months later he himself was at liberty.

How now, Johannes? We are so obstinate that on no account will we go home, and prefer to seek our fortune in foreign parts; we roam about, now to right, now to left, up hill and down hill and rub off our horns, and when, four weeks later, we come to the conclusion that in spite of the wind-miller's daughter there is no place in the world like the Rockhammer mill, we went our way homewards most cheerfully.

One sunny day in May Johannes arrived in Marienfeld.

Franz Mass, who had set up the autumn before as a worthy baker, was standing, with his legs apart, in front of his shop, looking up contentedly at the tin "Bretzel" swinging over his door in the gentle noon-day breeze, when he saw an Uhlan come swaggering down the village street with his cap cocked to one side and clinking his spurs. His brave ex-soldier's heart beat quicker under his white baker's apron as he took his pipe out of his mouth and shaded his eyes with his hand.

"Well, I declare, it's Johannes!"

"Hallo, old fellow!" And they were greeting each other with effusion.

"Where do you hail from so late in the season? Have you had to do extra service?"

"For shame!"

Then they start questions and confessions. About the captain and the sergeant and old Knapphaus and the fair baker's daughter whom they used to call "Crumpet Mary," and who lived in the baker's shop close to the barracks--they all have their turn and not one is forgotten.

"And what about yourself? Did they recognize you in the village?" asks Franz, transferring his insatiable thirst for knowledge to more homely ground.

"Not a soul," laughs Johannes, complacently twirling his budding cavalry moustache which points heavenwards in two smart ends.

"And at home?"

Johannes makes a serious face and says he must go.

"Oh, you're only on the way there now? Then I suppose it's bobbing about in there?" And he gives him a searching thump on his chest.

Johannes laughs curtly and then suppresses a sigh as if to master his excitement.

Franz lays his hand on his shoulder and says: "Well, you will find a sister-in-law--upon my word, she's a sister-in-law worth having!" He smacks his lips and winks his eye. It fills Johannes again with his former defiance and rage. He shrugs his shoulders contemptuously, shakes hands with his friend and goes off clinking his spurs.

Three more minutes' walk; then he is through the village. There is the church! Poor old thing--it has got even a bit more tumble-down!

But the black larches still rustle as of old, and theirs is the same sweet song of happy promise which they sang to him on the day of his confirmation. There on the left is the inn--by Jove, they have put up a massive new doorway, and at the window there stand immense liquor-flasks, filled with flaming red and viciously green fluids. Mine host of the "Crown" has been looking up! That side-path leads down to the river. And there is the mill, the goal of his dreams! How comfortable the old thatched roof looks across the alder bushes, how snowy white are the cherry blossoms in the garden, how cheerily the mill-wheels clatter: "Welcome, welcome!"

How the dear old moss-grown weir seems to chant a blessing from afar! He pushes his cap a degree further back and pulls himself together resolutely, for he is determined to master his emotion.

All the fields stretching on either side of the road belong to the mill. On the right is winter-rye, as of old; but on the left, where there used to be a potato-patch, there is now a kitchen garden--there are asparagus-plants and young beetroots arranged in prim and orderly rows.

Between the long vegetable borders, about five paces from the fence, he sees the lithe, robust figure of a girl assiduously bending to her work.

Who can that be? Does she belong to the mill? Perhaps a new maid! Hardly that, though, for she looks too smart, too neat; her shoes are too light, her apron too dainty, the white kerchief so picturesquely draped round her head is of too fine a texture. If only she would not so completely shade her face! Now she looks up! Good heavens, what a sweet girl! How her bonny cheeks glow, how her dark eyes gleam, how her pouting lips seem to invite a kiss!

As she perceives him, she drops her hoe and stares at him.

"Good-day," he says, and touches his cap somewhat awkwardly. "Do you know whether the miller is at home?"

"Yes, he's at home," she says, and goes on staring at him.

"I wonder what she means by it," he thinks, fighting against his embarrassment; and as, since his Berlin days, he has every reason to consider himself well-nigh irresistible, it is a point of honor with him now to step close up to the hedge and attempt a little flirtation with the girl.

"Well, always busy?" he asks, just for the sake of asking, and in his confusion clutches at the ends of his moustache. Uhlan, beware! Take care!!

"Yes, I'm always busy," she repeats mechanically, while she stares at his face unceasingly; and suddenly, raising her hand and spreading out all five fingers as if she would like to point at him with them all, she says, as she bursts out laughing:

"Why, you're Johannes!"

"Yes, tha-at's m-e," he stammers in astonishment; "and who are you?"

"I'm his wife!"

"What? You--his--Martin's?"

"Hm!" And she nods at him with assumed dignity, while her eyes are full of roguishness.

"But you look like a young girl!"

"It isn't so very long since I was one," she laughs.

They stand on opposite sides of the fence and look at each other.

Collecting herself, she wipes her hands ostentatiously on her apron, and stretches them out to him through the lattice-work.

"Welcome, brother-in-law!"

He returns her hand-shake, but is silent.

"Do you perhaps intend to be angry with me, brother-in-law?" she says, and looks up at him roguishly. He feels absolutely powerless before her, and can only laugh awkwardly and say: "I--angry? Oh, dear no!"

"It looked rather like it!" she says, and lifting her finger threateningly, she adds: "Oh, I should only just have liked you to attempt such a thing!" Thereupon she sticks her chin into her collar and bursts into a soft chuckle.

"Well, you are funny! he says, with a rather more easy laugh.

"I funny?--never! You go along now; meanwhile I will run in through the garden and fetch Martin."

And she starts to run away, then stops suddenly, puts her finger to her nose and says: "Wait a minute; I will come across to you."

Before he has time to stretch out a helping hand, she had slipped, as nimble as a lizard, in between the boards of the fencing.

"Well, here I am," she says, smoothing out her dress, while she lets the knotted kerchief fall loosely onto her neck, so that a mass of little brown curls escape round her forehead and neck and begin to dance in the wind as if delighted at their newly regained freedom.

His gaze rests with astonishment on the fresh, girlish beauty of this young wife, who behaves like a wild unconstrained child.

She notices the look, and slightly blushing, she passes her hand over the curly disorder which will not be fettered.

For a while they walk beside each other in silence.

She looks down and smiles as if she too had suddenly learned shyness. Conversation flags till they have got through the large entrance-gate. Johannes looks about and gives a cry of amazement. He cannot believe his eyes.

Everything all around is changed, everything is beautified. The round court-yard, which in rainy weather used to be one immense pool of dirt and in dry weather one mass of dust-clouds, now is all covered with turf like some flowering meadow, the doors of the store-houses and stables are resplendent with bright red paint and bear white numbers. In the middle of the open space is an artistic pigeon-house, like a little Swiss chalet, and in front of the house is a newly built veranda, round whose shining windowpanes and dainty wood-carving some young creepers twine their budding tendrils. The mill lies before his ecstatic gaze like the very home of peace and innocence. He folds his hands in emotion and asks "Who has done all this?"

She looks about without speaking.

"You?" he asks, amazed.

"I helped," she answers modestly.

"But you originated it?"

She smiles. This smile makes her appear older, and for a moment her child-like face is suffused with a shimmer of womanly grace.

"Your hand is blessed," he says softly and shyly, more in earnest than is his wont.

He cannot help thinking of his dead mother, who so often complained of the dreadful dust, and that in the whole space outside there was not a single place where she could sit down in comfort.

"If only she could have lived to see this," he murmurs to himself.

"Mother?" she asks him.

He looks up astonished. That she should not say "your mother" startles him at first, then it gives him a feeling of intense pleasure such as he has never before in his life felt. A sort of happy glow enters into his heart and will not leave it. So there is now in the world a young, beautiful strange woman who speaks of his mother as if she had been hers too, as if she herself were his sister, the sister he had so often longed for in his foolish younger days, when his gaze used to rest with admiration on other girls.

And now she softly repeats her question.

"Yes, mother," he answers, and looks at her gratefully.

She bears his look for a second; then drops her eyes and says in some confusion; "I wonder where Martin can be?"

"In the mill, I suppose!"

"Yes, in the mill, of course," she answers quickly; and with the words "I will fetch him," she hurries away. Almost without thinking he stares after the girlish figure bounding so lightly across the grass.

Everything about her seems to be flying and fluttering--her skirts, her apron-strings, the kerchief about her neck, her untameable, entangled mass of curls.

He remains for a time gazing after her as if spell-bound; then he laughingly shakes his head and walks to the veranda. There he notices a dainty work-table and on it a round wicker-work-basket. Across its edge hangs a piece of work commenced, a long, white strip embroidered with flowers and leaves such as women use for insertion. Without thinking he takes the piece of cambric in his hand and examines the cunning stitches till his sister-in-law's laughing voice reaches his ears.

Like a surprised criminal he quickly lets the embroidery drop--there she is already, bending round the corner; and the flour-whitened, square-set figure she is so merrily dragging behind her and who is so awkwardly trying to divest himself of her little, clutching hands, and dispersing thick, white dust-clouds all round, that is, why, that is--

"Martin, dear old Martin!" and he rushes out to embrace him.

The awkward movements cease; the bushy eye-brows are drawn up--the good-natured, quiet smile grows stony--the whole figure is fixed--the man draws back--but next moment he rushes forward towards his newly-regained darling.

In silence the brothers clasp each other.

Then after a time Martin takes the head of the returned wanderer between his two hands and, knitting his brows darkly and gnawing at his under-lip he looks long and earnestly into his brother's beaming, laughing eyes. Thereupon he sits down on the seat in the veranda, rests his elbows on his knees and looks down.

"Why are you so pensive, Martin?" Johannes asks softly, laying his hand on his brother's shoulder.

"Well, why shouldn't I be pensive?" he answers, with a peculiar sort of low grunt which accompanies all his meager speeches. "Ah--you rascal!" he continues, and the good-natured grin which is his in happy moments spreads over his heavily-cut features. "You made up your mind to be angry--you, you?" Then he jumps up and takes his wife's hand. "Look at him, Trude; he wanted to be angry, the silly fellow! Come here, boy! Eh--here she is--look at her properly, well! Do you think you could be angry with *her*?"

Then he drops clumsily onto his seat, so that a fresh cloud of white dust flies up, looks at Johannes, laughs to himself a little and says at last: "Trude, fetch a clothes brush!" Trude bursts out laughing and skips away singing. When she returns waving the desired object high in the air, he gives the order: "Now brush him!"

"When a miller or a sweep grows affectionate, there's sure to be a misfortune," Johannes says, attempting a joke, and tries to take the brush out of her hand.

"Please allow me, Mr. Johannes," she protests, hiding the brush under her apron.

Martin hits the bench with his fist. "Mr. Johannes! Well, I never--what's the meaning of that? Haven't you made friends yet?--eh?"

Johannes is silent and Trude brushes away at him with great vigor.

"Then I suppose you haven't even given each other a kiss yet?"

Trude lets the brush fall suddenly. Johannes says "H'm" and busies himself with rolling the wheel of one of his spurs along the scraper standing at the entrance.

"It's the proper thing to do, however! Now then!"

Johannes faces about and twirls his moustache, determined to get over his awkward predicament by playing the man of the world; but with all that he has not the courage to bend down to her. He stands there as stiff as a post and waits till she holds up her little mouth; then for a moment he presses his trembling lips upon hers, and feels how a slight shudder runs through her frame.

A moment later it is all over. With a shy smile they stand next to one another--both blushing all over.--Martin slaps his knees with his hands and declares it has been as good as a side-splitting farce. Then he suddenly gets up and walks off. He must ponder over his happiness in solitude.

In the afternoon the brothers go together into the mill. Trude stands at the window and looks after them, and, when Johannes turns around, she smiles and hides behind the curtain. On the threshold Johannes stands still and leans his head against the door-post, and deep emotion fills him as he gazes into the semi-darkness of the dear old place from which proceeds such a din of wheels that it nearly stuns him, while the draught drives into his face great whitish-grey clouds of flour, bran-dust and steam. Side by side the various "runs" open out before him. On the left, nearest the wall, the old "bolting-run," for the finest flour; then the "bruising-run," where the bran and flour remain together; then the "groats-run," where the barley is freed from its husks; and finally the "cylinder-run," one of the new kind only recently added.--They have also had a new spiral alley and a lift made. Fashion now-a-days requires all these innovations.

Martin puts his hands in his pockets and saunters along with his pipe in his mouth in silent self-content. Then he takes hold of Johannes' hand and proceeds to explain the new invention--how the fine flour is caught up by the spiral and conveyed to the suspiral where small pails, running along a belting, raise it through two stories, almost to the roofing, and then empty it into the silken, cylinder-like funnels through the fine network of which it has to pass before becoming fit for use. Listening breathlessly, Johannes drinks in his brother's scant, slowly uttered words, and is surprised how ignorant one grows in the army; for all these things are sealed books to him.

Business is flourishing. All the works are in full swing, and the 'prentices have plenty to do with pouring the grain into the mill-hopper and watching the outflow of the flour and the bran.

"I have three now," says Martin, pointing to the white-powdered fellows, one of whom is continually running up and down the stairs.

"And is David here yet?" asks Johannes.

"Why, of course," answers Martin; and makes a face as if the mere idea of David's being no longer at the mill had scared him.

"Where has he hidden himself, the old fellow?" Johannes laughingly asks.

"David! David!" shouts Martin's lusty voice above all the clatter of the wheels.

Then from out the darkness, by the motor machine, which rises Cyclops-like from below the woodwork of the galleries, there emerges a long, lanky figure, dipped in flour--a face shows itself on which the indifference of old age has left nothing to be read--a slightly reddened nose, which almost meets the bristly chin, weak and sulky eyes hidden beneath bushy brows, and a mouth which seems to be continually chewing.

"What do you want me for, master?" he asks, planting himself in front of the brothers without removing the clay pipe which hangs loosely between his lips.

"Here's Johannes," says Martin, patting the old man's shoulder, while a good-natured smile crosses his countenance.

"Don't you know me any more, David?" asks Johannes, holding out his hand in a friendly manner. The old man spits out a stream of brown juice from between his teeth, considers awhile and then mumbles:

"Why shouldn't I know you?"

"And how are you?"

"How should I be?"--Then he begins fumbling about at a sack of flour, tying and untying the string with his bony fingers; then when he has made sure that he is no longer wanted, he withdraws once more into his dark corner.

Martin's face beams. "There's a faithful soul for you, Johannes--28 years of service, eh! And always industrious and conscientious."

"By the bye, what does he do?"

Martin looks confused. "Well--look here--eh--hard to say--position of trust--eh--faithful soul, faithful soul."

"Does the faithful soul still occasionally prig something from the flour-sacks?" asks Johannes laughing.

Martin shrugs his shoulders impatiently and mutters something about "28 years of service," and closing an eye.

"He seems still to owe me a grudge," says Johannes, "for having discovered the hiding place to which he had carried his hardy-stolen little hoard."

"You will persist in being prejudiced against him," answers Martin, "just like Trude too--you are unjust towards him,--most unjust."

Johannes laughingly shakes his head; then he points to a door leading to a newly erected partition.

"What's that?"

Martin moves about uneasily. "My office," he then stammers, and, as Johannes attempts to open the door, he runs up to him and catches him back by his coat-tails.

"I beg of you," he mutters, "do not cross that threshold. Not to-day--nor any other day.--I have my reasons." Johannes looks at him in vexation. "Since when have you secrets from me," he feels impelled to ask, but his brother's trustful, pleading look closes his lips, and arm in arm they leave the mill together.

Evening has come.--The great wheel is at rest, and with it the host of smaller ones.--Silence is over all the mill and only in the distance the rushing water of the weir sings its monotonous song. Here of course--in front of the house--the mill-brook is quiet and peaceful, as though it had nothing in the world to do but to carry water-lilies and to mirror the setting sun in its depths. Like a golden-red, dark-edged streamer it winds along between the straggling thicket of alders, in which a choir of nightingales are just clearing their throats and, all unconscious of their superior merit, are about to commence a singing competition with the frogs down there. The three human beings who are henceforth to pass their days together in this blossoming, song-laden solitude have already become lovingly intimate. They sit on the veranda around the white-spread supper-table, the food upon which has to-day found little appreciation, and their gaze is full of intense content. Martin rests his head on his hands and draws great clouds of smoke from his short pipe, from time to time emitting a sound which is something of a laugh, something of a growl.

Johannes has quite buried himself in the mass of foliage and lets the tendrils of the wild vine play about his face. They tremble and flutter with his every breath.

Trude has pushed her head deep into her collar and is looking furtively across at the two brothers, like a high-spirited child that would like to get into mischief but first wants to make quite sure that no one is watching. This silence is evidently not to her taste, but she is already too well schooled to break it. Meantime she amuses herself by making little pellets of bread and shooting them, unnoticed by either of the brothers, into the midst of the herd of sparrows hopping about the veranda, with greedy intent. There is one in particular, a little, dirty fellow, who beats all the others' cunning and alertness. As soon as a grain of food comes rolling along he spreads both wings, screams like mad, and while fighting he endeavors to get it away by beating his wings, so that he can take possession of it comfortably while the others are still wildly hacking at each other. This maneuver he repeats four or five times, and always successfully, till one of his comrades finds out his trick and does it still better.

This gives Trude a fit of laughing which she tries to suppress by stuffing her handkerchief into her mouth and holding her breath till she gets quite blue in the face--Then when she finds it absolutely impossible to contain herself any longer, she jumps up to get away, but before she reaches the door, her laughter bursts forth and she disappears into the darkness of the passage, screaming loudly with delight.

Both brothers are roused from their dreaming.

"What's up?" asks Johannes, startled. Martin shakes his head as he looks after his young, foolish wife whose tricks he well knows; then after a time he takes his brother's hand and says, pointing to the door:

"Well--does she look as if she would oust you?"

"No, indeed," answers Johannes with a somewhat uneasy laugh.

"Oh, my boy," growls Martin, scratching his bushy head, "what a lot of worry I have been through!--I tossed about in my bed a long night when I thought of you! I mean on account of the wrong I might be doing you."--Then after a time--"And yet when I look at her--she is so fair--so innocent--say yourself, my boy, could I possibly help loving her? When I saw her--ah--why it was all over with me.--In so many ways she reminded me of you--merry, and bright-eyed and full of mischief, just like you.--Of course she was a child and has remained one to the present day--Charmless and wild and playful as a child.--And I tell you--she wants holding in tighter--her spirits run away with her.--But that is just how I love her to be"--a tender look brightens his features--"and if I rightly think it over, I would not even miss one of her ridiculous doings. You know I always must have some one to watch over--formerly I had you, now she is the one."

After relieving his feelings in this manner, he once more becomes silent.

"And are you happy?" asks Johannes.

Martin hides himself in a thick cloud of smoke, and from out of that he mutters after a time:

"Well, that depends!"

"On what?"

"On your not being angry with her."

"I angry with her?"

"Well, well, you needn't make excuses!"

Johannes does not reply. He will soon convince his brother of better things--and closing his eyes, he buries his head once more in the waving foliage. A gleam of light causes him to look up. Trude is standing on the threshold, holding a lamp and looking ashamed of herself. Her charming, childlike face is bathed in a red glow and the drooping lashes cast long, semi-circling shadows on her full cheeks.

"What a ridiculous creature you are!" says Martin, stroking her ruffled hair tenderly.

"Won't you go to rest, Johannes?" she asks with great seriousness, though there is still the sound of suppressed laughter in her voice.

"Good-night, brother!"

"Wait, I am coming too!"

Johannes shakes hands with his sister-in-law, while she turns her face aside with a furtive smile.

Martin takes the lamp from her and precedes his brother up the stairs. At the top he takes his hand and gazes silently and deeply into his eyes, like one who cannot yet contain his happiness; then he softly closes the door.

Johannes sighs and stretches himself, pressing both hands to his breast. His heart is heavy for very joy. He feels as if he must go after his brother and relieve his feelings by a few loving, grateful words, but already he hears his steps downstairs in the entrance. It is too late. But his mind must be calmer before he can attempt to sleep.

He puts out the lamp and pushes open a window. The night air cools his brow.--How soothing it is--how it wafts peace!

He bends over the window-ledge, whistles a song to himself and looks out into the night. The apple-tree beneath him is in full bloom--a waving sea of blossoms. How often as a child he has climbed up there, how often, tired with play, he has leant, dreaming, against its trunk, while its rustling leaves told him fairy stories. And when in autumn a gust of wind swept through the branches, it brought down a shower of rosy-cheeked apples, which fell almost into his lap.--What ecstasy that was! How many things enter one's thoughts as one whistles! Each note awakens a new song, each melody conjures up new reminiscences. And with the old songs there returns the old longing and flies on butterfly's wings through a vast empire between the moon and the morning sun!--

And as he looks down upon the earth melting into darkness, he sees how a window is softly opened and an upturned face bends far out. From out of a pale, gleaming oval, framed in a background of shadowy hair, two dark eyes glanced up at him, slyly and mischievously.

Abruptly he stops whistling; then a teasing laugh greets his ears, and his sister-in-law's merry voice cries: "Go on, Johannes!"

And when he will not do her bidding, she points her own lips and attempts a few very imperfect notes.

Then Martin's deep bass voice becomes audible in the house, saying in a tone of paternal reproof:

"None of your nonsense, Trude! Let him sleep!"

"But he doesn't sleep," she answers, pouting like a scolded child. Then the window is shut. The voices die away.

Johannes laughingly shakes his head and goes to bed, but he cannot sleep. Those flowers prevent him which Trude has placed at his bed-side, and the leaves of which hang right over the edge of the bed. Pale bluish bunches of lilac and the nebulous white stars of narcissi are mingled together. He turns round, kneels up in bed and buries his face in the flowery depths. Fondly the leaflets kiss his eye-lids and his lips.

Suddenly he listens. From underneath the floor, as it were from the bowels of the earth, comes a quiet laugh. It is soft as a breath of wind passing over the grass, but so merry, so full of happiness.

He listens, hoping to hear it again, but all is still. "Crazy little body, you," he says amused, then falls back upon his pillow and drops to sleep smiling.

Next day Johannes fetches down his working-clothes. They are a bit tight across the shoulders. But then, one gets broader.

The sun is already high in the heavens. As if it could shine so brightly, right into one's heart, anywhere else!--The sun of home is a wonderful thing. What it looks upon, it gilds, and when it touches one's lips, they begin to sing.

"It is lovely at home--hurrah!"

"Now I have a nest of merry birds in the house," laughs Martin, coming to greet him. "Go on singing. I am used to that from Trude--but what are you doing in that white coat?"

"I suppose you think I am going to be idle here?"

"At least just for a day!"

"Not for an hour! My lazy times are over!"

Martin has meanwhile noticed the flowers at the bed-side and says with a grumbling laugh: "Now there's a little witch for you! I have forbidden it for myself, and now she begins the same nonsense with others. That's why you look so pale this morning.

"I, pale? Not in the least!"

"Don't say a word! I'll cure her of her tricks."

With that they go downstairs.

Trude is nowhere to be seen.

"She has been in the garden since five o'clock," says Martin with a pleased smile. "Everything goes like clock-work since she's at the head of affairs. As quick as a weasel, up at peep of day and always merry, always ready with a song and a laugh."

On their way to the mill a young turnip whizzes past the brothers', heads. Martin turns round and laughingly threatens with his finger.

"Who was that?" asks Johannes, peering in bewilderment round the empty yard.

"Who but she?"

"But can you see her anywhere?"

"Not a trace of her! Oh, she's a teasing elf who can become invisible at will." And with a beaming face he follows his brother to the mill.

The hours pass by. Johannes wants to show what he can do and works with twofold energy.

While he is superintending the storing of the grain on the gallery, some one from below gently pulls his coat-tail. He looks down;--Trude, with sun-heated face and sparkling eyes, stands on the steps and invites him to come to breakfast. "In a minute," he says, finishes his task and jumps down.

"Brr!" she says, shaking herself, "how you look!"

"What's the matter?"

"Well--yesterday I liked you better." Then she gives him her hand with a "good-morning," and trips down the stairs in front of him, strewing the flour about for fun as she goes.

When they get to the door of the partition that Martin called his office, she pulls a mysterious face and raises her hand silently as if to lay a ghost.

Then after a moment she asks: "I say, what has he got in there!"

"I don't know."

"Mayn't you go in either?"

"No."

"Thank goodness! Then I am not the only one who's kept in the dark. In there he sits, and every stranger is allowed to go in to him, only not I. If I want him, I have to ring.--Say yourself whether that's nice of him? Surely I am no longer such a child that he should--well, I won't say anything,--one oughtn't to speak ill of one's husband--but you are his own brother--do put in a good word for me, so that he tells me what is in there. For I am dying to know."

"Do you suppose he has told me?"

"Well, then we must comfort each other. Come along."--And in one jump she flies up the three steps leading to the entrance.

During breakfast she suddenly puts on a serious air and speaks grandly of her weighty household cares. Of course, she says, she had to be independent at home already, for her poor little mother died many years past, and she had to superintend her father's household long before she was confirmed; but it was only a small one, for her father had to manage with one apprentice and almost worked himself to death--poor father!

Her eyes are full of tears. She is ashamed and turns away. Then she jumps up and asks: "Have you had enough?" And when he says "Yes," she continues: "Come along into the garden. There's an arbor which is splendid for a chat."

"That one at the end of the long path?--that is my favorite place too."

Side by side they stroll through the mazy garden walks, all bathed in glowing sunlight, and both feel relieved when they reach the cool shade of the leafy recess.

She throws herself down carelessly on the grassy bank and puts her plump, sun-burnt arms under her head. Through the dense foliage stray gleams of sunlight break, painting her dress with golden patches, playing on her neck and face, and passing over her head till they make her curly brown hair all aglow.

Johannes sits down opposite her and gazes at her with undisguised admiration. He is convinced that never before in his life has he seen so much loveliness as there in the half-reclining figure of his charming young sister-in-law, and he thinks of his brother's saying: "Was it possible for me not to love her?"

"I don't know why I feel so inclined to talk about myself to-day," she says with her sympathetic smile, while she shifts her head to a more comfortable position. "Do you care to listen?" He nods his head.

"I am glad of that, Johannes! Well, you may imagine that at home bread was not over plentiful--not to speak of the butter which by rights belongs to it--and if I had not had my little garden, the produce of which we could sell in the town, we should not have managed at all. 'Why does everyone take all their grain to the Rockhammer mill, without thinking that the poor wind-miller wants to live too?' That is what we often thought, and we positively hated your place. Then all of a sudden comes Martin--says he wants to be neighborly--and is kind and good to father and kind and good to me--and brings toffee and sugar-candy for the boys, so that we are all mad on him. And in the end he informs father that he absolutely must have me for his wife. 'But she hasn't a penny,' says my father, and fancy--he took me without a farthing! You may imagine how glad I was, for father had often said to me: 'Now-a-days men only marry for money; you are a poor girl, Trude, so make up your mind to be an old maid. And now I was engaged before my 17th birthday.--And then, you know, I had liked Martin very much for a long time already--for even if he is rather shy and quiet I could see by his eyes what a kind heart he has! Only he can't let himself go, as he would perhaps like to. I know how good he is, and even if he growls ever so much and scolds me, I shall be fond of him all my life!' She is silent for a moment and passes her hand across her face as if to wipe away the sunbeam which is gilding her lashes and making her eyes glisten. "And fancy how good he is to my family," she then resumes eagerly, as if she could not find enough love to heap on Martin's head. "He absolutely wanted to give them a yearly allowance--I don't know how much--but I would not allow that--for I did not wish to induce my father in his old days to take alms, even though it was from his son-in-law. But one thing I asked for--for permission to continue the gardening as I had done at home and to use the proceeds as pocket-money. What I do with it is my own business." She smiles across at him slyly and then continues: "They really do want it though, at home, for you see, there are three boys who all want to be fed and clothed, and they have to keep a servant too now, since I left home."

"Have you no sisters?" he asks.

She shakes her head; then she says, suddenly bursting out laughing. "It's really too bad. Not even one for a wife for you."

He joins in her laughter and observes: "I don't seem to want a wife so much now."

"As what?"

"As a sister."

"Well, she is here," says she, jumping up and stepping up to him; then, as if ashamed of her impetuosity, she drops down again on to the grass, blushing.

"Yes, will you be that?" he says with beaming eyes.

She pulls a little face and observes carelessly. "That's nothing much to be! Sister-in-law is in itself already as much as half a sister." Then, smilingly looking him up and down, she remarks: "I think one might put up with you as a brother."

"Five foot ten--been Uhlan of the Guard--does that suffice?"

"And you might even turn out a good playfellow."

"Do you require one?"

"Yes, very badly! It is so quiet and solemn here. There's not a soul to romp about with as I used to with my brothers at home. Sometimes I felt half inclined to collar one of the mill-hands, but dignity and respect forbade such a thing."

"Well, I am here now," he laughs.

And she: "I set great hopes on you!"--

"Then collar me!"

"You are too floury for me."

"A fine miller's wife to be afraid of flour," he teases.

"Never mind," she interrupts, "I shall soon put your playing powers to the test."

In the gloaming, when they are once more sitting together on the veranda, and Johannes, like his brother, sits dreaming with his head hidden in the foliage, he suddenly feels a round, indefinable something hit his head and then drop to the ground. "Perhaps it was a cock-chafer," he thinks to himself, but the attack is renewed two or three times.

Then he begins to suspect Trude, who sits like a perfect picture of innocence, humming quite dolefully to herself, "In Yonder Verdant Valley," while she works little bread pellets which evidently serve as her missiles.

He suppresses a merry laugh, secretly gets hold of a branch of the vine on which a few of last year's dried-up berries are still hanging, and when she lets fly a new volley at him, he promptly dispatches his reply at her little nose.

She flinches, looks at him quite amazed for a moment, and when he bends towards her with the most serious face in the world, she bursts into a loud, joyful laugh.

"What's the matter again now?" asks Martin, startled from his dreaming.

"He has withstood the test," she laughs, putting her arm around her husband's neck.

"What test?"

"If I tell you, you will grumble, so I had better be silent."

Martin looks at Johannes questioningly.

"Oh, it's nothing," says he smiling; "it was only nonsense. We were--bombarding each other."

"That's right, children--you bombard one another," Martin says, and goes on smoking in silence. Johannes is ashamed of himself, while Trude challenges her playfellow with mischievous glances. "Full of play," yes, that was it; that was what Martin Rockhammer had called his wife.

Henceforth there are to be no more of those peaceful silent hours in the gloaming which Martin loves so well.

The quiet paths of the garden resound with song and laughter, across the lawn figures dart, as quick as the wind, in pursuit of each other;--they let loose the dogs and race with them;--they hunt the wild cats that frequent the mill-yard--they play hide-and-peek behind the haystacks and hedges.

Martin looks on at all these doings with kindly, fatherly indulgence.

At the bottom of his heart he would prefer to have his former quiet restored, but they are both so happy in their youth and harmlessness; their eyes sparkle so, their cheeks are so rosy: it would be a shame to spoil their pleasure through grumbling and interference. Why, they are but children! And are there not quieter hours? When Trude says, "Hans, let us sing," they sit down demurely side by side on the veranda or saunter slowly along the river, and when Martin has lighted his pipe and is ready to listen, they warble forth their songs into the gloaming. These are delightful, solemn moments. The birds in the trees twitter in their slumber, a soft breeze wafts through the branches and the mill-weir with its dull rushing sings the accompaniment. How quickly their mood changes! They have begun so merrily, but the melodies grow sadder and sadder, and the sound of their voices more and more mournful. A few minutes ago they were planning nonsense, now they have solemnly folded their hands and are gazing dreamily towards the sunset. Johannes' clear tenor tones well with her full deep contralto, and his ear never fails him when he is singing seconds in some new song.

It is strange that they cannot sing when they are alone together. If Martin happens to be

called away on business during their song, their voices at once begin to waver, they look at each other and smile, turn away and smile again; then generally one of them makes a mistake and they stop singing. If Martin is not at home in the evening, or if, as is his wont once or twice a week, he has locked himself up in his "office," they are both silent as if by a mutual understanding, and neither of them would dare to invite the other to sing. Instead of singing they have other more fascinating occupations which are only possible when they are sure no third person is listening. While serving in the army Johannes had acquired an "Album of Lyrics," in which he had made a collection of everything in the way of merry or sentimental songs that took his fancy. The sentimental kind, however, greatly predominate. Love ditties, dirges, ballads about child murderers or innocently convicted criminals, side by side with poetical meditations on the vanity of life in general--and the gem of the whole collection is Kotzebue's "Outburst of Despair," that sentimental effusion which was for half a century the most popular of all German poems. This collection just suits Trude's taste in poetry, and as soon as she is alone with Johannes she whispers entreatingly, "Fetch the Lyrics!" Then they crouch in some quiet corner, put their heads together--for Trude insists on looking into the book too--and enjoy the delicious feeling of awe which thrills them as they read.

There is that wonderful "Count Von Sackingen to his Bride:--"

"Farewell! The lonely sorrows of my heart
In sweetest melody are all enshrined
Lest thou shouldst guess how hard it is to part"

and that popular old romance:--

"Henry slept and at his side
Was his richly-dowered bride.
"At midnight hour the curtain wide
By cold, white hands was pushed aside,
And Wilhelmine he did see,
For from the grave had risen she."

Then Trude starts and gazes into the dusk with large, terrified eyes, but she enjoys it intensely.

The holy of holies in the album is a part bearing the title "The Lovely Miller-Maid."

"Where did you get that from?" asks Trude, who feels that the title might apply to her.

"A friend of mine, a musician, had these songs in a big volume of music, out of which I copied them. The man who wrote them is said to have been called Miller and to have been a miller himself."

"Read, read quickly," cries Trude.

But Johannes refuses. "They are too sad," he says, closing the book; "some other time."

And so matters rest. But Trude so persecutes him, pouting and imploring, that he has to give way to her after all.

"Come this evening to the weir," he says--"I have to close up the sluices. Then we shall be undisturbed and I can read to you--of course only if--"

He winked across at the "office." Trude nods. They understand each other admirably. After supper Martin withdraws to his retreat, pursued by Trude's impatient looks, for she is dying to hear what secrets are contained in the "Lovely Miller-Maid." Arm in arm they walk across the meadow to the weir. The grass is damp with the evening dew. The sky glows red and all a-flame. The dark pine wood which forms a sombre frame round the picture is clearly silhouetted against the fiery background. Louder and louder the waters rush towards them.

In the tumbling waves the glowing sunset is reflected and every drop of frothy spray becomes a dancing spark. On the other side of the weir the river lies like a dark mirror and the alders lay their black shadows upon it and dip their image into its clouded depths.

Silently the two go to the weir. A narrow plank which in the center carries a drawbridge, runs alongside the main beam. From this point the sluices of the lock, six in number, and supported by solid pillars or props, can be opened or closed at will by the miller. Now in the gentle month of June the weir gives little trouble, but in early spring or autumn at high water or during the drifting of the ice, when all the sluices have to be opened wide and some of the supports to be removed, so that the volume of water as well as the lumps of ice may pour down unhindered, then one has to watch and put forth one's strength, or there is danger of being dragged down along with the wood-work by the seething mass. Johannes opens two of the sluices. That suffices for the present. Then he throws the lever to one side and rests his elbow on the rail of the drawbridge. Trude, who has so far watched him in silence, hoists herself up on to the big beam which runs from shore to shore on a level with the rail.

"You will get dizzy, Trude," says Johannes, anxiously looking down onto the "fall," where over sloping planks the water shoots down in wild haste and then rushes foaming into the depths below.

Trude gives a short laugh and declares she has often sat here for hours and looked down without experiencing the least giddiness, and, if the worst came to the worst, why he would be there. Full of suspense she looks towards his pocket, and when he pulls out the book of poems she sighs rapturously, in anticipation of delights to come, and clasps her hands like a child ready to listen to fairy stories. The tender words of the inspired poet flow like music from his lips.

"The miller's heart delights to roam"--Trude gives a cry of delight and beats time with her feet against the wooden posts. "I heard a mill-stream rushing."--Trude listens expectantly. "I saw the mill a-gleaming."--Trude clasps her hands with pleasure and points to the mill. With "Didst thou mean this, thou rippling stream?" the lovely miller-maid comes upon the scene and Trude grows serious. "Had I a thousand arms to stir." Trude gives slight signs of impatience. "No flowret I will question, nor yet the shining stars." Trude smiles to herself contentedly, "Would I might carve it upon every tree!" Trude sighs deeply and closes her eyes; and now proceed the passionate fancies of the young, love-frenzied miller, till they reach the cry of joy which penetrates above the rippling of the brook, the rushing of the mill-wheels, the song of the birds:

"The loved miller-maid is mine!" Trude spreads out both arms, a smile of quiet happiness flits across her face, she shakes her head as if to say, "What in the world can come after this?"--Then suddenly commences the miller-maid's mysterious liking for green, the hunting-horn echoes through the wood, the jaunty huntsman appears. Trude grows uneasy, "What does the fellow want?" she mutters and hits the beam with her fist. The miller, the poor young miller, soon begins to understand.--"Would I could wander far away, yea, far away from home; if only there were not always green wherever the eye doth roam." Thus the burden of his mournful strain. Trude puts out her hands in suspense and hope; why, it cannot be, things must come right again in the end. And then:

"Ye tiny flowrets that she gave.
Come rest with me in my lonely grave."

Trude's eyes grow moist, but still she hopes that the hunter may go, and the miller-maid think better of it; it cannot, it must not be otherwise. The miller and the brook begin their sad duologue--the mill-brook tries to console him, but for the miller there remains but one comfort, *one* rest:

"Ah! brooklet, little brooklet, thou wouldst comfort my pain,
Ah! brooklet, canst thou make my lost love return again?"

Trude nods hastily. "What has the silly brooklet to do with it? What does it know of love or pain?"

And then--there comes the mysterious lullaby sung by the waters. Surely the young miller must have fallen asleep on the brink of the rivulet--a kiss will waken him and when he opens his eyes the miller-maid will be bending over him and saying. "Forgive me, I love you as much as ever."

But nay--what is the meaning of those words about the small, blue crystal chamber? Why must he sleep till the ocean shall have drunk up the brook? And if the cruel maiden is to throw her kerchief into the brook that his eyes may be covered, why, then the sleeper cannot be lying on the water's brink, then he must be lying deep down--Trude covers her face with her hands and bursts into loud, convulsive sobs, and when Johannes still persists in reading to the end, she cries out "Stop, stop!"

"Trude, whatever is the matter?"

She beckons him to leave her alone; her weeping becomes more and more violent; her whole body sways, it seeks a support, it bends backwards.

Johannes gives a terrified scream and springs forward, catching her in his arms. "For heaven's sake, Trude!" he gasps, breathing heavily. Beads of cold perspiration stand on his brow--but she bows her little head on his breast, flings her arms round his neck and cries her heart out.--

Next day Trude says: "I behaved very childishly yesterday, Hans, and I believe I only just missed falling down."

"You were already sinking," he says, and a shudder passes through him at thought of that terrible moment. A sentimental smile crosses her face. "Then there would have been an end once and for all," she observes with a deep sigh, but forthwith laughs at herself for her silliness.

The days pass by. Johannes has fulfilled Trude's keenest expectations as a play-fellow. The two have become inseparable; and Martin, the third of the party, can do nothing but look on silently and with a good-natured grumble say "Yea" and "Amen" to all their pranks.

It is a pleasure to see them whizzing past, racing each other across the mill-yard as if they had wings to their feet. Trude flies along so that her feet hardly touch the ground, but in spite of that Johannes is the quicker of the two. Even if it takes time, she gets caught in the end. As soon as she finds that she cannot escape she cowers like a little frightened chicken; then when his arms encircle her triumphantly, her lithe body trembles as if his touch shook its very foundations.

David, the old servant, very attentively watches these doings from a dormer window in the attic, which he makes his customary stand; there he begins scratching his head and mumbling all sorts of unintelligible things to himself.

Trude notices him one day and laughingly points him out to Johannes.

"We must play some trick on that old sneak," she whispers to him.

Johannes tells her the amusing tale of how, years ago, he discovered the corner where the old fellow was in the habit of stowing away the flour he pilfered. "Perhaps we could do the same thing again?" he laughs.

"Well, we must hunt," says Trude. No sooner said than done. The following Sunday when the mill stands still and no servants or apprentices are about, Johannes takes the bunch of keys and beckons to Trude to follow him.

"Where are you off to?" asks Martin, looking up from the book he is reading.

"One of the hens lays its eggs astray," said Trude quickly. "We want to hunt for them." And she does not even blush. They ransack the stables and barns, the storehouses and haystacks and especially the mill,--they tear upstairs and downstairs, clamber up steep ladders and rummage in the rubbish of the lumber attics.

About two hours have gone by in fruitless search, when Trude, who has never lost courage, announces that in the furthest corner of the store-house she has found what she was seeking. Beneath some rotten shafts and worn-out cog-wheels, covered by the débris of the last ten years, stand a few large bushel-sacks, filled with flour and barley; besides which there are all sorts of useful trifles, such as hammers, pincers, brushes and table-knives. Loudly rejoicing, her eyes glistening, her face all dirty, her hair full of cobwebs, she emerges from the cavity, and after Johannes has convinced himself that she has seen aright, they hold council of war. Shall Martin be drawn into the secret? No, he would be vexed and perhaps spoil their fun. Johannes hits upon the right thing to do. He pours the contents of the sacks into their proper receptacles and then fills them with sand and gravel, but on the top puts a layer of lamp-black, such as the coachman uses for blacking his leather trappings. After having, on the way, quickly arranged everything as before, he considers his work completed. Both depart from the mill filled with intense delight, wash their hands and faces at the pump, help each other to get their clothes clean and do their best to keep a straight face on entering the room. But Martin at once notices the treacherous twitching of their mouths; he threatens them smilingly with his finger, though he asks no further questions....

Two--three days go by during which they are consumed with impatience;--then one morning when Trude is in the garden Johannes comes rushing down, breathless and red in the face with suppressed laughter. She forthwith throws down her hoe and follows him then and there to the yard. In front of the pump stands old David, helpless and enraged, half white and half as black as a sweep. His face and hands are coal black and his clothes are full of huge tar stains. From all the windows of the mill the laughing faces of the mill-hands peep out; and Martin walks excitedly to and fro in front of the house.

The scene is surpassingly comic. Johannes and Trude feel fit to die of laughing. David, who very rightly suspects where he must look for his foes, casts a vicious look at the two and makes a fresh attempt to clean himself. But the tell-tale black sticks to everything as if grown fast upon it. At last Martin takes pity on the poor devil, lets him come inside the common-room and orders Trude, who is laughing very tears, to find him an old suit of clothes.

At dinner-time the two tell him about their successful prank. He shakes his head disapprovingly and thinks it would have been better to have told him of their find. Then he mutters something about "28 years of service" and "babyish tricks," and gets up from the table.

Trude and Johannes exchange meaning looks which say "spoil-sport!" The affair affords them ground for amusement for three whole days.

On the following Sunday Martin makes an excursion across country to get some old debts cashed. He will not be likely to return before evening. The mill-hands have gone to the inn. The mill stands empty.

"Now I shall send the maids off too," says Trude to Johannes; "then we shall be absolutely alone in the place and can undertake something."

"But what?"

"That remains to be seen," she laughs and goes out into the kitchen.

After half an hour she returns and says: "There, now they have gone, now we can begin." Then they sit down opposite each other and deliberate.

"We shall never again manage to have such a lark as last Sunday," sighs Trude, and then after a while: "I say, Johannes!"

"What?"

"You really are a great boon to me!"

"In what way?"

"Since you came I have been three times as happy. You see--he is ever so kind and you know--I am fond of him, very fond, but--he is always so serious, so condescending, as if I were a silly, senseless child--and don't you think I am hardworking and take care of his household as well as any one older? Surely it's not my fault that I was born so full of fun and it isn't, after all, a crime to be like that--but under his eyes, when he looks at one so solemnly and reproachfully, why it spoils all one's pleasure in any nonsense.... And when one has to sit there quite still, it's sometimes so awfully full and so ..."

She stops and considers. She would like to pour out her grievances to him, but hardly knows what they are?

"With you it is quite different," she continues, "you are a dear, good fellow, and never say 'no' to anything. With you one can do as one likes!--And besides, you haven't got his irritating smile which he puts on when I tell him anything, as much as to say: 'I don't mind listening to you, but of course you are only talking rubbish.' Then the words seem to stick in my throat--whereas with you ... well, one can tell you anything that comes into one's head."

She pensively rests her head on her two hands and moves her elbows about on her knees.

"Well, and what is coming into your head now?" he asks.

She blushes and jumps up. "Catch me," she cries and barricades herself behind the table; but when he attempts to pursue her she walks calmly towards him and says; "leave that! We were going to undertake something, you know.--Keep the keys handy; in any case--perhaps we shall think of something on the way."

He takes the great bunch of keys from its peg and follows her out into the yard, on which the hot midday sun is glaring.

"Unlock the mill," she says, "it is cool in there." He does as he is bid, and with one wild leap she jumps down the steps into the half-dark space which lies before them in Sabbath quiet.

"I should be frightened to be here alone," she says, looking round at him, then she points to the door of the office, the light wood of which gleams through the semi-obscurity, spreads open her fingers and shudders.

"Has he never yet told you anything?" she whispers after a little while, bending towards his ear.

He shakes his head. He grows somewhat oppressed in this close, dimly-lighted place--he breathes heavily--he longs for light and fresh air.--But Trude feels all the more comfortable in this vapor-laden atmosphere, in this mysterious twilight, where through the closed shutters stray slanting sunbeams glide like golden streamers onto the floor, and form a play-ground for myriads of little dancing particles of dust. The tremor which fills her is just to her liking;--she crouches down, then stealthily creeps up the stairs as if on the lookout for ghosts. When she reaches the gallery she gives a loud scream, and when Johannes anxiously asks what ails her, she says she only felt she must give vent to her feelings.

She climbs up to a mill-hopper, clammers over the balustrade and slides down again on the banisters. Then she disappears in the darkness among the machinery, where the huge wheels tower above each other in gigantic masses. Johannes lets her do just as she likes; to-day there is no danger, to-day everything is at a standstill.

A few seconds later she re-appears. She nestles up to Johannes' side, looks about with startled eyes, then pulls from her pocket a small key, hanging on a black ribbon. "What is this?" she asks softly.

Johannes throws a rapid glance towards the office door and looks at her enquiringly. She nods.

"Put it back," he cries, alarmed.

She balances the key in her hand and gazes longingly at the shining metal. "I once saw by chance where he hid it," she whispers.

"Put it back," he says once more.

She knits her brows, then she suggests with a short laugh: "That would be something for us to undertake." With that she casts a timorous side-glance at his face to try and explore his mood.

His heart beats audibly. In his soul there dawns the presentiment of approaching guilt.

"It would remain between us two, you know, Hans," she says coaxingly. He closes his eyes. How delightful it would be to have a secret with her! "And after all, what is there in it?" she continues. "Why should he be so mysterious about it, especially to us two, who are his next of kin in the world?"

"That's just why we ought not to deceive him!" he replies.

She stamps her foot on the ground.

"Deceive indeed! It's a shame to use such a nasty expression!" Then she says, pouting: "Well, then don't!" and prepares to return the key to its hiding-place. But she turns it about in her fingers three or four times, and finally remarks, laughing, "Perhaps it isn't the right one after all."

She goes up to the door and with a shake of her head compares the keyhole and the shape of the key--but,--then, with a sudden jerk, she pushes the key into the lock.

"It fits, after all," she says, and looks with apparent disappointment back over her shoulder at Johannes, who is standing behind her, anxiously watching the movements of her hands.

"Turn it!" she says in jest, and steps back from the door.

A tremor passes through his body. Ah, Eve, thou temptress!

"Turn it and let me put my head in," she laughs, "you needn't look at anything yourself."

Then a sudden rage takes hold of him; he lets the key fly back with a jerk and pushes the door wide open, so that a bright stream of light from the window floods towards them. Trude makes a disappointed face. All they see is a plain, business-like room with bare, whitewashed wooden walls. In the middle stands a large, roughly painted writing-table on which lie samples of grain and ledgers. On one wall hangs a bundle of old clothes, and on the opposite one a wooden shelf with some blue exercise-books and a few plainly bound volumes upon it. Johannes casts a few timid glances around, then steps up to the book-shelf and begins turning over the title-pages. What an uncanny collection! There are medical works on brain diseases, fractures of the skull and the like, philosophical treatises on the heredity of passion, a "History of Passion and its Terrible Consequences." "Method for Self-Restraint," and Kant's "Art of Overcoming Morbid Feeling by Pure Force of Will." There are literary works, too, but they nearly all treat of fratricide as their subject. Side by side with such thrilling romances as "The Tragic Fate of a Whole Family at Elsterwerda," are Schiller's "Bride of Messina," and Leisowitz's "Julius of Tarent." Even theology is represented by a number of little tracts on the deadly sins and their remission. Besides these, the blue exercise-books contain carefully made extracts and dissertations and morbid reflections upon things experienced and mused over.

Johannes lets his hands drop. "My poor, poor brother!" he murmurs with a deep sigh. Then he feels Trude's hand on his shoulder. She points to a tablet hanging above the door, and asks in an anxious whisper: "What does that signify?"

In large gold letters these words are there inscribed:

Think of Fritz!

Johannes does not answer. He throws himself into a chair, buries his face in his hands and weeps bitterly.

Trude trembles in every limb. She calls him by name, puts her arm round his neck, tries to remove his hands from his face, and, when all this avails nothing, she bursts into tears herself. When he hears her sobbing, he raises his head and looks about in a dazed sort of way. His gaze rests on the clothes hanging upon the wall, boy's clothes of many years ago. He knows them well. His mother used to keep them as relics at the bottom of her linen-press, and once showed them to him with the words: "These were worn by your little dead brother." Since her death the clothes had disappeared. Nor had he ever thought of them again. A shudder runs through his frame.

"Come," he says to Trade, who is still crying to herself, and they both leave the office. Trade wants to get out of the mill forthwith.

"First take the key back," he says.

Together they descend the stairs leading down to the machinery, and, when the key hangs in its old place, they both rush out into the open air as if pursued by furies.

With this hour their intercourse has lost its old harmlessness. They have become participants in guilt. The feeling of guilt rests with terrible weight on their youthful souls. They pity each

other, for each reads the story of his own conscience in the other's silent depression, suppressed sighs and ill-concealed absent-mindedness--but neither can help the other.

How gladly they would confess their fault to Martin.--But it would not do to go to him together and say, "Forgive us--we have sinned"--it would really look too theatrical--and if one of them takes the confession upon himself, he gains no mean advantage over the other. They are both equally closely connected with Martin and whoever is the first to break silence must perforce appear to him as the more upright and less guilty one. Besides, they have vowed absolute secrecy to each other and feel all the less inclined to break their word, as they are afraid to converse openly on the subject.

Thus more and more a sort of clandestine understanding is nurtured between them; every harmless word spoken at table has for them a special, deep significance; every look they exchange becomes an emblem of secret agreement.

Martin notices nothing of all this; only now and again it strikes him that "his two children" have lost a good deal of their old cheerfulness and that they no longer sing so merrily. He makes no remark, however, for he thinks they may have quarreled and are still sulking with one another.

The following week, when Martin has once again shut himself up in his office, Trude takes heart and says: "I say, Hans, it is nonsense for us to fret ourselves. We will let the stupid affair rest."

He makes a melancholy face and says: "If only it were possible!"

She bursts out laughing and he laughs with her; it is "possible," of course, but the love of concealment to which they have pandered will not be shaken off. Every foolish joke gains piquancy by the fact that Martin "on no account" must get to know about it, and when they are whispering with their heads together, they start asunder at the least noise as if they were planning conspiracy.

As yet no word has been spoken, no look exchanged, hardly a thought awakened which need shun the light, but the bloom of innocence has been swept off their souls. In this wise the feast of St. John has come round.

The wind blows sultry. The earth lies as if intoxicated--buried beneath blossoms, reveling in a superabundance of fragrance. The jasmine and guelder-rose bushes appear as though covered with white foam; the spring roses open their chalices, and the limes are putting forth their buds already.

Trude sits on the veranda, has let her work drop into her lap and is a-dreaming. The fragrance of the flowers and the sun's hot glow have confused her senses, but she heeds not that. The flowers' fragrance and the sun's hot breath, she would love to drain all the flower-cups--if only they contained something to drink.

In the mill they have ceased working earlier than usual, for the apprentices want to go to the village to the midsummer night's fête. There is to be dancing and firing of tar-barrels and everyone will enjoy himself to the best of his ability.

Trude sighs. Ah, for a chance of going there too! Martin may stay at home, but Johannes, Johannes of course would have to accompany her there. There he stands at the entrance and nods across at her. Then he throws himself down on the bench opposite--he is tired and hot. He has been working hard.

A few minutes later he jumps up again. "I can't stay here," he says. "It is suffocatingly hot."

"Where else do you want to go?"

"Down to the weir. Will you come too?"

"Yes."

And she throws down her work and takes his arm.

"They are going to dance down in the village to-day," says she.

"I suppose that's where you would like to go too, you puss?"

She wrings her hands and groans, so as to give the most drastic expression to her longing.

"But I cannot have my way; For at home I've got to stay," he hums.

"It's a regular shame," she grumbles, "that I have never yet in my life danced with you.--And I should like to immensely, for you dance well--very well!"

"How do you know that?"

"What a question!" she says with feigned indignation. "Think of that rifle fête three years ago. All the girls told wonders of how well you held them during the dance--not too loose and not too tight;--and that you were tall and good-looking I could see for myself--but what good was all that to me? You overlooked me as utterly as if I were nothing but empty air."

"How old were you at that time?"

She hesitates a little, then says dejectedly: "Fourteen and a half."

"Well, that's the explanation," he laughs. "But I was then already tall and--and--full grown," she answers eagerly. "It wouldn't have hurt you to have whirled me round the room a few times."

"Well, we can make up for it in a fortnight at the rifle fête."

"Yes, can we?" she asks with beaming eyes.

"Martin is one of the patrons of the shooters' company. That is in itself a reason for his being present."

Trude gives vent loudly to her delight; then in sudden perplexity she says: "But I have no dancing shoes."

"Have some made for yourself."

"Oh, our village cobbler is such a clumsy worker."

"Then I will order you a pair from town. You need only give me your measure."

"Will you really? Oh, you dear, darling Hans!" And then she suddenly withdraws her arm, runs forward a few steps, calls out "catch me," and whisks away. Johannes starts in pursuit,--but he is tired--he cannot overtake her. Across the drawbridge of the weir the chase proceeds across on to the vast grass plain, stretching as far as the distant pine wood. Trude dodges him cleverly,--runs past him--and before he can follow, she is once more on this side of the river. Breathlessly she makes a dash for the chain by which the drawbridge is regulated; from on shore--she tears at it with all her might; the wood-work moves creaking on its hinges--and jerks upwards--at the very moment when Johannes springs on to the foot-plank. He staggers, he cries out,--and clutching hold of the main beam, he manages by sheer force to stem its movement just as the gap is opening. Trude has turned as white as a sheet, she stares speechlessly at him, as, gasping for breath, he gazes down into the dark abyss.

"I didn't--think of that, Hans," she stammers with a look which very eloquently pleads forgiveness.

He laughs out loud. A wild, devil-may-care feeling of happiness has come over him.

"Oh you--you!" he cries, opening out his arms. "I shall have you yet." And with a fool-hardy leap he jumps on to the narrow main-beam, which, with its two slanting, roof-shaped sides, spans the river.

"Hans--for God's sake--Hans!"

He does not hear--beneath him is the foaming abyss--he has hard work to keep his balance--he moves forward--he trembles he sways--three more--two more steps only one more daring leap--he is over.

"Now run!" he cries, with a wild shout of glee.

But Trude does not stir. She stares in his direction, paralyzed with terror. Like a tiger he springs towards her--he encircles her with his arms--he presses her to him--she closes her eyes and breathes heavily--then he bends down and lays his hot and thirsting lips upon hers. She gives a loud moan--her body trembles feverishly in his embrace. Then he lets her glide down--his affrighted gaze travels around--has no one seen it? "No, no one!" And what if they have? May Martin's brother not kiss Martin's wife? Did not he himself once require it of him?

She opens her eyes as though awakening from a deep dream. Her eyes avoid his.

"That was not nice of you, Hans," she says softly, "you must never do that to me again!"

He does not answer and stoops to pick up the rose which has fallen from her bosom.

"Let me go home," she says, casting a frightened look around.

They walk along side by side for a while in silence; she gazes into space; he smells the rose he has found.

"Do you like roses?" he continues. She looks at him. "As if you did not know that," her look says.

"By the bye," he goes on gaily, "why do you no longer put flowers at my bed-side now?"

"He has forbidden me," she stammers.

"That alters the case," he replies, crestfallen. Then their conversation comes to a standstill altogether.

On the veranda Martin receives them with a good-natured scolding. He declares he is ravenously hungry, and supper is not yet served.

Trude hurries to the kitchen to give a helping hand herself.... The meal is consumed in silence. The two do not raise their eyes from their plates. An atmosphere of unbearable sultriness oppresses the earth. The hot wind whirls up small dust clouds and bluish grey veils of mist settle down slowly.

Johannes leans his head against the glass of the veranda window, but that is as hot as if it had been all day in a fiery furnace. Then Trude suddenly jumps up.

"Where are you going to?" asks Martin.

"Into the garden," she replies.

After a while they hear her mounting the stairs that lead to the turret room. When she comes out again she gives Johannes a quick, timid look, then takes her seat with downcast eyes.

From the village green come sounds of merry-making and screams of enjoyment, mingled with the squeak of the fiddle and the drone of the double-bass.

"I suppose you'd like to go there, children?" They are both silent and he takes their silence for consent. "Well, then come along," he says, getting up. Trude stretches out her arms in silent anguish, looks across wistfully at Johannes, then with a shake of her head she says, "Don't care about it!"

"Why, what's up?" cried Martin, quite taken aback. "Since when do you get out of the way of dance music? I suppose you two have been squabbling again, eh?"

Johannes laughs curtly and Trude turns away. Suddenly she gets up, says laconically, "Good-night," and disappears.

A little later the brothers, too, part company.

With heavy limbs Johannes mounts the stairs--he opens the door of his room--an intoxicating fragrance of flowers wells towards him. He draws a deep breath and utters a sigh of satisfaction. Then this was the reason for going at such a late hour into the garden! By the side of his pillow stands a huge bunch of rose and jasmine. He drops into bed as if he would like to bury himself beneath this mass of blossoms. For a while he lies a-dreaming quietly to himself, but his breathing becomes more and more labored, his senses grow dim,--at every pulsation a poignant pain darts through his temples,--he feels as though he must succumb beneath this overpowering fragrance.

Exerting all his force of will, he pulls himself up and pushes open a window. But even this brings no calm, no relief. A very chaos of fragrance wafts up to him from the garden--the wind breathes hotly upon him, lukewarm, tingling drops of rain beat upon his face. Down in the village the fires from the tar-barrels shoot fitfully through the nebulous clouds of mist veiling the distance.

Johannes looks down. He is waiting. His heart is beating audibly. His longing appears to him almighty--he will force that window below to open and ... hark! Softly the latch is pushed back, one sash is thrown open, and there, leaning far out, framed by waving unbound tresses, Trude's face appears, straining upwards to him with mute yearning.

One moment--then it has vanished. He knows not--shall he exult, or shall he weep?--Now he may sink into sweet unconsciousness--What can the fragrance harm him now?

He undresses and goes to bed; but before he drops to sleep he once more raises himself up, gropes with a trembling hand for the vase, and buries his face in the flowers.

How like it all is to that first evening, and yet how different! Then he was peaceful and happy; now ...

A suddenly awakened memory makes him start; his fingers clutch the handle of the vase more tightly--he listens and listens--he feels as if that merry laugh which then so softly sounded through the floor, must at this moment again greet his ears--he listens with increasing fear till his whole brain is humming and buzzing--an ugly feeling of hatred and jealousy suddenly uprises within him; and, bursting into a wild laugh, he hurls the vase far away into the middle of the room, where it shatters with a crash.

Next morning Johannes is ashamed of himself. It all seems as if it had been a bad dream. He collects the fragments of the vase, fits them together and resolves to get some cement from the chemist and mend it. Much as he considers the matter, he cannot explain the feeling which prompted him to this act of apparent school-boy folly; he only knows that it was something wicked and loathsome.

He presses his brother's hand more heartily than at other times and gazes silently into his eyes as if to plead forgiveness for some grave crime.

Trude looks pale and as if she had not slept. Her eyes avoid his, and the cup of coffee which she hands him rattles in her trembling hand.

As he can find no better subject, he begins to talk about the dancing shoes, wishing at the same time to sound Martin. He is quite agreeable. Trude is to have her measure taken at once and when she objects to taking off her shoes in Johannes' presence, he angrily calls her an "affected little prude," She is offended, begins to cry and leaves the room. Then towards evening she bashfully appears with her measure and Johannes sends off his letter. The broken vase still weighs heavily on his conscience. When he is alone with her he confesses.

"I say, I've done a clumsy thing."

"What?"

"I have smashed a vase."

"Indeed! was that simply clumsiness?"

"What else should it be?"

"I thought you had done it on purpose," she says, with apparent utter indifference. He gives no answer, and she quietly nods a few times to herself as much as to say, "It seems I was right after all!"

The days pass by. Relations between Johannes and Trude are cooler than they were. They do not avoid each other, they even talk together, but their former happy-go-lucky mode of intercourse is irretrievably lost.

"She is offended because I kissed her," thinks Johannes, but it does not strike him that he too has changed his behavior towards her.

"Children, what's up with you?" says Martin one evening grumblingly. "Have your throats grown rusty, as you never sing now?"

For a few seconds both are silent, then Trude says, half turning towards Johannes, "Will you?" He nods; but as she has not been looking at him she thinks she has had no answer and says, turning towards Martin, "You see, he doesn't want to!"

"Don't I though!" laughs Johannes.

"Then why can't you say so at once?" she answers with a timid attempt at responding to his cheerful tone.

Then she puts herself in position, folds her hands in her lap as she is wont to do when singing, and fixes her eyes on the pigeon-house yonder.

"What shall we sing?" she asks.

"Must we part, beloved maid?"--he suggests.

She shakes her head. "Nothing about love," she says rather pointedly, "that's all so stupid."

He looks at her astonished and after some deliberation she starts a hunting song. He joins in lustily and their voices blend and unite like two waves in the ocean. They themselves marvel at such harmony; they have never sung so well. But they soon come to an end. The Germans have not many folk-songs which are not at the same time love ditties. And finally she has to submit.

"Rose-bush and elder-tree,
When my love comes to me!"

she begins, tacking on a "Jodler." He smiles and looks at her, she blushes and turns away.--She has let herself be caught now.

The two voices grow full of wonderful animation, as though their hearts' pulsation were throbbing through the notes. They swell heavenwards as though impelled by waves of passion, they die down as though the bourne of life were stagnant through intensity of hidden woe.

"No words can e'er express my love,
In silent longing I adore.
Question my eyes, for they will speak;
I love thee now and evermore!"

Why do their eyes suddenly meet? What occasion is there for them both to tremble as though an electric current were passing through their bodies?...

"There is never an hour in my sleeping
When my thoughts are not waking.
Their flight to thee taking,
To thank thee for placing forever
Thy heart in my keeping!"

What intoxicating passion vibrates through the notes!

How the two voices seek each other as if to embrace!

"O'er the mill-stream bends the willow,
In the valley lies the snow,
Sweetest love, 'tis time we parted,
I must leave thee, broken-hearted.
Parting, love, is full of woe!"

The voices die away in tremulous whispers. It is over--longing and hope, the pain of parting and the agony of death, all resounded in these treacherous, swelling chords.

Trude's lips twitch as with suppressed weeping, but her eyes glitter, and suddenly, standing bolt upright, she begins the old, sad miller-song about the golden house that stands "over on yonder hill."

Johannes starts, and his voice falls in tremulously. They sing through the first verse and begin the second:

"Down there in yonder valley,
The mill-wheel grinds away,
'Tis love that it is grinding
By night and all the day.
The mill-wheel now is broken--"

Suddenly--a scream--a fall--Trude has dropped down in front of the bench and is sobbing convulsively in the corner with her head pressed against the wood-work.

Both brothers jump up--Martin takes her head between both his hands, and, quite upset, he stammers disconnected, confused words--but she only sobs more violently. He stamps his foot on the ground in despair and, turning towards Johannes, who is deathly pale, he cries; "What ails the child?"

Then Trude flings both her arms around his neck, raises herself up by him and hides her tear-stained face upon his breast, as if seeking refuge. He strokes her dishevelled hair caressingly and tries to calm her; but he does not understand the art of comforting, poor Martin; each one of his half-mumbled words sounds like suppressed scoldings. She lets her head sink back towards the wall of foliage, her lips move, and, as if she were continuing the song, she murmurs, still half choked with sobs:

"The mill-wheel--now--is broken!"

"No, my child, it is not broken," his eyes filling with tears, "it will not be broken--not *ours*--it will go on turning--as long as we live."--

She shakes her head passionately and closes her eyes, as though beholding visions.

"And what makes such things enter your head?" he continues. "Has not everything turned out better than we thought? Isn't Johannes with us too?--Don't we live together in happiness and content?--and work from morn till night?--and--and--aren't your people comfortable too? And don't we take care that your father has a good income--and"--

He groans and wipes the perspiration from his brow. He can think of nothing more--and now appeals to Johannes, who is standing with his face turned away and his head resting against the pillar at the entrance of the veranda.

"Why will you always sing such sad songs?" he growls at him. "I myself got to feel quite--I

don't know what--when you began with them--and she--she is only a weak woman."

Trude shakes her head as if to say, "Don't scold!" Then she raises herself, murmurs, without looking up, a soft "Good-night," and goes into the house.

Martin follows her.

Johannes buries his head in his arms and dreams to himself. He sees her again as she raises herself to her full height with her eyes all a-gleam,--then suddenly sank down as if struck by lightning. Then he reproaches himself that he did not hasten to her side sooner, to prevent her from falling, for he was nearest to her, and not only as regards space!

Not only as regards space! As by a lurid flame--horrible, bloody-red--his brain is suddenly illumined! Now he understands what feelings inspired him on that midsummer night--why he flung the vase to the ground--he makes a movement as if he would shatter it a second time!--It is only for one moment--a moment of hellish torture--then the flame is suddenly extinguished, there is darkness once more--intense, pain-penetrated darkness!--He passes his hand over his brow, as if to fire the flame anew, but all remains dark,--and dark and mysterious remains to him what he has just experienced. He feels as though he must cry out, as if he must confide to the night this unintelligible agony in which he is wrestling. He drops on to his knees, on the very same spot where Trude sank down, rests his head on the edge of the bench and moans softly to himself.

Suddenly a door in the house slams. His brother's steps resound in the entrance.

He jumps up and sits down on the bench. Martin's figure, darkly outlined, appears on the veranda.

"Brother, brother!" Johannes calls out to him.

"Are you there, my boy?" the latter answers and throws himself with a deep sigh on to the bench. "Well, things are nearly all right again now--she has cried herself to sleep and now she is lying there quite calmly and her breath too comes quietly and regularly. I stood for a while at her bedside and looked at her. I am quite at a loss! Her child-like mind used to lie before me as clear as a mirror--and now all at once--what can it be? However much I think about it, I don't seem to get on to the right track. Perhaps she troubles because as yet there is no prospect of--of--yes, probably that's it. But I have always kept my longing quite to myself--didn't want to hurt her feelings--for of course, she can't alter the matter. And really, if one thinks about it, she is but a child herself and much too young to fulfil maternal duties. Why, one must have patience!" Thus he tries to talk away his soul's secret sorrow. Johannes remains silent. His heart is so full, so full. He wants to give his brother some proof of his affection and knows not how? He too has his own pain which he wants to work off, and, grasping Martin's hand, he says from the depths of his soul: "Oh, everything, everything will come right again!"

"Of course, why shouldn't it?" Martin stammers in consternation. He shakes his head, looks down thoughtfully for a while, then says, with an uneasy laugh: "Go to bed, Johannes.--That broken mill-wheel is haunting your imagination."

Next day Trude is lying ill in bed. She will see no one--even Martin as little as possible. Johannes slinks about unable to settle down to anything. Their meals are taken in monotonous silence. The shadows close down more and more round the Rockhammer mill.

But the sun breaks forth once more. On the fourth day Trude is half-way convalescent again, and Johannes may go into her room for a talk with her.

He finds her sitting at the window, with a white dress lying across her lap. She is pale and weak yet, but her features are glorified by an expression of peaceful melancholy such as convalescents are apt to wear.

Smiling, she puts out her hand to Johannes.

"How are you now?" he asks softly.

"Well--as you see," she replies, pointing to the white dress; "my thoughts are already occupied with the ball."

"What ball?" he asks, astonished.

"What a bad memory you have!" she says with an attempt at a joke. "Why, next Sunday is the rifle-fête."

"Yes, so it is."

"Perhaps you're not even looking forward to dancing with me?"

"Indeed I am!"

"Very much?--Tell me! Very much?"

"Very much!"

A child-like smile of pleasure flits across her pale, delicate face; she fingers the laces and frills, with undisguised delight at the white, airy texture.

This physical exhaustion seems to have restored to her mind its former, child-like harmlessness, and with a certain degree of anxiety she begins to enquire about her dancing shoes. She is once more, to all appearance, just the same girlishly thoughtless creature who once put out her hand with such unconstrained simple-heartedness to bid Johannes welcome.

He sits down opposite to her, lets the texture of the ball-dress glide through his fingers, and listens to her prattling with a quiet smile.

And everything she tells him is replete with sunshine and the very joy of existence. This had been her wedding dress which she had made and trimmed herself, for she could do that as well as anybody. She would have liked to wear silk, as befitted the bride of the rich miller Rockhammer, but she could not scrape together sufficient money, and as for letting her intended give her her wedding dress--well, her pride would not permit that. To-day she felt almost sorry to undo the seams, for how many foolish hopes and dreams were not sewn into them?--But what else could she do?--she had got so much stouter since she was a married woman.

Then the conversation flies off at a tangent to the approaching rifle-fête, touches on her new acquaintances in the village and occasionally wanders off to the shoemaker's place in the town; but ever and again she comes back to the time of her engagement and tarries over the moods and events of those blissful days.

She seems to feel just like a young girl again. The smile that plays so dreamily and full of presage about her lips, is like the smile of a bride--as if the fete to which she is looking forward were her wedding.

All her thoughts henceforth tend towards the ball. While she is entirely recovering, while her eyes grow clear, and the color returns to her cheeks, she is meditating by day and by night how she shall adorn herself; she is dreaming of the bliss which in those looked-for hours is to dawn upon her, as though it were something totally new and beyond all comprehension.

Trumpets sound; clarionets shriek; the big drum joins in with its dull, droning thud.

Midst clinking and clanking, midst skipping and tripping, the guild march along the street in solemn procession. On in front ride two heralds on horseback--Franz Maas and Johannes Rockhammer, the two Uhlans of the Guard. Nothing would induce them to give up their privilege--even did it mean rack and ruin to the guild.

Franz's countenance is beaming, but Johannes looks serious--indifferent almost; what does he care about all these people from whom he has become estranged? He salutes no one, his gaze rests on none; but he is searching, he is mustering the lines of people,--and now, suddenly--his features glow with pride and happiness--he bows, he lowers his sword in salute:--over there at the street corner, with rosy-red cheeks, with beaming eyes, waving her handkerchief, stands she whom he seeks--his brother's wife.

She is laughing--she is beckoning--she pulls herself up by the railing, she jumps on to the curbstone--she wants to watch him till he disappears in the whirling clouds of dust. With all this she nearly, very nearly, forgets Martin, who is walking along close to the banner. But then, why does he go marching on so quietly and stiffly, why does he stick his head so far into his collar?--Over there in the distance Johannes is beckoning just once more with his sword.

The rifle-range, the goal of the procession, is situated close to the fir-copse--which, seen from the weir, frames the meadow landscape,--and hardly a thousand paces straight across from the Rockhammer mill, which seems to beckon from over the alder bushes by the river. If those stupid rifle people did not make such a deafening noise one might easily hear the rushing of the waters....

"If only this hocus-pocus were already over," observed Johannes, and casts a longing look towards the "ball-room," a huge square tent-erection, whose canvas roof rises high above the mass of smaller stalls and tents grouped around. Not till afternoon, when the "King" has been solemnly proclaimed, may the members' friends enter the festival ground. The hours pass by; shots resound at intervals along the boundary of the wood. At noon comes Johannes' turn. He shoots--at random--in spite of the flowers which Trude stuck into his gun. "Flowers for luck," she had said, and Martin had stood by and smiled, as one smiles at childish play. ... As soon as his duties as a rifleman are fulfilled, he turns his back on the ranges and betakes himself into the wood, where nothing is to be heard of all the shouting and chattering and there is no sound but the echo of the shooting softly dying away into the air.... He throws himself down upon the mossy ground and stares up at the branches of the fir-trees, whose slender needles glisten and gleam in the rays of the midday sun, like brightly polished little knives. Then he closes his eyes and dreams. How strange the whole world has become to him! And how far removed everything seems which he ever lived through before! Not indeed that he has lived through much--women and care have played no great part in his life hitherto: and yet how rich, how full of glowing color it has always appeared to him! Now an abyss has swallowed up everything, and over the abyss

rose-colored mists are undulating....

Two hours may have elapsed, when he hears distant trumpet blasts proclaim the election of a new king. He jumps up. Only half an hour more; then Trude will be coming.

At the shooting-stand he learns that the dignity of "king" has been allotted to his friend Franz Maas. He hears it as if in a dream; what does it concern him? His gaze wanders incessantly towards the highroad, where, through the dust and the glaring sun, crowds of gaily dressed female figures are approaching on foot and in carriages.

"Are you looking out for Trude?" asks Martin's voice suddenly, close behind him.

He looks up startled from his brooding. "Good gracious, boy, what's up with you?" asks Martin laughingly. "Have you taken your bad shot so much to heart, or are you sleeping in broad daylight?"

Martin has one of his good days to-day. Meeting all these people--he is one of the chief dignitaries of the guild--has roused him from his usual moodiness,--his eyes glisten and a jovial smile plays about his broad mouth. If only he did not look so awkward in his Sunday clothes! His hat sits right on his forehead, leaving full play to a bunch of bristly hair sticking up curiously over the brim, and below that there appear the white tapes of his shirt-front, which have worked out from under his coat collar.

"There she comes, there she comes," he suddenly shouts, waving his hat.

The flashing carriage, drawn by a pair of splendid Lithuanian bays, is the Rockhammer state coach, which Martin had had built for his wedding. Sitting within it--that white figure reclining with such proud dignity in one corner, and looking about with such distant seriousness--that is she, "the rich mistress of Rockhammer," as the people all round are whispering to each other.

"Look--Trude is giving herself airs," says Martin softly, pulling Johannes' sleeve.

At the same moment she discovers the brothers, and, throwing her affected bearing to the winds, she jumps up in the carriage, waves her sunshade in one hand, her kerchief in the other, and laughs and gives vent to her delight and prods the coachman with the point of her parasol to make him drive faster. Then, when the carriage stops, she gives herself no time to wait till the door is opened, but jumps onto the splash-board and from there straight into Martin's arms. She is in a state of feverish excitement; her breath comes hot; her lips move to speak, but her voice fails her.

"Quietly, child, quietly," says Martin, and strokes her hair, which to-day falls upon her bare neck in a mass of little ringlets. Johannes stands motionless, lost in contemplation of her.

How lovely she is!

The white, gauzy dress floats round her exquisite figure like an airy veil! And that white neck!--and those little dimples at her bosom!--and those glorious plump arms on which there trembles a light, silvery fluff!--and this plastic bust, which rises and falls like a marble wave!... She appears unapproachably beautiful, every inch a woman yet every inch majesty, for in his innocent mind the ideas "woman" and "majesty" are synonymous, and mean for him an indefinable something which fills him with bliss and with fear. His eyes are suddenly opened and are dazzled as yet with gazing at this regal type of female loveliness, beside which he has hitherto walked as one blind. How lovely she is! How lovely is woman! And now a torrent of confused words streams from her unfettered lips. She had nearly died of impatience.--And that stupid big clock,--and her lonely dinner,--and those silly dancing shoes which would not fit! They are too tight; they pinch frightfully--"but they look lovely, don't they?"

And she lifts up the hem of her skirt a little to show the works of art, light blue, high-heeled little shoes, tied across the instep with blue silk bows.

"They seem too short!" Martin remarks, with a doubtful shake of his head.

"That's just what they *are*," she laughs, "my toes burn as if they were on fire! But I shall dance all the better for it--what do *you* say, Johannes?" And she closes her eyes for a moment as though to recall vanished dreams. Then she hooks her arm in Martin's, and asks to be taken to her tent. The most notable families of the district have provided themselves with private dwellings--light huts or canvas tents which afford them night shelter, for the fête commonly drags on till early day. Trude had been herself the day before on the festival ground to superintend the erection of her tent; she had also had furniture brought in and wreathed the entrance gaily with leafy garlands. She may well be proud of her handiwork, for the Rockhammer tent is the finest of the whole collection.

While Martin seeks to wedge his way through the crowd, she turns to Johannes and says quickly and softly:

"Are you satisfied, Hans? Am I to your liking?"

He nods.

"Very much. Tell me--very much?"

"Very much."

She draws a deep breath, then laughs to herself in silent satisfaction.

The miller's lovely wife makes a sensation among the crowd. The strange farmers and land-proprietors stand and stare at her--the burghers' wives secretly nudge each other with their elbows; the young fellows from the village awkwardly pull off their hats; a whispering and murmuring passes through the throng wherever she appears. With serious mien and affecting a certain dignity, she walks along, leaning on Martin's arm, from time to time shaking back the curls which wave over her shoulders,--and when, in so doing, she throws back her head, she looks like a queen, or rather like a spirited child which is playing the part of a queen in a fairy tale, and hardly feels comfortable in the rôle.

When an hour later the first notes of the fiddles are heard, she calls out with a cry of delight! "Hans, now I belong to you."

Martin warns her to beware of cold and other evils, but in the midst of his speeches they are off and away. Then he resigns himself, pours himself out a good glass of Hungarian wine, and stretches himself on the sofa to take some rest.

All sorts of pleasant thoughts flit through his head. Hasn't everything arranged itself happily and satisfactorily since Johannes came to live at the mill? Have not even his own bad hours of tragic presentiment and haunting terror become less and less frequent? Is he not visibly reviving, infected by the harmless merriment of those two? Is not this very day the best proof that his antipathy to strange people has disappeared, that he has learnt to be merry when others are merry-making?--And Trude--how happy she is at his side!--That evening certainly!--Well, what of that! Women are frail creatures, subject to a thousand varying moods! And how quickly things have come right again! The words which Johannes spoke to him that night, come back to him; he clinks his full glass against the two empty ones which the youngsters have left behind them: "Good luck to you both! May our happy triple alliance continue to our lives' end!"--Meanwhile Trude and Johannes have squeezed themselves through the closely packed crowd, as far as the entrance to the dancing-room. Sounding waves of music swell towards them; like a hot human breath the air from within is wafted in their direction. In the semi-obscurity of the tent the couples are whirling along in one dense crowd, and flit past them like shadowy forms.

Johannes walks as one a-dreaming. He hardly dares to let his gaze rest upon Trude; for even yet that mysterious awe has complete possession of him and seems to bind him round with iron fetters.

"You are so quiet to-day, Hans," she whispers, nestling with her face against his sleeve. He is silent.

"Have I done anything to displease you!"

"Nothing--no indeed!" he stammers.

"Then come, let us dance!"

At the moment when he lays his hand upon her she gives a start; then with a deep sigh she lets herself sink into his arms. And now they are whirling along. She leans her face with a deep-drawn breath upon his breast. Just in front of her left eye there flutters the rosette which he wears to-day as a member of the rifle-guild; the white silk ribbon trembles close to her eyelashes. She moves her head a little to one side and looks up at him.

"Do you know how I feel?" she murmurs.

"Well?"

"As if you were carrying me through the clouds."

And then, when they have to stop, she says: "Come out quickly, so that I need not dance with anyone else!"

She clutches hold of his hand, while he makes a passage for her through the crowd of people. Outside, she takes his arm, and walks at his side proudly and happily with glowing cheeks and dancing eyes. She laughs, she chatters, she jests, and he keeps pace with her to the best of his ability.--In the heat of the dance his bashfulness has entirely melted away. A wild gladness fires his veins. To-day she is his with every thought and feeling, his only, as he can feel by the trembling of her arm, which rests upon his more firmly with secret, sweet pressure; he can see it in the most gleaming glamour of her eyes as she raises them to his.

After a time she asks, somewhat reluctantly: "I say, mustn't we have a look what Martin is doing?"

"Yes, you are right," he replies eagerly. But nothing comes of this good resolution. Every time they happen to pass the tent something remarkable is sure to be taking place in the opposite direction, which gives them an opportunity of forgetting their intention.

Then all of a sudden, Martin himself comes towards them, beaming with pleasure and surrounded by a number of village inhabitants whom he is taking along with him to stand them treat. "Hallo, children!" he says, "I am just going to remove my general headquarters to the 'Crown' Innkeeper's booth; if you want a drink, come along with me."

Trude and Johannes exchange a rapid glance of understanding and simultaneously beg to be excused.

"Good-bye then, children, and enjoy yourselves thoroughly!" With that he goes off.

"I have never seen him in such good spirits," remarks Trude, laughing. "Indeed, no one could grudge them to him," says Johannes in a gentle voice, looking affectionately after his brother. He wants to kill the gnawing which has awakened within him at sight of Martin.

Evening has come on. The festive crowd is bathed in purple light. The wood and the meadow are ruddy red.

In a lonely nook at the meadow's edge, Trude stops and looks with dazzled gaze towards the faintly glowing sun.

"Ah, if only it would not set for us today!" she cries, stretching forth her arms.

"Well, command it not to!" says Johannes.

"Sun, I command thee to stay with us!"

And as the red ball sinks lower and lower, she suddenly shivers and says: "Do you know what idea just came into my head? That we should never see it rise again!" Then she laughs aloud. "I know it is all nonsense! Come and dance."

And they return to the dancing-tent. A new dance has just commenced. Fired by longing, entranced by contemplation of each other, they whirl along and disappear in a dark little corner near the musicians' platform, which they have chosen in order to avoid the searching gaze of the other dancers, who are all dying to make the acquaintance of the miller's lovely wife.

Trude's hair has loosed itself and is fluttering about unbound; in her eyes is a faint glow, as of intoxication: her whole being seems pervaded by the ecstasy of the moment.

"If only my foot did not burn like very hell-fire," she says once as Johannes takes her back to her place.

"Then rest awhile."

She laughs aloud, and when at the same moment Franz Maas comes to claim the dance of honor in his capacity of "rifle-king," she throws herself into his arms and whirls away.

Johannes puts his hand to his burning brow, and looks after the couple, but the lights and the figures melt away before his eyes into one heaving chaos: everything seems to be turning round and round--he staggers--he has to clutch hold of a pillar to prevent himself from falling; and when at that moment Franz Maas returns with Trude, he begs him to take charge of his sister-in-law for half an hour; he must go out for a whiff of fresh air.

He steps out of the hot, close tent, in which two candelabra filled with tallow candles diffuse an unbearable smoke--out into the clear, cool night. But here too are noise and fiddling! In the shooting booths the bolts of the air-guns are rattling, from the gaming tables comes the hoarse screaming of their owners, trying to allure people, and the merry-go-round spins along in the darkness, laden with all its glittering tawdriness and accompanied by shouting and clanging.

In between everything sways the black, surging crowd.

Behind the crests of the pine wood, which silently and gloomily towers above all the tumult, the sky is all aflame with glorious yellow light. Half an hour more and the moon will be pouring its smiling beams over the scene. Johannes walks along slowly between the tents.--In front of the "Crown" host's booth he stops and looks in through the window. But when he sees Martin sitting with a deeply flushed face amidst a swarm of rollicking carousers, he creeps back into the darkness, as if he were afraid to meet him.

From the adjacent tent comes the sound of noisy singing. He hesitates for a moment, then enters, for his tongue cleaves to the roof of his mouth. He is received with a loud shout of delight. At a long beer-bedabbled table sits a host of his former schoolfellows, rowdy fellows, some of them, whom as a rule he seeks to avoid. They surround him; they drink to him; they press him to join their circle. "Why do you make yourself so scarce, Johannes?" one of them screams from the

opposite end of the table, "and where do you stick of an evening?"

"He dangles at the apron-strings of his lovely sister-in-law," sneers another. "Leave my sister-in-law out of the game," cries Johannes with knitted brows. These proceedings sicken him; this hoarse screaming offends his ear; these coarse jests hurt him. He pours down a few glasses of cool beer and goes outside, with great difficulty succeeding in shaking off the importunate fellows.

He saunters toward the boundary of the wood and stares into its obscurity, already beginning to be animated by pale lunar reflections; then he proceeds for some distance beneath the trees, deeply inhaling the soft, aromatic fragrance of the pines. He is determined that by main force he will master this mysterious intoxication which seems to fever his whole being; but the further he betakes himself away from the festival ground the more does his unrest increase. Just as he is about to enter the dancing-room he sees Franz Maas hurrying towards him in breathless excitement. A vague presentiment of disaster dawns within him.

"What has happened?" he calls out to him.

"It's a good thing I've found you. Your sister-in-law has been taken ill."

"For heaven's sake! Where have you taken her?"

"Martin led her to your tent."

"How did it happen? How did it happen?"

"Some time before, I noticed that she had become pale and quiet, and when I asked her what was the matter, she said her foot hurt her. But in spite of that she would not sit still, and, while I was dancing with her, she suddenly broke down in the middle of the room."

"And then? What then?"

"I raised her up and drew her as quickly as possible to her chair, while I sent some one off to fetch Martin."

"Why didn't you send for me, man?"

"Firstly I didn't know where you were, and then, of course, it was the proper thing to send word first to her husband."

Johannes breaks into a shrill laugh. "Very proper, but what then?"

"She opened her eyes even before Martin arrived. The first thing she did was to send away the women who were crowding round her! then she whispered to me, 'Don't tell him that I fainted;' and then when he came hurrying in, looking quite pale, she went to meet him apparently quite cheerfully and said, 'My shoe hurts me; it is nothing else.'"

"And then?"

"Then he took her outside. But I just happened to see how she burst out sobbing and hid her face on his shoulder. Then I thought to myself, 'God knows what else may be hurting her.'"
Johannes hears no further. Without a word of thanks to his friend he rushes off.

The canvas which covers the entrance to the Rockhammer tent is let down low. Johannes listens for a moment. Soft weeping mingled with Martin's soothing voice is audible from the interior, he tries to tear the curtain open, but it does not give way; it is evidently fastened down with a peg, "Who is there?" calls Martin's voice from the other side.

"I--Johannes!"

"Stay outside."

Johannes winces. This "stay outside" has given him a very stab at his heart. When there is a chance of being at her side to help her in her trouble,--of giving her peace and comfort, he is to "stay outside." He grates his teeth and stares with hungry eyes at the curtain, through the apertures of which a faint red gleam pierces.

"Johannes!" Martin's voice is heard anew.

"What do you want?"

"Go and see if our carriage is here."

He does as he is bid. He is just good enough to go errands! He inspects the rows of conveyances, and, when he does not find what he is seeking, he returns to the tent.

Now the curtain is drawn aside. There she stands--a little transparent shawl about her shoulders, looking pale and so beautiful.

"Just as I expected," says Martin, when he reports to him--"the carriage wasn't ordered till daybreak."

"But what now? Does Trude want to go?" he asks anxiously.

"Trude must!" says she, giving him a look out of her tear-stained eyes, which are already trying to smile again.

"Resign yourself to it, my child," answers Martin, stroking her hair. "If it were only the foot, it would not matter. But your crying just now--all this excitement--I think your illness is still hanging about you and rest will do you good. If only it did not take so long to fetch the carriage! I believe it would be best if you could walk the short distance across the fields--of course, only if you have no more pain. Can you manage it?"

Trude gives Johannes a look; then nods eagerly.

"The air is warm, the grass is dry," Martin continues, "and Johannes can accompany you."

Trude gives a start, and he feels his blood mount in a hot wave to his head. His eyes seek hers, but she avoids his glance.

"You can easily be here again in half an hour, my dear boy," says Martin, who takes Johannes' silence to mean vexation. He shakes his head, and declares, with a look at Trude, that he too has had enough of it now.

"Well then, good speed to you, children," says Martin, "and, when I have disbanded my party, I will follow!"

Johannes sends a look into the distance; the plain which lies before him, swathed in silver veils of moonlight, appears to him like an abyss over which mists are brewing; he feels as if the arm which is just being pushed so gently and caressingly through his were dragging him down--down into the deepest depths.

"Good-night," he murmurs, half turned away from his brother.

"Aren't you even going to shake hands?" asked Martin, with playful reproach, and, when Johannes hesitatingly extends his right hand, he gives it a hearty shake. What pain such a shake of the hand can inflict!

The din of the fête more and more dies away into the distance. The many-voiced tumult becomes a dull roaring in which only the shrill tinkle of the merry-go-round is distinguishable, and when the dance-music, which has been silent so long, commences anew, it drowns everything else with its piercing trumpet-blasts.

But even that grows more and more indistinct, and the big drum alone, which hitherto has played only a modest part, now gains ascendancy over the other instruments, for its dull, droning beat travels furthest into the distance. Silently they walk beside each other--neither ventures to address the other. Trude's arm trembles in his; her eyes rest upon the mists which rise up in the greenish light from the meadows.

She steps along bravely, though she limps a little and from time to time gives vent to a low moan.

They have perhaps been walking for about five minutes when she turns around and points with outstretched hand towards the twinkling lights of the festival ground, that glisten against the black back-ground of the pine-wood. The merry-go-round is spinning its glittering hoop round, and the canvas partition of the dancing-room sparkles like a curtain of woven flames.

"Look, how lovely!" she whispers timidly.

He nods.

"Johannes!"

"What is it, Trade?"

"Don't be cross with me!"

"Why--should I?"

"Why did you go away from the dancing?"

"Because it was too hot for me in the room."

"Not because I danced with some one else?"

"Oh! dear no!"

"You know, Hans, I suddenly felt so lonely and forsaken that it was all I could do to keep from crying. He might have said he didn't want me to dance with anyone else, I said to myself--for whom else did I go to the fête but for him? For whom did I adorn myself but for him? And my foot hurt me a thousand times worse than before; and then suddenly--well, you know yourself what happened."

He sets his teeth; his arms twitch, as if he must press her to him. Her head leans softly against his shoulder; her shining eyes beam up at him--when suddenly she gives a loud cry: her injured foot which she can only just drag along the ground, has hit against a pointed stone. She tries to keep up, but her arm slips away from his, and overcome by pain, she lets herself drop on to the grass.

"Just for a moment I should like to lie here," she says, and wipes the cold perspiration from her brow; then she throws herself down on her face and lies there for a while motionless. He grows frightened when he sees her thus. "Come on," he exhorts her, "you will catch cold here."

She stretches out her right hand to him with her face turned away and says, "Help me up," but when she attempts to walk, she breaks down once more. "You see, it won't do," she says with a faint smile.

"Then I will carry you," he cries, opening out his arms wide.

A sound, half of pain, half of joy, escapes her lips; next moment her body lies upraised in his arms. She sighs deeply, and, closing her eyes, leans her head against his cheek--her bosom heaves upon his breast; her waving hair ripples over his neck; her warming breath caresses his glowing countenance. More firmly does he press her trembling body to him. Away, away further, ever further away, even though his strength fail! Away, to the ends of the earth! His breath becomes labored, acute pains dart through his side, before his eyes there floats a red mist--he feels as though he were about to drop down and give up his ghost--but he must go on--further, further.--

Over there the river beckons; the weir's hollow roaring comes through the silent night; the splashing drops of water sparkle in the moonbeams.

She lets her head fall back upon his arm; a melancholy yet blissful smile plays about her half-opened lips; and now she opens her eyes, in whose somber depths the reflection of the moon is floating.

"Where are we?" she murmurs.

"At the river's edge," he gasps.

"Put me down."

"I must--I cannot."

Close to the water's edge he lays her down; then he stretches himself full length on the grass, and presses his hand to his heart and struggles for breath. His temples are throbbing, he is in a fair way to lose consciousness; but, pulling himself together with an effort, he bends his body towards the river, ladles out a handful of water and bathes his forehead with it.

That restores him to consciousness. He turns to Trude. She has buried her face in her hands and is moaning softly to herself.

"Does it hurt very much?" he asks.

"It burns!"

"Dip your foot in the water. That will cool it."

She drops her hands and looks at him in surprise.

"It has done me good," he says, pointing to his forehead, from which single drops of water are still trickling down. Then she bends forward and tries to pull off her shoe, but her hand trembles, and she grows faint with the effort. "Let me help you," he says. One pull--her shoe flies to one side; her stocking follows, and, pushing herself forward to the very edge of the bank, she dips her bare foot up to the ankle in the cooling stream.

"Oh, how refreshing it is!" she murmurs with a deep breath; then, turning to right and to left, she seeks a support for her body.

"Lean against me," he says. Then she lets her head drop upon his shoulder. His arm twitches, but he does not dare to twine it round her waist; he hardly dares to move. His breath comes heavily; his eyes stare on to the stream, through the crystal waters of which Trude's white foot gleams like a mother-o'-pearl shell resting in its depths.

They sit there in silence. Just in front of them, at the weir, the water's rush and roar. The spray forms a silver bridge from bank to bank, and the waves break at their feet. From time to

time the soft night-breeze wafts hushed music towards them, and the monotonous droning of the big drum comes to them mingled with the dull note of the bittern.

Suddenly a shudder passes through her frame.

"What is the matter with you?"

"I am shivering."

"Take your foot out of the water at once." She does as she is bid, then draws from her pocket the dainty little cambric handkerchief which she had for the ball. "That is no good," he says, and with a trembling hand pulls out his own coarser handkerchief. "Let me dry you!" Silently, with a dumb, pleading look, she submits, and when he feels the soft, cool foot between his hands, everything seems to whirl before him; a sort of fiery madness comes over him, and, bending down to the ground, he presses his fevered brow upon it.

"What are you doing?" she cries out.

He starts up. In wild ecstasy their eyes meet--one wild, exuberant cry, and they lie in each other's arms. His kisses burn hot upon her lips. She laughs and cries and takes his head between her hands and strokes his hair and leans her cheek against his cheek and kisses his forehead and both his eyes.

"Oh, my darling, my darling! How I love you!"

"Are you my very own?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Shall you always love me?"

"Always! Always! And you--you will never again leave me alone like to-day so that Martin--"

Abruptly she stops short. Silence weighs upon them! What terrible silence! The big drum drones in the distance. The waters roar.

Two deathly pale faces gaze at each other.

And now she screams aloud. "Oh Lord, my God!" is the cry which resounds through the night.

Loudly moaning, he covers his face with his hands. Tearless sobs shake his frame. Before his eyes everything is aflame--aflame with a blood-red light as if the whole world were set on fire. Now it is all suddenly made clear as day to him! What dawned mysteriously within him in yonder midsummer night, what flashed like lightning through his brain on that evening when Trude broke down sobbing in the middle of her song--all now arises before him like a glowing ball of fire. Every flame speaks of hate; every ray flashes with torturing jealousy through his soul, every gleam pierces his heart with fear and guilty consciousness.

Trude has thrown herself face downwards upon the ground, and is weeping--weeping bitterly.

With bowed head and folded hands he gazes upon her fair form, lying before him in an agony of woe.

"Come home," he says tonelessly. She lifts her head and plants her arms firmly upon the ground; but when he attempts to help her up, she screams out: "Do not touch me!" Twice, thrice, she endeavors to stand upright, but again and again she breaks down. Then without a word she stretches forth her arms, and suffers herself to be drawn up by him. In silence he guides her feeble steps to the mill. Her tears are dried up. The rigidness of despair has settled upon her deathly pale features. She keeps her face averted and resistingly allows him to drag her along. Before the threshold of the veranda she loosens her arm from his, and, with what little strength is left to her, she darts away from him towards the house-door. Her figure disappears among the dark foliage.

The knocker gives forth its dull beats. Once--twice, then shuffling footsteps become audible in the entrancehall; the key is turned; a dark yellow ray of light beams out into the moonlight night.

"For heaven's sake, madam, how pale you look!" the maid ejaculates in a terrified voice.... The door closes with a bang.

For a long time Johannes keeps on staring at the place where she has disappeared.--A cold shiver which runs through him from head to foot rouses him at length. Absentmindedly he slinks across the moonlit yard,--strokes the dogs that with joyous barking drag at their chains,--casts an indifferent glance towards the motionless mill-wheel, beneath the shadows of which the waters glide along like glittering snakes. Some indefinable impulse drives him forward and away. The ground of the mill-yard burns beneath his feet. He wanders across the meadows, back to the weir--to the spot where he was sitting with Trude. On the grass there gleams her blue silk shoe, and not far from it lies her long, fine stocking. So she must have limped home with her bare foot and probably is not even conscious of the fact! He breaks into a shrill laugh, takes up both and

flings them far into the foaming waters.

Whither shall he turn now? The mill has closed its portals upon him forevermore. Whither can he go now? Shall he lay himself down to rest under some haystack? He cannot sleep even if he does. Stay! He knows of a jolly set of fellows--though he despised them a little while ago, they will just suit him now.

When, at two o'clock in the morning, Martin Rockhammer has shaken himself free of his drinking companions and is stepping, in the happiest of moods, out on to the festival ground, when the bluish-gray light of dawning day is beginning to illumine the doings of these night-birds, he is met by a band of drunken louts, who, singing obscene songs, break in single file through the ranks of the promenading couples. They are headed by the locksmith Garmann, a fellow of bad repute who practices poaching by night and in whose train now follow other good-for-nothing scamps. Intending to turn them out of the place forthwith, Martin steps towards them. But suddenly he stops as if turned to stone; his arms drop down at his sides: there in the midst of this crew, with glassy eyes and drunken gestures staggers his brother Johannes.

"Johannes!" he cries out, horrified.

He starts back; his drink-inflamed face grows ashy pale; a frightened gleam flickers in his eyes--he trembles--he stretches forth his arm as if to ward him off--and staggers back--two--three paces. Martin feels his anger disappear. This picture of misery arouses his pity. He follows after Johannes, and, taking him by the arm, he says in loving tones: "Come, brother; it is late, let us go home." But Johannes shrinks back in horror at the touch of his hand, and fixing his gaze upon him in mortal agony, he says in a hoarse voice: "Leave me--I do not wish to--I do not wish to have anything more to do with you--I am no longer your brother." Martin starts up, clutches with his two hands at the slab of the table near him and then drops down upon the nearest bench as if felled by the stroke of an axe.

Johannes, however, rushes away. The forest closes in upon him.

Henceforth come sad days for the Rockhammer mill.

When Martin reached home on that morning, when he found the whole house quiet, as quiet as a mouse, he took the key of the mill from the wall and slunk off to that melancholy place which he had built up as the temple of his guilt. There his people found him at midday, pale as the whitewashed walls, his head bowed upon his hands, muttering to himself incessantly: "Retribution for Fritz! Retribution for Fritz!" The phantom, the old terrible phantom, which he had thought was laid for evermore, has cast itself upon him anew and is twining its strangling claw about his neck.

The men had to drag him almost by force from his den. With weary, halting steps he staggered out of the mill. His wife he found crouching in a corner, with hollow cheeks and gaunt, terrified eyes. Then he took her face between his two hands, looked for a while with stern looks at the trembling woman, and once more murmured the mournful refrain: "Retribution for Fritz! Retribution for Fritz!"

When she heard his ominous words, a cold shiver ran through her frame. "Does he know? Does he not know? Has Johannes confessed to him! Has he found out by chance? Does he perhaps only suspect?" Since that time her soul is fretting itself away; her body repines in fear of this man and in yearning for that other, whom love of her has driven away. She grows pale and thin; her cheeks fade. She steals about like a somnambulist. Round her eyes bluish grooves are outlined, and grow broader and broader, and about her mouth is graven a tiny wrinkle which keeps on twitching and moving like a dancing will-o'-the-wisp.

Martin remarks nothing of all this. His whole being is absorbed in sorrow for his lost brother. During the first few days, he has hoped from hour to hour for his return--hoped that he was possibly quite unconscious of the words he spoke in the madness of intoxication. As for him--he would verily be the very last to remind him of them. But when day after day passes without any news of Johannes, his fear grows more and more terrible, he begins to search for the lost one;--at first with little result, for the intercourse between one village and the next is very slight. But gradually one report after another reaches the mill. To-day he has been seen here, yesterday, there--erring restlessly from place to place but always surrounded by a band of merry-makers. The people call him "Madcap Hans," and, wherever he appears, the public-house is sure to be full--corks fly and glasses clink, and sometimes, when things become specially lively, the window-panes clink too, for the bottles go flying out through them into the street. Keep it up! "Madcap Hans" will pay up for the whole lot. He will stand treat to any one he happens to come across, and there are boisterous songs and comic anecdotes fit to make one's sides split with laughing. Yes, he's a fine bottle-companion, is "Madcap Hans."

Soon, too, various very doubtful personages appear at the door of the Rockhammer mill, people with whom one does not like to come into contact; such as the corn-usurer. Lob Levi from Beelitzhof, and the common butcher Hoffman from Gruenhalde; they present yellow, greasy little papers which bear his brother's signature and turn out to be promissory notes with such

and such interest for so many days.

Martin stares for a long time at the unsteady hand-writing; where the strokes are all tumbling over as if drunk, then he goes to his safe and, without a word, pays the debts as well as the usurious interest. How gladly he would give the half of his fortune, could he buy his brother's return therewith!

At length he has the horses put to the carriage and himself sets out in quest. He drives miles away; he is about whole nights through, but never does he succeed in getting hold of his brother. The information he receives from the inn-keepers is scanty and confused--some answer him with awkward prevarication, others with sly attempts at concealment--they all seem to guess that their rich profits will go to the devil as soon as the owner of the Rockhammer mill once more gets possession of his scape-grace brother. When Martin begins to notice that he is being taken in, he loses heart. He has the carriage put up in the coach-house and locks himself in for several days in his "office." During that time he is gravely considering whether it would be advisable to secure the service of the Marienfeld gendarmes. For him, of course, by virtue of his official authority, it would be an easy matter to extort the truth from these people. Yet no!--it would hardly be compatible with the honor of the Rockhammer family to have his brother hunted for by the police--why it would make his old father turn in his grave!

A cold, brought on by his nocturnal expeditions, throws him upon the sickbed. Through two terrible weeks Trude sits by day and by night at his bedside, tortured by his delirious ravings in which his two brothers, the dead and the living one, now singly, now together, transformed to one horrible two-headed monster, haunt and encircle him.

As soon as he is halfway convalescent, he has the carriage got ready. *Some* time he must find him!

And he does find him.

Late one evening at the beginning of September, his road happens to pass through B----, a village two miles north of Marienfeld.

Through the closed shutters of the tavern boisterous noises reach his ears--stamping of feet, brawling and drunken singing. Slowly he gets out of the carriage, and ties up his horse at the entrance to the inn. The lantern flickers dimly in the night wind--heavy drops of rain come pelting down. The handle of the taproom door rattles in his hand; one push--it flies open wide. Thick, bluish-yellow tobacco fumes assail him as he enters, mixed with the odor of stale beer and foul-smelling spirits.

And there, at the top end of the long, roughly-hewn table, with flabby cheeks, with his eyes all red and swollen, with that glassy stare habitual to drunkards, with matted, unkempt hair, with a dirty shirt-collar and slovenly coat to which hang blades of straw--perhaps the reminders of his last night quarters--there that picture of precocious vice and hopeless ruin, that, that is all that remains to him of his darling, of his all in all ...

"Johannes!" he cries, and the driver's whip which he holds in his hand falls clattering to the ground.

A dead silence comes over the densely crowded room, as the tipplers gaze openmouthed at this intruder. The wretched man has started up from his seat, his face petrified with nameless fear, a hollow groan breaks from his lips; with one desperate leap he springs upon the table; with a second one he endeavors to reach the door over the heads of those sitting nearest to him.

No good! His brother's iron fist is planted upon his chest.

"Stay here!" he hears close to his ear in angry, muffled accents; thereupon he feels himself being pushed with superhuman strength towards the fire-corner, where he sinks down helplessly.

Then Martin opens the door as far as ever its hinges will allow, points with the butt-end of his whip towards the dark entry and plants himself in the middle of the taproom.

"Out with you!" he cries in a voice which makes the glasses on the table vibrate. The tipplers, most of them green youths, retreat in terror before him, and hastily don their caps; only here and there some suppressed grumbling is heard.

"Out with you!" he cried once more and makes a gesture as if about to take one of the nearest grumblers by the throat. Two minutes later the taproom is swept clear ... only the innkeeper remains, standing half petrified with fear behind the bar; now, when Martin fixes his gloomy gaze upon him, he begins to complain in a whining tone of this disturbance to his business.

Martin puts his hand in his pocket, throws him a handful of florins and says: "I wish to be alone with him."

When he has bolted the door after the humbly bowing innkeeper, he walks with slow steps towards Johannes, who is crouching motionless in his corner, with his face buried in his hands. He places his hand gently upon his shoulder and says in a voice in which infinite love and infinite

pain tremble: "Rise up, my boy; let us talk to one another."

Johannes does not stir.

"Will you not tell me what grievance you have against me? It will do you good to speak out, my boy! Relieve your feelings, my boy!"

Johannes drops his hands and laughs hoarsely: "Relieve my feelings! Ha-ha-ha!" That secret terror that distorted his features before as with a cramp has now changed to dull, obstinate stubbornness.

Wavering between horror and pity, Martin looks upon this countenance in which deep furrows have left nothing, not a trace of his former open-faced, good-natured Johannes. Every evil passion must have worked therein to disfigure it so wretchedly within six short weeks. Now he raises himself up and casts a searching look towards the door. "It seems you have locked me in," he says with a fresh outburst of laughter that cuts Martin to the quick.

"Yes."

"I suppose you intend dragging me with you like a criminal?"

"Johannes!"

"Go on. I know you are the stronger! But one thing let me tell you: I am not yet so wretched but that I should resist. I would rather fling myself from the carriage and dash my head against a curbstone than come back with you."

"Have pity, merciful God!" cries Martin. "My boy, my boy, what have they made of you?"

Johannes paces the room with heavy tread and snaps open the lids of the beer-mugs as he passes.

"Cut it short," he then says, standing still. "What do you want with me that you imprison me here?"

Martin goes silently to the door and lets the bolt fly back; then he places himself close in front of his brother. His bosom heaves as if he were laboring to raise the words he is about to speak from the uttermost depths of his soul. But what good is it? They stick fast in his throat. He has never been a fluent talker--poor, shy fellow that he is, and how is he to find tongues of flame now with which to talk this madman out of his delusions? All he can stammer forth is that one question:

"What have I done to you? What have I done to you?"

He says the words twice, thrice, and over and over again. What better can he find to say? All his love, all his misery, are contained in these.

Johannes answers not a word. He has seated himself on a bench, and is running the fingers of both his hands through his unkempt hair. About his lips there lurks a smile--a terrible smile, void of comfort or hope.

At length he interrupts his helpless brother who keeps on repeating his formula as if to conjure therewith. "Let that be," he says, "you have nothing to say to me; nor can you have anything to say to me. I have done with myself, with you, with the whole world. What I have been through in these last six weeks--I tell you, since I left the mill, I have slept under no roof, for I felt sure it must fall down upon me."

"But for heaven's sake, what ...?"

"Do not ask me.... It is no good, for you won't get to know, not through me.... Let all talking alone, for it is to no purpose ... and if you were to entreat me by the memory of our parents...."

"Yes, our parents!" stammers Martin joyfully. Why did he not think of that sooner?

"Let them rest quietly in their graves," says Johannes with an ugly laugh. "Even that won't catch on with me. They can't prevent me from going to the dogs nor from hating you!"

Martin groans aloud and drops down as if struck.

"It is just because I *did* always think of them, because I tried again and again to remember that Martin Rockhammer is my brother, that things have turned out like this and not differently. It has cost me a heavy sacrifice,--you may believe me that! I have behaved quite fairly towards you, ha-ha-ha, brother--quite fairly!"

Martin inquires no further. The solution of this riddle is perfectly clear to him. Old blood-guilt has risen from the grave to claim its penalty.... He folds his hands and mutters softly:

"Retribution for Fritz! Retribution for Fritz!"

"For one reason, however, you are quite right to remind me of our parents; I must not bring shame upon their name, upon the name of Rockhammer! That is the one thing which has been worrying me all along--even though it did not alter matters; for surely a man must enjoy himself somehow ... ha-ha-ha! After all I am quite glad to have met you, for we can talk things over quietly ... I intend going to America!"

Martin looks for a while into his glowing, bloated face; then he says softly, "Go, in God's name!" and lets his hand drop heavily upon the table slab.

"And soon, too, what's more," Johannes continues. "I have already made enquiries. On the first of October the ship sails from Bremen--next week I shall have to leave here,--you know what part of our inheritance is owing to me--I dare say, by the bye, that I have got through a good bit of it already; give me as much as you happen to have handy in cash and send it to Franz Maas; I will fetch it from him."

"And won't you come just once more to the--to the--"

"To the mill? Never!" cries Johannes starting up, while a restless gleam, full of terror and of longing, comes into his eyes.

"And you expect me to--I am to bid you good-bye here--here in this disgusting hole--good-bye forever? good-bye forever?"

"I suppose that is what it will be," says Johannes, bowing his head.

Then Martin falls all in a heap and once more murmurs, "Retribution for Fritz!"

With burning eyes Johannes stares at his brother, crouching there before him as if broken, body and soul.... He is quite determined never to see him again ... but he must give a hand at parting!

"Farewell, brother," he says, approaching him, as he sits there motionless. "Keep well and happy!" Then, suddenly, a warm, gentle sensation comes over him. His brain reels. A thousand scenes seem simultaneously to be evoked. He sees himself as a child, petted and spoiled by his elder brother, he sees himself as a youth proudly walking at his side, he sees himself with him at their parent's death-bed, he sees himself hand in hand with him at that solemn moment when they vowed never to part, nor to let any third person come between them.

And now!--And now!

"Brother!" he cries aloud--and loudly sobbing he falls at his feet.

"My boy--my dear boy." He sobs and cries with joy, and catches hold of him with both hands and presses him to him as if he nevermore would let him go.

"Now I have got you ... oh, thank heaven--now I have got you! Now everything will come right again--won't it? Tell me it was all only a dream--only madness! You did not know what you were doing--eh? You don't remember anything of it--eh? I bet you haven't any notion of it all--eh? Now you have woke up, haven't you--you have woke up again now?"

Johannes digs his teeth into his lips till they smart and leans his face upon his breast. Then suddenly a thought takes possession of him and weighs him down and buzzes in his ears--a thought like a vampire, cold and damp, and beating the air with bat's wings.... In these arms Trude has rested this very day--this very day....

He jumps up abruptly.

Away from this place, away from this atmosphere--else madness will really assail him!

He rushes towards the door. One creak of its hinges, one click of the lock: he has disappeared.

Martin looks after him, mute with consternation; then he says, as if to quell his rising fear:

"He is too excited; he wants some fresh air. He will come back!"

His glance falls upon the wooden clothes=pegs on the opposite wall. He smiles, now quite reassured, and says "He has left his cap here; it is raining outside, the wind blows cold; he will come back." Thereupon he calls the innkeeper, orders his horse to be put up and has some hot grog mixed for his brother, and a bed prepared for him. "For," he says with a blissful smile, "he will come back again."

When everything is made ready he sits down on the bench and becomes lost in brooding. From time to time he murmurs as if to resuscitate his sinking courage:

"He will come back!"

Outside the rain beats against the windowpanes, autumn blasts are souging around the housetop, and every gust of wind, every drop of rain, seems to proclaim:

"He will come back! He will come back!" The how's pass; the lamp goes out.... Martin has fallen asleep over his waiting and is dreaming of his brother's return.

In the morning the people of the inn wake him. Haggard and shivering he looks about him. His glance falls upon the empty bed in which his brother was to have slept. The first bed since six weeks!--Sadly he stands there in front of it and stares at it. Then he has his conveyance brought round and drives off.

This year autumn has come early. Since a week there has been a rough north wind which cuts through one's body as if it were November. Gusts of rain beat against the window-panes and the ground is already covered with a layer of yellowish-brown half-decayed leaves off the lime-trees. And how soon it grows dark! In the bakery a light burns in the swinging lamp long before supper-time. Beneath its globe sits Franz Maas, eagerly reckoning up and counting. On the baker's table before him where as a rule the little white round heaps of dough are ranged, to-day there are little white round heaps of florins, and instead of the crisp "Bretzels" to-day the paper of bank-notes is crackling.

This is the treasure which Martin Rockhammer entrusted to him the Sunday before, with instructions to hand it over to Johannes. He also left a letter in which the various items of the inheritance are set down to a penny.

Every morning since then he has knocked at the door, and each time asked the selfsame question, "Has he been?" Then when Franz Maas shook his head, has silently departed again.

To-day the same. To-day is Friday; today he must come if he wants to be in time for the Bremen ship. Noiselessly he has opened the door and is standing behind him, just as he is about to lock the money away. "I suppose that is all for me," he asks, laying his hand on his shoulder.

"Thank heaven I you have come," cries Franz, agreeably startled. Then he casts a critical glance over his friend's figure. Martin must have been exaggerating when, with tears in his eyes, he described his dilapidated appearance. He looks decent and respectable, is wearing a brand new waterproof, beneath the turned-back flaps of which a neat gray suit is visible. His hair is smoothly brushed--he is even shaved. But of course his dark, dulled gaze, the bagginess under his eyes, the ugly red of his cheeks, are sad witnesses in this face, eretime so youthfully joyous.

And then he grasps both his hands and says:

"Johannes, Johannes, what has come over you?"

"Patience; you shall hear all!" he replies, "I must confide in one living soul, or it will eat my very heart out over there."

"Then you really mean it? You intend--"

"I am off to-night by the mail-coach. My seat is already booked. Before I came to you, I went once more through the village. It was already dark, so I could venture--and I took leave of everything. I went to our parents' grave, and as far as the church door, and to the host of the 'Crown,' to whom I owed a trifle."

"And you forgot the mill?"

Johannes bites his lips and chews at his moustache; then he mutters: "That is still to come."

"Oh, how glad Martin will be," cries Franz Maas, quite red with pleasure himself.

"Did I say I was going to see Martin?" asks Johannes between his teeth, while his chest heaves, as if it had a load of embarrassment to throw off.

"What? You intend slinking about on your father's inheritance like a thief,--avoiding a meeting with any one?"

"Not that either. I have to bid good-bye to some one, but not to Martin!"

"To whom else then?--To whom else, man?" cries Franz Maas, in whom a horrible suspicion dawns.

"Lock the door and sit down here," says Johannes,--"now I will tell you."

The hours pass by; the storm rattles at the shutters. The oil in the lamp begins to splutter. The two friends sit with their heads together, their looks occasionally meeting. Johannes confesses--conceals nothing. He begins with that first meeting with Trude, up to the moment when horror drove him forth from Martin's embrace--out into the stormy night.

"What came after that," he concludes, "can be told in a few words. I ran without knowing

whither, until the cold and wet restored me to consciousness. Then the post-chaise from Marienfeld just happened to come along. I stopped it--at last I got under cover by this means. Thus I came to the town, where I have been putting up till now. Lob Levi had just given me a hundred thalers. With these I rigged myself out afresh, for I did not want to face Trude in the dilapidated state I was in."

"Miserable wretch--are you going to ...?"

"Don't kick up a row," he says roughly. "It is all arranged, already. I gave a note for her to a little boy I met in the street, and waited till he came back. She took it from him in the kitchen without even a servant noticing anything. At eleven o'clock she will be at the weir, and I--ha-ha-ha- ... I too!"

"Johannes, I beg and implore you, don't do it," cries Franz in sheer terror. "There's sure to be a misfortune." Johannes' reply is a hoarse laugh, and, with burning eyes, his mouth put close to his friend's ear, he hisses: "Do you really think, man, that I could manage to live and to die in a strange country if I did not see her just once more? Do you imagine I should have courage to stare for four weeks at the sea without throwing myself into it--if I did not see her once more? The very air for breathing would fail me, my meat and drink would stick in my throat, I should rot away alive if I did not see her just once more!"

When Franz hears all this he refrains from further discussion.

Johannes' restless glance wanders towards the clock. "It is time," he says, and takes his cap. "At midnight the mail-coach comes through the village. Expect me at the post office and bring me two hundred-thaler notes; that will be enough for my passage. The rest you can give back to him; I shan't want it! Good-bye till then!" At the door he turns round and asks: "I say, does my breath smell of brandy?"

"Yes."

He breaks into a coarse laugh; then he says: "Give me a few coffee beans to chew. I don't want Trude to get a horror of me in this last hour."

And when Franz has given him what he wants he disappears into the darkness.

It is high water to-day. With a great hissing and roaring the waters shoot down the declivity, then sink down into their foaming grave with dull, plaintive rumblings, while the glistening spray breaks over them in one high-vaulted arch.

The howling of the storm mingles with the tumult of these volumes of water. The old alders alongside the river bow and bend to each other like shadowy giants come forth in their numbers to dance a reel in one long line. The heavens are obscured by heavy rain-clouds,--everything is dark and black except the snowy froth, which seems to throw out an uncertain light against which the outlines of the wood planking are dimly visible. Above that projects the rail of the little drawbridge, in appearance like the phantom form of a cat, creeping with outstretched legs across a roof.

On the drawbridge the two meet. Trude, her head covered by a dark shawl, has been standing for a long time beneath the alders, seeking shelter from the rain, and has hurried to meet him as she saw the outline of his figure appear on yonder side of the weir.

"Trude, is it you?" he asks hurriedly, looking searchingly into her face. She is silent and clings to the rail. The foam is dancing before her eyes, in blue and yellow colors.

"Trude," he says, while he tries to catch hold of her hand, "I have come to bid you farewell for life. Are you going to let me go forth to a strange land without one word?"

"And I have come for the peace of my soul," says she, shrinking back from his groping hand. "Hans, I have borne much for your sake; I have grown older by half a lifetime; I am weak and ill. Therefore take pity on me: do not touch me--I do not want to return again guilt-laden to your brother's house!"

"Trude--did you come here to torture me?"

"Softly, Hans, softly--do not pain me! Let us part from one another with clean and honest hearts, and take peace and courage with us--for all our lives.... We must surely not rail at each other--not in love and not in hatred," She stops exhausted; her breath comes heavily; then, pulling herself together with an effort, she continues: "You see, I always knew that you would come long before I got your note to-day; and, a thousand times over I thought out every word--that I was going to say to you. But of course--you must not unsettle me so."

His eyes glow through the darkness; his breath comes hot; and with a shrill laugh he says:

"Don't make a halo round us. It is no good--we are both accursed anyway in heaven and on earth! Then let us at least--"

He stops abruptly, listening.

"Hush! I thought--I heard--there in the meadow!"

He holds his breath and hearkens. Nothing to be heard or seen. Whatever it was, the storm and the darkness have engulfed it.

"Come down to the river's edge," he says, "our figures are so clearly defined up here."

She leads the way; he follows. But on the slippery woodwork she loses her footing. Then he catches her in his arms and carries her down to the river. Unresisting, she hangs upon his neck.

"How light you have got since that day," he says softly, while he lets her glide down, then raises her up.

"Oh, you would hardly recognize me if you saw me," she replies equally softly.

"I would give anything if only I could!" he says, and tries to draw away the shawl from about her face. A pale oval, two dark, round shadows in it where the eyes are--the darkness reveals no more.

"I feel like a blind man," he says, and his trembling hand glides over her forehead, down to her cheeks, as if by touch to distinguish the loved features. She resists no longer. Her head drops upon his shoulder.

"How much I wanted to say to you!" she whispers. "And now I no longer can think of anything--not of anything at all."

He twines his arms more closely around her. They stand there silent and motionless while the storm tugs and tears at them, and the rain beats down upon their heads.

Then from the village come the cracked notes of the post-horn, half drowned by the blast.

"Our time is up," he says, shivering. "I must go."

"Now--the night?" she stammers voicelessly.

He nods.

"And I shall never see you again?"

A wild scream rends the storm.

"Johannes, have pity, I cannot let you go. I cannot live without you!" Her fingers dig themselves into his shoulders. "You shall not--I will not let you."

He tries to free himself by main force.

"Ah, well--you are going--oh--you--you--you are wicked! You know that I must die if you go, I cannot--Take me with you! Take me with you!"

"Are you out of your senses, woman?" He covers his face with his hands and groans aloud.

"So--this is what you call being out of one's senses! Does not even a lamb struggle--when led to the slaughter? And you are capable of---Ah, is this all your love for me? Is this all? Is this all?"

"Don't you think of Martin?"

"He is your brother. That is all I know about him. But I know that I must die if I stay with him any longer. It makes me shudder to think of him! Take me with you, my husband! Take me with you!"

He grasps both her wrists, and shaking her to and fro, he whispers with half-choked utterance:

"And do you know besides that I am ruined and disgraced--an outcast, a drunkard, no good at all in the world? If you could see me, you would have a horror of me, good people shun me and loathe me--do you think I should be good to you? I shall never forgive you for coming between me and Martin--never forgive you for making me sin against him as I have done for your sake. He will be between us as long as we live. I shall insult you--I shall beat you when I am drunk. You will find it hell at my side. Well? What do you say now?"

She bows her head demurely, folds her hands and says: "Take me with you!" A scream of exultant joy escapes his lips. "Then come--but come quickly. The coach stops for a quarter of an hour. No one will see us except Franz Maas--the only one he will not betray us. In the town you can get clothes and then.... Stop! What does this mean?"

The mill has awakened to life. A yellow light streams out into the darkness from the wide-opened door. A lantern sways across the yard then, thrown to one side, flies in a gleaming curve through the air like a shooting star.

Martin lies in bed asleep. Suddenly there is a tap at the window-pane.

"Who is there?"

"I--David!"

"What do you want?"

"Open the door, Master! I have something important to tell you."

Martin jumps out of bed, strikes a light and hurries on his clothes. A casual glance falls upon Trude's empty bed. Evidently she has dozed off on the sitting-room over her sewing, for it is a long time since she has known sound, healthy sleep.

"What is the matter?" he asks David, who steps into the entrance dripping like a drowned cat.

"Master," he says, blinking from under the peak of his cap, "it is now more than twenty-eight years since I first came to the mill--and your late father already used to be good to me always...."

"And you drag me out of bed in the middle of the night to tell me *that*?"

"Yes, for to-night when I woke up and heard the rain pelting down, I suddenly remembered with a start that the sluices of the lock were not opened.... Perhaps the water might get blocked up and we could not grind to-morrow."

"Haven't I told you fellows hundreds of times that the sluices need only be opened when the ice is drifting? At high water it only means unnecessary labor."

"Well, I didn't touch them," observes David.

"Then what do you want?"

"Because, when I got to the weir I saw two lovers standing on the drawbridge!"

"And that's why?..."

"Then I thought it was a regular disgrace and a crying shame, and no longer--"

"Let them love each other, in the devil's name!"

"And I thought it my duty to tell you. Master, when Master Johannes and our lady--"

He gets no further, for his master's fingers are at his throat.

What has come over Martin, wretched man? His face becomes livid and swollen; the veins on his forehead stand out; his nostrils quiver, his eyes seem to start from their sockets--white foam is at his mouth.

Then he gives vent to a sound like the howl of a jackal, and, loosening his grip of David, with one wrench he tears the shirt at his throat asunder.

Two or three deep breaths, like a man who is achoking; then he roars aloud in suddenly unfettered rage: "Where are they? They shall account to me for this. They have been acting a farce! They have deceived me! Where are they? I'll do for them! I'll do for them, then and there!"

He tears the lantern out of terrified David's hand and rushes out. He disappears into the wheel-house; a second later he reappears. High above his head there gleams an axe. Then he swings the lantern thrice in a circle and flings it far away from him into the water. He storms along in the direction of the weir.

"There's some one coming," whispers Trude, nestling closer up to Johannes.

"Probably they have something to do at the sluices," he whispers back. "Don't stir and be of good courage."

Nearer and nearer hastens the dark figure. A beastlike roaring pierces through the night, above the fury of the storm. "It is Martin," says Johannes, staggering back three paces.

But he collects himself quickly, clutches Trude and drags her with him close up to the woodwork at the weir, in the darkest shadow of which they both crouch down.

Close to their heads the infuriated man races along. The axe, lifted on high, glints in the half-light of the foam. On the other side of the weir he stops. He seems to be gazing searchingly across the wide meadow, which spreads before him in monotonous darkness without tree or shrub.

"You keep watch at the hither sluice, David," his voice thunders out in the direction of the mill. "They must be in the field. I shall catch them there!"

A cry of horror starts from Johannes' lips. He has divined his brother's intention. He is going to pull up the drawbridge and trap them both on the island. And close behind Trude's neck hangs the chain which must be pulled to make the bridge move back. His first thought is: "Protect the woman!" He tears himself out of Trude's arms, and springs up the slope of the river-bank to offer himself as a sacrifice to his brother's fury.

Trude utters a piercing shriek. Johannes in mortal danger; over there the infuriated man, the axe gleaming bright; but behind her there is that chain, that iron ring which is almost tearing her head open. With trembling hands she grasps hold of it; she tugs at it with all her might. At the very moment when Martin is about to climb upon the foot-plank, the drawbridge swings back.

Johannes sees nothing of it; he only sees the shadow over there, and the gleaming axe. A few paces further, and death will descend swiftly upon him. Then suddenly, in the moment of direst distress, he thinks of his mother and what she once said to the enraged boy.

"Think of Fritz!" he cries out to his brother. And behold! The axe drops from his hand; he staggers; he falls--one dull thud--one splash: he has disappeared. Johannes rushes forward; his foot hits against the draw-up bridge. Close before him yawns a black hole. "Brother, brother!" he cries in frenzied terror. He has no thought, no feeling left, only one sensation: "Save your brother!" whirls through his brain. With one jerk he throws off his cloak--a leap--a dull blow as if against some sharp edge.

Trude, who is half unconsciously clutching at the chain, sees a long dark mass shoot down the incline into the white waters, and disappear into the foaming whirlpool, a second later another follows.

Like two shadows they flew past her. She turns her gaze upwards towards the woodwork. Up there all is quiet; it is all empty. The storm howls; the waters roar. Fainting, she sinks down at the river's edge.

Next day the bodies of the two brothers were pulled out of the river. Side by side they were floating on the waters; side by side they were buried.

Trude was as if petrified with grief. In tearless despair she brooded to herself--she refuses to see any of her relations, even her own father. Franz Maas alone she suffers near her. Faithfully he takes charge of her, kept strangers away from her threshold and attends to all formalities.

There was some rumor of a legal investigation to be held against the wretched woman, on the ground of David's dark insinuations. But even though the statements of the old servant were too incomplete and confused to build up a lawsuit upon them, they still sufficed to brand Trude Rockhammer as a criminal in the eyes of the world. The more she shrinks from all intercourse, the more anxiously she closes the mill to all strangers, the more extravagant grow the rumors that were spread about her.

"The miller-witch," people come to call her, and the legends that surrounded her were handed down from one generation to the next. The mill now becomes the "Silent Mill," as the popular voice christened it. The walls crumble away; the wheels grow rotten; the bright, clear stream becomes choked with weeds, and when the State planned a canal which conducted the water into the main stream above Marienfeld--then it degenerated into a marsh.

And Trude herself became entirely isolated, for soon she would not even allow her one friend to approach her, and closed her doors to him.

Before her own conscience she was a murderess. Her terrors drove her to a father confessor and into the arms of the Catholic Church. She was to be seen crawling at the foot of a crucifix or kneeling at church doors, telling her beads and beating her head against the stones till it bled.

She is expiating the great crime which is known as "youth."

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK THE SILENT MILL ***

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