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THE SONG OF SONGS

(DAS HOHE LIED)

BY HERMANN SUDERMANN

TRANSLATED BY
THOMAS SELTZER

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THE SONG OF SONGS

PART I

CHAPTER I

Lilly was fourteen years old when her father, Kilian Czepanek, the music-master, suddenly disappeared.

It happened in this way. He had been giving piano lessons the whole day, in the interim swearing and drinking Moselle and Selters, for it was intensely hot. Occasionally he had slipped into the dining-room to take a cognac or arrange his Windsor necktie. He had pulled Lilly's brown curls as

she sat labouring over her French vocabulary, and had disappeared again into the best room, where the girl pupils changed from hour to hour, and only the dissonances and the curses remained.

When the last victim had stumbled through her lesson and closed the hall door behind her, Czepanek failed to reappear in his usual bad temper and with his usual appetite. He remained in the front room, where this day he neither whistled nor whined nor played out his rage on the keyboard, as he sometimes did after a day's labour. In fact, he gave scarcely a sign of life. Now and then a deep sigh—that was all.

Lilly, who took warm interest in everything her handsome father did or did not do, let her French textbook slip from her lap, and stole up to the keyhole.

Through it she saw him standing before the large pier-glass, absorbed in a close study of himself. From time to time he raised his left hand and pressed it as if in despair against his soft, silky, dark artist's curls, which Lilly's mother devotedly fostered every day with bay-rum and French oils.

He and his reflection gazed at each other's moist red face with wild, eager eyes, and Lilly's heart expanded in love of her adored papa.

To Lilly his standing before the mirror was a familiar sight. It was his manner of squaring accounts for his lost life and wasted love, his manner of charming back the great world, in which duchesses and prima donnas yearningly cherished the memory of their vanished idol.

He stood there like an elderly god of love, with small alcoholic puffs under his eyes, and a tendency toward a paunch.

Both mama and Lilly cared for him with unremitting zeal. They regarded him as a sort of bird of paradise, who by a lucky chance had been caught between the walls of a room, and who required the greatest effort, the utmost circumspection, to keep him safe in the cage.

By right, Lilly should long ago have been sitting at the piano, for in the house of Czepanek a quiet keyboard was a waste of time and a sin before the Lord. She had to practice four or five hours every day. Often when her father was seized by the holy spirit of creativeness and forgot the time set aside for her practicing, she did not begin until nearly midnight. Then she sat at the piano frozen, with heavy eyes, striking out in all directions until the small hours of the morning. Sometimes her mother found her the next day lying with her arms crossed on the keyboard in that profound child's sleep from which there is almost no rousing.

Thus it happened that she cared little for the artistic future for which her father's ambition had destined her. She preferred to dally with some old forbidden book, and often drove her father to despair by a false pretence at cleverness in playing at first sight. But to-day she had the Sonata Pathétique to do, and there is no trifling with that, as any babe in arms knows.

So she was just about to interrupt her father as he stood there plunged in dreamy self-observation, when she heard a click at the door from the kitchen. She bounded away from the keyhole with one great leap of her long legs, and the next instant her mother entered, carrying the supper dishes.

The mother's prematurely faded cheeks were now glowing from the heat of the kitchen fire. She held her lean figure erect, taut as a whip cord, which seemed to be tied in a knot at the abdomen by a protrusion, the result of abortive child-bearing. Dull marital sorrow had long ago transformed her eyes, once beautiful, into two lustreless slits. But at this moment they were beaming with pride and expectation.

For to-day Mrs. Czepanek hoped to satisfy her lord and his palate.

At the clatter of the plates on the table, the door to the parlour opened, and papa's dark curly head, about which the evening sunlight cast a halo, appeared in the bright opening.

"The deuce, supper already?" he said, and his eyes wandered with a peculiar, confused gaze.

"In ten minutes," the mother replied, joy at the surprise in store for him playing about her parched, chapped lips like secret bliss.

He entered the room, took a few deep breaths, and said with the air of a man to whom speech comes hard:

"I've just noticed that one of the straps of my hand-bag is torn."

"Why, do you want it?" asked his wife.

"One's hand-bag must always be kept in readiness," he answered, his eyes continuing to rove about the room. "Suppose I were suddenly to be called to act as substitute somewhere. I must have my bag ready."

As a matter of fact, he had been called upon the previous winter to take the place of a Berlin virtuoso, who had undertaken to "do" the towns in eastern Germany and whose train had been snow-bound near Bromberg. The committee telegraphed to papa requesting him to play in his stead. But now, in midsummer, when the concert season was dead, such an emergency was scarcely within the realm of the possible.

"I'll tell Minna to take it to the saddler's right after supper," said mama, who took good care not to contradict her choleric husband.

He nodded meditatively and walked into his bedroom, while the mother ran to the kitchen to do the final honours in her own person to the titbit she had prepared for him.

A few minutes later he returned with the bag in his hand. It looked rather bulgy. He stopped before the linen chest.

"Lilly, dear," he said, "I wonder whether the score would go into the grip crosswise? In case I am called to a concert, you know—"

The score of the Song of Songs was kept in the linen chest, so that, should fire break out during papa's absence, anyone in the family might easily get at this greatest of treasures.

Lilly looked for the keys, but could not find them.

"I'll go ask mama," she said.

"No, no," he cried hastily, and a shiver went through his body, such as Lilly had often noticed when mother was mentioned to him. "I'll first take this old thing to the saddler."

Lilly was shocked at the idea that her celebrated father should himself go to the saddler's dingy workshop.

"Mercy!" she cried, and reached out for the handle of the bag. She would take it to the saddler herself.

But he warded her off.

"You're too grown up now for such things, my girl," he said, and his eyes lighted up as they scanned her tall, virginal body, her hips and bosom, already beginning to show delicate curves. "Why, you're almost a *signora*."

He patted her cheeks and pulled a little at the lock of the linen chest, gnawing his lips the while in intense bitterness. Then suddenly he shook himself, and with a shy, contemptuous look toward the kitchen—Lilly knew that look, too—went quickly out of the room.

He went and never came back.

The night following that red summer evening remained graven in Lilly's memory hour by hour.

Her mother sat on the window-sill in her nightgown, and her fervid, anxious eyes kept glancing up and down the street. Whenever she heard steps at a distance knocking on the pavement, she would start and cry:

"There he is."

Lilly felt there was no need to bother about the Pathétique to-day. A dull oppression in her left breast determined her to turn to St. Joseph, to whom she had stood in tender relations since her confirmation. She had already passed many a dreamy, idle hour before his altar at St. Anne's—right front, second chapel—and secretly sent up many an abstract sigh to the dear, good face with the beautiful beard. But to-night he failed her utterly. She could get no consolation from him, and vexed and disillusioned, she dismissed him.

At twelve o'clock the last vehicle passed the house.

At one the pedestrians, too, grew less frequent.

At half-past two a dusty wind arose, smelling of sand and threatening to blow out the lamp.

Between two and three only the night watchman was heard shuffling along the narrow, echoing street.

At three the early delivery wagons began to rattle, and it grew light.

Between three and four Lilly prepared a boiling hot cup of coffee for her mother, and ate up all the cold supper. Long waiting and crying had made her ravenously hungry.

Between four and five a band of young night revellers passed by, throwing kisses to her mother, and when their importunities forced her to withdraw from the window they serenaded her. Fine, pure voices, Lilly had to admit despite her grief; rendition good and precise, without that pedantic stop-like effect which papa so detested in the singing societies. Perhaps they were even pupils of his who did not know his residence.

Scarcely were they gone when the mother was again at her post.

Lilly struggled against sleep.

She saw as through a veil the thin blond hair waving over her mother's forehead in the morning breeze, saw the pointed nose, red with weeping, turn now to the right, now to the left, according to the direction from which a sound came; saw the nightgown fluttering like a white flag, and the

lean legs incessantly rubbing against each other in nervous agitation. Then she had to retell, perhaps for the hundredth time, the story of the hand-bag and the linen chest, but her eyes closed.

And then suddenly she started up with a cry; her mother had dropped back in a swoon, and lay supine on the floor like a log of wood.

CHAPTER II

So Kilian Czepanek never came back.

Good friends were not wanting, of course, who had for years foreseen the event. In fact, they failed to understand how he could have endured it so long—he, the man of genius, of God-given fancy, with the hall-mark of creative restlessness on his thunder-headed brow. Others called him a good-for-nothing, a dirty scoundrel, who ran after innocent girls and enticed young men to gamble. They declared Mrs. Czepanek lucky to be rid of him, and charged Lilly to erase her unworthy father from her memory.

Most unpleasant of all, however, were those who said nothing, but presented bills. Mrs. Czepanek sold or pawned all the articles of luxury left her from the middle-class comfort of her youth, or from her husband's liberal moods. But these soon gave out. Furniture, dress and linen not absolutely indispensable followed; then at last the creditors were stilled.

The singing society, to the leadership of which Kilian Czepanek had been called fifteen years before, and which, during that period, had carried off no less than six prizes, expressed its satisfaction with the accomplishments of its conductor by holding the position open for half a year and paying the salary in full to his wife.

But this period of grace also came to an end. Now began the bitter begging pilgrimages to the eminent citizens and officials of the city, the sorry pulling of bells, the anxious scraping of shoes before strangers' doors, the half-hour waitings in dark corridors, the abashed sitting down on the narrow edges of chairs, the sighs, the stammering, the wiping of eyes, which, however honestly meant, came to have somewhat the appearance of professional hypocrisy. The more it was calculated to produce an impression the more it failed of its purpose.

Now came the chase for work in shop and factory, in all places where bed-linen and shirts and nightgowns are made, where cheap lace is added to cheap underwear, where white goods is vitalised with hems and yokes and bindings and strings. Now came the whizz of the sewing machine the whole day and the whole night. Now came pricked fingers, inflamed eyes, swollen knees, vinegar compresses about feverish temples, a simmering tea-kettle at four o'clock in the morning, watery coffee heated three times over, with bread and butter instead of the midday roast and the evening eggs. In short, now came poverty.

And strange to say, the more remote the day on which Kilian Czepanek had disappeared, the more confidently his abandoned wife looked forward to his return. The first half year had passed; another conductor appeared and challenged comparison. For a couple of weeks the papers contented themselves with mortifying him by flattering allusions to the former leader. But this also passed. And now followed the great silence of the grave. At most, Czepanek's picture remained alive only in a few bar-rooms and a few girls' hearts.

Mrs. Czepanek, however, who had so long compressed her lips in smothered shame when the conversation turned upon her husband, began to speak of his coming back as of an established fact definitely prearranged. More than that, she who in the course of fifteen years had gradually lost her youth, her beauty, her ready wit and laughter, everything she had brought as a marriage dowry to her husband, sinking it, for no reason at all, in a grey pool of self-reproach and anxiety; she who for many years had not tried a coloured ribbon on her sunken breast, who had not troubled to arrange a lock of hair on her forehead, which kept growing higher and higher—this woman became vain again. Each time she received her meagre pay she made haste to invest part of it in powder and beauty creams. In moments of exhaustion, when she could no longer stand on her feet, she quickly whipped a red stick from her pocket and passed it over her thin lips. And about eight o'clock every morning she bustled between the kitchen fire and the sewing machine with a freshly burned wreath of curls.

In this way she prepared herself for his return. She would receive her repentant husband in her outstretched arms, bedecked and radiant as a bride.

For he was bound to return; that was certain. Where else would he find a comprehending smile like hers, where else the secret soul-harmony which consoles by silence and compels happiness by prayer, which, with the dropping of the rosary beads, secretly insinuates dreamy stipulations with Providence, and dissolves the whole universe into one great minor harmony of yearning? Where else was there a human being who served as she did, without malice and without regret, with body and with soul, who allowed herself to be taken or rejected according to impulse or desire?

Thus she had once welcomed him, a young, blond, laughing, unsuspecting thing. She had given herself to him without stint and without questioning; just because he desired it. And she had

scarcely felt it as her right and his atonement, when he led her to the altar at the command of her father, an honest subordinate in a court of justice. In fact, Czepanek had been forced into marriage by half the city, which otherwise would have ostracised the seducer and ousted him from his soft berth.

Happier she could not be, that she knew. Of the nameless misfortune bound to come she had not the least presentiment; and when it came she took it without complaint; she loved him so very much, she regarded it as the natural indemnity for the unnatural gift of having possessed him.

Yet he would come back in spite of all. Whether he wished to or not, he would come. She had in her possession a pledge which chained him to her for all time, and which, sooner or later, must force him to cross her threshold.

It was not Lilly. True, he loved his child, loved her with a tenderness strangely compounded of pleasure in a toy for idle hours, and of aesthetic delight in her inner and outer loveliness. But for a real father's love, she knew, there was no room in his gypsy heart. Even in hours when he would feel himself most alone and abandoned, the thought would never occur to him to seek solace and comfort with a child of his.

But the wife had something else in her keeping which gave her a far stronger hold upon him—a roll of music; that was all. He might easily have put it in the bag with which he had departed on his great journey. In fact, he had attempted to. But so great at the decisive moment was his desire to escape that he did not dare to face his suspicious wife.

This roll of music contained everything that had linked his past with his future during the fifteen years of his Philistine life, everything remaining from the titanic storm and stress of his youth, from the giddy hopes and ambitions of the days when he starved.

This roll of music—it was slender enough—contained the work of his life; it contained the Song of Songs.

Since Lilly could think, nothing in the world had been spoken of with such respect, with such tender and reverent awe, as this work, of which, with the exception of the two women, no one knew a note.

It was something that had never yet been, something unheard of, a new world of sound, the beginning of a musical development, of which the end was lost in the twilight of mystic anticipation.

The opera had reached its culmination in Wagner, the road from which pointed straight down into the abyss; symphonic composition no longer answered modern requirements for sense music; the song had been split up by the newest school into a series of small subtle effects. The art of the future belonged to the oratorio, but not that constrained wooden production hitherto suffered to pass by the name from a false belief that we have to make concessions to a misunderstood ecclesiasticism, but—and here it was that the new world of sound, the Song of Songs, began.

The score had been completed years ago. To entrust it to the heavy execution of the musicians of Czepanek's provincial town would have been desecration. So it lay there and lay there, and interwove the day with a mild, mysterious light, which no one saw, yet every one felt. It shot rays of light into the distant future, and so filled a child's palpitating heart with anticipation, prayer and love that that heart would rather have stood still than exist without this fountain of the good and the noble, from which the acting forces of life daily drew their sustenance.

For Lilly the roll of music lying in the upper drawer of the linen chest, held together by two rubber bands, was a kind of household divinity, which gave purity and sanctity to the home. She had imbibed reverence for the sheets of paper, scrawled over with curly-headed runes, since the dawn of her recollections, and their music was familiar to her from her early childhood.

Papa, it is true, did not like to have the themes of his creation bandied about in everyday life. "Why don't you sing 'O du lieber Augustin' or 'Nun sei bedankt, mein lieber Schwan?'" he used to say when he caught one of them dreamily humming his arias. "They are plenty good enough for you."

Later his warnings grew unnecessary. Mama gradually forgot everything sounding like a song, and Lilly withdrew more and more into herself.

She had arranged a sort of mass from the Song of Songs, which she celebrated before the mirror when she knew she was alone in the house. She draped a sheet about her waist like a skirt, hung window-curtains over her shoulders, wound old lace about her neck, and wove spangles taken from shoes into her hair. Singing, weeping, and uttering shouts of joy, with genuflections, magic dances and airy embraces, she lived through Sulamith's bridal yearning and ecstasy as awakened to life again in papa's Song of Songs after a slumber of twenty-five hundred years.

The manuscript of this song became the anchor to which the hopes of Kilian Czepanek's family were henceforth fastened. It was conceivable that he, a vagabond, cast out by his own parents when a child, might abandon wife and daughter to want and pining—but to believe that he would desert the work of his lifetime, the sword wherewith he was to fight his way back into the great world, was sheer folly.

And while the sewing-machine whizzed and whirred day and night in the attic to which Mrs. Czepanek and her daughter had removed, while the body of the forsaken woman dried up entirely and grew ever more deformed, and the layer of paint with which she kept herself young rested upon cheekbones sharpening from week to week, there lay in the upper drawer of the linen chest (the chest had been saved from bankruptcy) an earnest of future reunion, working miracles by its proximity, the Song of Songs.

CHAPTER III

Lilly was now a tall young woman with a well-developed figure for her age, who carried her school-bag through the streets with the air of a princess.

Her plaid dress of mixed wool was always wrinkled by rain, and despite the let-out tucks was ever too short. Her rainy-day boots went to the cobbler time and again, and between the wavy ends of her cotton gloves and the hems of her sleeves laboriously stretched to meet them, gleamed a strip of red, slender arm.

But whoever saw her come down the street with the easy swing of her beautifully curved hips, with the careless, rhythmic tread of exuberant youth and strength, with the mobile head, too small for her tall body, set on a long neck, with the two mouse teeth that looked out eagerly from behind an upper lip somewhat too short, and with the two famous "Lilly eyes"—he who saw her did not think of the shabbiness of her dress, did not suspect that this delicately shaped, broad breast was bent for hours and hours over sewing, that this whole glorious, youthful organism, whose sap, as it chased through her veins, manifested itself in causeless blushings and passionate palings, was grandly maintained and preserved on boiled potatoes, bread spread with clarified fat, and bad sausage.

The high school students followed her all afire, and for a long time the poems composed in her praise in the first year class were to be counted by the dozen.

It cannot be said that she remained indifferent to their homage. When a troop of them came toward her on the street she felt as if a rosy veil were descending over her eyes from shame and dread; and when the young men passed by, doffing their caps—they had met her at the skating-rink—she was overcome by giddiness, or a sinking sensation, so suddenly did the blood mount to her head. The aftertaste of the meetings was delicious. For hours she recalled the picture of the young man who had greeted her most respectfully, or the one who had blushed like herself. That was the one she loved—until at the next encounter he was replaced by another.

Despite her adorers she was subjected to less teasing by her schoolmates than is usual in such cases. The contented defencelessness of her manner disarmed all enmity. If they hid her school-bag she merely entreated, "Please give it back to me." If they stuck her up on the stove, she remained there laughing, and if they wanted to copy her English exercise, she gave them the solution to an arithmetic problem besides.

The only discord in her relations with them arose from the jealousy that set her bosom friends by the ears. In this she was not quite blameless, as she changed her friendships with startling rapidity, feeling in duty bound to respond to all overtures of intimacy. Consequently her affections could not be fastened on a single companion for long, and she herself was amazed when she saw one sentiment pushed aside by the next attack.

The teachers, too, had kindly feelings for her. The words, "Lilly, you are dreaming," which sometimes came from the platform, sounded more like a caress than a reproach. As head of the newcomers in the 1 B class she sat for a time at the end of the sixth row, and more than one hand gave her hair a paternal stroke in passing.

Her nickname was "Lilly with the eyes." Her schoolmates declared such eyes were absolutely improbable, such eyes *could* not exist. "Cat eyes," "nixie eyes," are samples of the epithets bestowed upon them. Some maintained they were violet, some knew for sure she penciled her lids. However that may be, he who looked at her face saw eyes and nothing but eyes, and was content to look no further.

When fifteen and a half years old Lilly passed from the first-year class into the Selecta, the class for advanced pupils, for it had been decided that she was to earn her living as a governess.

With this came a change in many respects; new teachers, new subjects of study, new companions and a new tone in intercourse. Nobody was addressed by the first name; the throwing of paper balls ceased, and no one on going home found bits of paper stuck in her hair. Phrases like "sacredness of a vocation" and "consecration of life" were cheapened by repetition; but so also were love episodes and secret betrothals.

For the first time Lilly experienced a slight feeling of envy—she was neither engaged, nor did the least love affair come her way. Such trivialities as anonymous bouquets or verses bearing the superscription, "Thine forever," with two initial letters intertwined, were, of course, not to be counted.

But her time came. Her love was compounded of marble statues and temple pillars, of evergreen

cypresses and a sky eternally blue, of pity and yearning for the far-off, of a pupil's adoration for her teacher, and of a desire to save.

He was assistant instructor in science in the girls' high school, and taught in the lower grades, where the ruler is still used on pupils' knuckles and tongues are stuck out behind the teacher's back in revenge. He gave no instruction whatever in the higher classes, but delivered lectures on the history of art to the Selecta.

"History of art." The very words are enough to send a shiver of ecstasy through a maiden's soul. How much greater the charm when a suffering young man with deep-set, burning eyes and a lily-white forehead expounds the subject!

His first name was Arpad.

But there the romance ended. What remained was a poor consumptive, who had painfully earned his way through the university by private tutoring, only to fall a victim to the grave just when he had hoped to reap the scant fruit of the sufferings of his youth. His superiors helped him to the extent of their ability. They assigned him the easiest classes, and as soon as they noticed the fever stains burning on his cheeks, they obtained a substitute in his place and sent him home. But they succeeded in securing only a short respite, during which the dying man became a burden to the teaching staff. Feeling this himself he put forth suicidal energy to disarm whatever criticism might be made against his ability to work. He eagerly assumed all possible duties in his line, and what the most industrious and ambitious man found too difficult he, who stood with one foot in the grave, with no career ahead of him, gladly took upon his shoulders.

The day the principal introduced him to the Selecta remained fixed in Lilly's memory. It was between three and four o'clock, the last hour, when the almighty principal's portly belly unexpectedly appeared in the doorway. He entered followed by the slender, good-looking young man with a slight stoop, who stood at Miss Hennig's right side during morning services in the main hall and dog-eared the pages of his hymn-book while the anthem was being sung. He wore a tight grey coat, which emphasised his slimness, and his shining modish silk vest cast a false glitter of the world of society over him. He made two or three abrupt bows to the class, like a lieutenant, and looked very shy and embarrassed.

"Dr. Mälzer," said the principal, presenting him. "He will introduce you to the art of the Renaissance. I should like you, young ladies, to listen most attentively, for although the subject is not obligatory, and you will not have to pass an examination in it, it is of great importance for general education, and I shall have occasion to test your progress in the literature class when we take up, for example, Lessing, Goethe, or Winckelmann."

With these words he strutted out of the room.

The young pedagogue twirled his little blond moustache, which fell in two thin scraggly tufts over the corners of his mouth. A smile both bashful and sarcastic flitted across his face. He looked around irresolutely for the chair, hesitating, apparently, whether to sit down or remain standing.

Meta Jachmann, with her usual inclination to be silly, began to giggle, and soon half the class had followed suit. A hot red spread over the teacher's wan face.

"Laugh, ladies, laugh," he said with a voice which despite its weakness shook his narrow chest. "Persons in your position may well laugh; for a life full of activity and vigour lies ahead of you. I may rejoice, too, for I am permitted to speak to you as soul to soul; which is a piece of good fortune that rarely falls to the lot of a novice in the teaching profession. You will find that out from your own experience soon enough."

The class grew still as a mouse. From that moment on he had the girls in his grip.

"But that's not the whole of my good fortune," he continued. "The theme which the authorities of this institution have entrusted to my slender ability—whether from magnanimity toward me, or lack of respect for the subject, I cannot say—is the highest theme which human tradition knows. Every personal expression in history, however defiant, revolutionary, or alien the voice of the chosen one that uttered it, later exegesis used as moral fodder with which to satiate the masses. The only personages with whom this did not succeed were the men of the Renaissance. The nine times wise branded Plato as a shield bearer of Christianity, Horace as a pedant, Augustine as a church saint, Jesus as the Son of God. But no one has ever undertaken to make of Michael Angelo, of Alexander Borgia, of Machiavelli, anything but an ego, an ego which faces surrounding conditions and the world either as creator or destroyer, relying on the fulness of his own power."

The young souls sat up and listened. Never had anyone spoken to them in such a tone. They felt he was talking his life away, but in the very moment they realised this, they drew a chain of freemasonry about him with which they shielded him.

He continued. With bold rapid strokes, which wrung new life from the dead, he pictured to them the time and the men. The accumulation of many years of repression now burst from him in passionate utterance.

His auditors suspected that here was more than a school lesson, more, even, than the harvest of scholarship. They divined that they were listening to a confession of faith; and they attached themselves to him with all the rapturous abandon of a woman and pupil, most rapturous when they did not understand.

Lilly being one of the younger girls sat nearest to the instructor. She had a vague feeling, as of a flood of new, ineffably beautiful melodies being poured over her. Since everything in her life and imagination had hitherto centred about music, she had first to translate pictures and thoughts into the world of sound, before her perceptions could grasp them.

She turned pale, and sat there squeezing her handkerchief in her left hand. Her eyes staring at him clouded over with moisture in the joy of surmise. She saw his breast working, saw the drops of perspiration on his forehead, saw the flames burning on his cheeks; she wanted to weep, to laugh, she wanted to cry: "Stop!" But she might not. So she sat motionless, and listened to the poor suppressed voice proclaiming the evangel of that old time which is still new. She listened also to another voice which cried jubilantly deep down in her heart: "Let there be——!"

"But how does the world look," he continued, "in which that high-keyed life developed? Like Moses, I have viewed it only from the mountain. I have loitered a little in its outer courts, but I have seen enough for me to know that my soul will never cease to desire it while breath remains in my body. There between cypresses and evergreen oaks, temples and palaces sprang up in white glory from the soil, seeming like a part of it. What is clay here is marble there; what is routine here is free creative energy there; our feeble imitation there is spontaneous growth. Here laborious, grafted culture, there the grace of a happy nature; here poverty-stricken pursuit of the useful, there voluptuous passion for the beautiful; here sober, subtly reasoning Protestantism, there glad, naïve, Catholic paganism."

This came to Lilly like a blow on the head. She had been raised by Catholic parents in a Protestant country. Though there had been little place for piety in her home, a great deal of religious enthusiasm dwelt in her soul, fostered by an imaginative faculty and a compelling emotionalism. To hear her Catholicism praised did her heart good, but why it should be linked, almost as a matter of course, with the wicked heathens, whom she had been taught to despise and deplore, was a riddle to her. Her mind was a whirl of anxious thoughts and queries. She was unable to follow the speaker any longer, and lost the thread of his discourse, until after a while she heard him, in soft caressing words, give a picture of the southern country.

She saw the golden-blue summer sky rising over the isles of the blessed, she saw the sun's bloody disk dip into the sea blackened by the breath of the sirocco, saw the shepherd with his flute of Pan pasturing his long-haired goats on the shining meadows of asphodel, saw the evergreen forest clambering up the slopes of the Apennines to their snow-clad peaks. She breathed in the fragrance of the laurels and strawberries and inhaled the olive vapours, which, at the sounding of the Angelus, ascended heavenward in blue pillars, like the offerings of a prayer.

When she glanced up again, she almost started back in fright. A consuming, tortured look of yearning shot from his eyes as they stared with clairvoyant gaze, past them all, into emptiness.

The bell rang, the hour was over. He looked around like a somnambulist roused from sleep, snatched up his hat, and rushed from the room. Sacred silence remained. After a while the tension was broken by a whisper here and there and by a shy fumbling for school-bags.

Lilly spoke to no one, and managed to make her escape into the street alone. Humming and weeping softly she walked home.

The next morning there was profound excitement in the Selecta. The waves set in motion by the great event of the day before continued to vibrate.

Anna Marholz, the daughter of a physician, who was a member of the Board of Health, brought some facts about the young instructor's life. It was absolutely necessary, she reported, for Dr. Mälzer to go to the south. If he remained at home, he would probably not survive the winter.

Lilly's heart stood still. The others considered ways and means of helping him. Since he lacked the money and since the city would not assume the cost of so long a leave of absence, especially as his position was not yet assured, the means for saving him would have to be obtained privately.

"Let's form a committee," one girl proposed, and the others seconded enthusiastically.

"Thank God," Lilly thought. She felt as if his life had already been prolonged by forty or fifty years.

At the ten o'clock recess they lost no time in getting together for urgent deliberation. Officers were chosen, and Lilly had the inexpressible joy of emerging from the election in the dignity of secretary.

A few days later the first meeting took place in Klein's confectionery shop—they did not venture into Frangipani's, the resort of military officers and city officials—in the course of which fifteen young ladies consumed fifteen small meringues glacés and fifteen cups of chocolate, business expenses subsequently to be divided among them. Various promising plans were submitted for consideration. Emily Faber suggested that a public reading of Romeo and Juliet with assigned rôles be given in the club house, and the leading man of the city theatre be asked to take the part of Romeo. The proposal received unanimous approval; for this leading man was one of the most beloved of leading men that ever found his way into girls' hearts.

Kate Vitzing, whose cousin was tenor of the boys' high school quartette, proposed an amateur concert to be given jointly by the quartette and the Selecta. This, too, was unanimously approved.

Finally, Rosalie Katz, who was of a practical turn, submitted a scheme for printing subscription blanks to be presented to well-to-do citizens. This plan gave less satisfaction, but in the end the girls agreed that one good thing need not exclude another, and decided to put all three projects into execution.

Lilly conscientiously recorded all the transactions, and her heart went pit-a-pat, "For him!"

The lectures on the history of art followed their regular course; so also the meetings of the aid committee. The consumption of meringues glacés and cups of chocolate remained on about the same level, but enthusiasm for the cause markedly diminished. Not that Dr. Mälzer's subsequent lectures offered ground for disillusionment. Rich alike in substance and figures of speech, they never failed to win the same tense sympathy from the girls. But the plans for helping him had met with serious obstacles.

The much-beloved Romeo had been engaged to perform in another city at the beginning of the autumn, the quartette had been refused permission to coöperate with the Selecta, and a permit from the police department was necessary for a house to house collection. None of the girls dared apply for it.

Thus, the great life-preserving idea gradually petered out, terminating in a confectioner's bill, of which three marks eighty fell to Lilly's share. Lilly well knew the way to the pawnbroker's, and she did not have to pluck up courage before relinquishing the little gold cross that she wore about her neck, the last remnant of better days. Besides, it was all for his sake.

Autumn came, and Dr. Mälzer grew worse. He coughed a great deal, each time putting his handkerchief to his mouth and then examining it furtively.

One day the girls were told that the lectures on the history of art would be discontinued until further notice.

Anna Marholz reported he had had a hemorrhage.

Lilly did not stop to ask for an explanation of what that meant.

"He's dying, he's dying!" was the cry in her soul.

After dark she stole to his house (Anna Marholz had found his address in one of her father's books). A weary, green-shaded lamp was burning in his room. Not a shadow stirred, no hand appeared at the window-curtain. But the little lamp continued to burn patiently for hours and hours, despite its weariness, all the time that Lilly trotted up and down the damp street in front of his house, full of conscientious scruples for having robbed her toiling mother of her help.

The adventure was repeated the following evenings, and anxiety waxed in Lilly's soul. She pictured him lying there gasping for breath, with no woman's hand to wipe the death sweat from his brow.

On Saturday her solicitude drove her from her work-table early in the afternoon. To patrol his house in broad daylight was impossible, but she ventured to pass it once, and lacked the courage to return. Then she was seized by a heroic resolve. She went to the florist's shop, and sacrificing the two marks eighty left over from the transaction of the little cross, she walked back to his house with a brownish yellow bouquet of drooping autumn roses.

Without stopping to think she ran up the steps, and rang at the door of the second story, where she had seen the green lamp.

An old woman in a soiled blue apron and mumbling her lips opened the door. Lilly stammered Dr. Mälzer's name.

"In the rear," said the woman, and shut the door.

Then the little green lamp did not burn for him. An old woman lived there, who wore a dirty apron and whose lips kept mumbling. For a week she had been worshipping a false idol. Disappointed, she was about to steal down the stairs, when her eye caught his name among four door-plates. Her heart leapt, and before she knew it, she had knocked.

A brief interval elapsed before his head appeared behind the door, which he held only partly open. The lapels of his grey coat were raised to cover his neck, which apparently was collarless. His hair was in wild disorder, and the ends of his moustache were more matted than ever. And how his eyes glared as they seemed to demand in embarrassment, "What do you want?"

"Miss—Miss—Miss—" he stammered. He appeared to recognise her, but failed to recall her name.

Lilly wanted to give him the bouquet and run away, but she remained rooted to the spot as if paralysed.

"You have been sent here by your class, I presume," he said.

"Yes, yes," Lilly answered eagerly. That was her salvation.

"Otherwise, you see, it would be impossible for me to invite you to come in," he continued with a

shy smile. "It might have very serious consequences for both of us. But as a delegate—" he reflected a moment—"come in, please."

Lilly had imagined him living in high, spacious apartments, surrounded by carved bookcases, vases, globes, and busts of great men. In dismay she observed a little room with only one window, an unmade bed, an open card table, a clothes-rack, and a small book-stand holding mostly unbound and crumpled old volumes. Such were his quarters.

"He lives more wretchedly than we do," she thought.

At his invitation she seated herself on one of the two chairs, feeling less embarrassed than she had expected to. Poverty shared alike brought them nearer to each other.

"How lovely in the young ladies to remember me!"

Lilly recollected the flowers she still held in her hand.

"Oh, excuse me," she said, proffering them.

He took the bouquet without a word of thanks, and pressed them against his face.

"They don't smell," he said, "they are the last—but my first. So you can imagine how precious they are to me."

Lilly felt her eyes growing dim with joy.

"Are you still in pain, Dr. Mälzer?" she managed to ask.

He laughed.

"Pain? No. I don't suffer from pain. A little fever now and then—but the fever's pleasant, very amusing. Your soul seems to soar in a balloon away over everything—over cities, countries, seas, over centuries, too; and often great persons come to visit you, persons, if not so beautiful—that is to say—I beg your pardon—"

His compliment frightened him. Why, he was the teacher and she the pupil.

In the midst of his embarrassment a certain blindness seemed suddenly to drop away from him. He stared at her with eyes burning like torches in two blue hollows.

"What is your name?" he asked in a voice even shriller and hoarser than usual.

"Lilly, Lilly Czepanek."

The name was not familiar to him, as he had been in the city only a short time.

"You intend to become a teacher?"

"Yes, Dr. Mälzer."

"Do you know what? Get yourself exiled to Russia and throw bombs. Go to a pest-house and wash sores. Marry a drunkard, who will beat you and sell your bed from under your body. *Don't* become a teacher—not *you*."

"Why not just I?"

"I will tell you why. A flat-breasted person with watery eyes and falling hair who can only see one side of a subject—such a creature should be a teacher. Somebody without the blood and nerve to live his own life can teach others to live—he's good enough for that. But he whose blood flows through his body like fluid fire, whose yearning spurts from his eyes, to whom the problems of life exist for seeing and knowing, not for paltry criticism, he who—but I mustn't talk to you about that, though I should very much like to."

"Please do, please," Lilly implored.

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"And already a woman." His eyes scanned her in pained admiration. "Look at me," he continued. "I, too, was once a human being—you wouldn't believe it—I, too, once stretched two sturdy arms longingly to heaven; I, too, once looked with desire into a girl's eyes, though not into such as yours. Let me prattle. A dying man can do no harm."

"But you shall not die," she cried, jumping from her seat.

He laughed.

"Sit down, child, and don't excite yourself about me. It doesn't pay. A friend of mine once broke the back-bone of a cat that had gone mad. He did it with one blow of a stick. The cat couldn't run away, she couldn't howl, she couldn't do anything but just remain on all fours and cough and choke and cough and choke—until the second blow came. That's the way it is with me. There's nothing to be done. Go away, child, I've already made my peace, but when I look at you my heart grows heavy again."

Lilly turned her face away to hide her tears.

"Must I?" she asked.

"Must?" He laughed again. "I shall feed on every minute of your presence as a hungry man feeds on the crumbs he digs out of his pockets. You sat on the left end of the first bench. I remember. I said to myself, 'What a pair of improbable eyes! Such eyes the magic dogs of Andersen's tales must have, eyes to which you would like to say, Please don't make such big eyes. And from being thought big, they grow still bigger and bigger.'"

Now Lilly laughed.

"You see," he said, "I have made you merry again. You must not carry away too deathlike a picture from here. Our lessons were beautiful, weren't they?"

Lilly answered with a sigh.

"When I spoke of Italy, you gasped a couple of times from sheer longing. I thought to myself: 'She's gasping just like yourself, yet she doesn't need it.'"

"Would you like to go there very, very much?" Lilly ventured to ask.

"Ask a man on fire whether he would like to take a cold plunge."

"And it's the only thing that would save your life?"

He looked her up and down a moment with a black, morose gaze.

"Why are you questioning me? What do you want to find out? Tell the young ladies of your class that I'm very grateful to them, tell them I'm touched by their sympathy, I—"

An attack of coughing choked him. Lilly jumped up and looked about for help. She instinctively seized a glass from the folding-table, which was half filled with a pale liquid, and held it to his mouth. He groped for it eagerly. After drinking he fell back exhausted, and looked at her gratefully, tenderly. She returned his look with a feeble smile, thinking only one thought:

"What happiness to be here!"

It was so quiet in the dark, overheated room that she could hear the ticking of his watch, which hung on the wall not far away. He wanted to sit up and speak, but he seemed not to have recovered sufficient strength. Lilly gave him an imploring look of warning. He smiled and leaned back again. So they sat in silence.

"What happiness!" thought Lilly. "What great, great happiness!"

Then he stretched out his hands to her wearily. She took them in an eager grasp of both her own. They felt hot and clammy, and his pulse beat down to his finger-tips. It went twice as fast as hers, for she could feel hers, too.

"Listen, child, sweet," he whispered. "I want to give you a piece of good advice to carry away with you. You have too much love in you. All three kinds: love of the heart, love of the senses, love springing from pity. One of them everybody must have if he's not to be a fossil. Two are dangerous. All three lead to ruin. Be on guard against your own love. Don't squander it. That's my advice, the advice of one on whom you cannot squander it, for I can use it—God knows how well I can use it!"

"Have you nobody to stay with you?" she asked, dreading to hear that some other woman had the right to nurse him.

He shook his head.

"May I come again?"

He started, struck by the ardour with which she asked the question.

"If the class sends you again, of course."

Lilly cast aside all reserve.

"That was a lie," she stammered. "Not a soul knows I came here."

He sprang to his feet, almost like a man in good health. His face lengthened, his eyes filled with tears. He stretched out his hands, which were trembling violently, as if to ward her off.

"Go," he whispered. "Go!"

Lilly did not stir.

"If you don't go," he went on, excitement almost stifling his words, "you will ruin your future. Young ladies do not visit unmarried men who live the way I do—even if the man is their teacher and sick as I am. Tell no one that you have been here, no friend, not a single human being. Your livelihood depends upon your reputation. I cannot steal your bread. *Please go.*"

"May I never come again?" Her eyes pled with him.

"No!!" he shouted in a voice like riven iron.

Lilly felt herself being shoved through the doorway. The key was turned in the lock behind her.

She disobeyed his injunction that very hour. She ran to Rosalie Katz, her friend *du jour*, to confess everything and relieve her feelings in tears. The little brown Jewess had a soft heart and was also head over heels in love with her teacher, and so the girls wept together.

But they had forgotten to lock the door, and thus it happened that Mr. Katz, whose wealth and social position found pictorial expression in a round paunch, and whose waistcoat buttons consequently were always coming loose, entered his daughter's room to have one sewed on.

When he discovered the girls in tearful embrace, he discreetly retired. But the instant Lilly had left the house, he extracted all the completer a confession from his daughter. He learned the story of the sick teacher, the abortive committee meetings, and the futile meringues glacés.

"Well, we can fix that," he said with a smirk, twirling the very thin watch chain—heavy watch chains were worn only by those among the grain merchants who had remained below on the social scale—which branched out to the right and to the left from the third buttonhole of his waistcoat.

A week later Dr. Mälzer received a registered letter from two strangers informing him that means had been found to enable him to make a lengthy sojourn in the south. All he needed to do was obtain leave of absence and draw the first payment at the office of Goldbaum, Katz & Co.

He departed on a cold, crisp October evening. The faculty accompanied him to the station. Lilly and Rosalie, who had learned the time of his leaving at papa Katz's office, also were present, but they kept themselves in the background.

He glided past them muffled in a thick scarf, his fiery eyes turned upon the distance.

When the train left, the two girls flung themselves into each other's arms and wept for love and pride.

On their way home Rosalie invited her friend to have an éclair with her, for it had grown too cold for meringues glacés.

Half an hour later they were sitting in the confectionery shop smiling at each other and looking at the pictures in the illustrated papers.

CHAPTER IV

With the advent of spring a new and gayer existence began for Mrs. Czepanek.

He was soon coming, that was certain. But even if the time was short, why spend it over that disgusting sewing? There was a less wearing way of making a living.

The thing was simple enough—rent an apartment of nine rooms, buy the furniture on credit, and have a plate hung on the outside of the house inscribed: "Board and Lodging for Students." As for the rest, well, a way would be found.

This little set of thoughts took exclusive possession of Mrs. Czepanek's poor brain, riddled like a sieve by the incessant whirr of the sewing-machine.

Though such a careless existence appealed to Lilly's fancy, she harboured some small doubts. In the first place the clamouring, threatening duns that had besieged their home after papa's departure were still fresh in her shuddering memory. Then she did not see quite clearly where so many students, enough to fill a nine-room apartment, were suddenly to come from after the beginning of the summer semester, since all had secured quarters already.

But her mother would listen to no objections.

"I will go to the directors, I will go to the mayor, I will—" and the attic room resounded with the new triumphant, "I will—"

Now began a series of mysterious expeditions. Frequently, when Lilly returned from school, she could tell at the bottom of the stairs that the machine, whose industrious clatter had greeted her for years, was at a standstill, and she would find the key to the room under the door-mat.

As the time drew near for the great event, the mother became more taciturn. A crafty smile lay on her face, which, but for an admixture of scorn, was like the smile parents wear before Christmas. She painted her cheeks more carefully than ever, and the jar of rouge, which previously she had kept locked away from Lilly, reposed unabashed on the top of the chest.

But money grew rapidly scarcer. Lilly had to give up every minute she could spare from school work to make up for her mother's remissness, while Mrs. Czepanek went about calculating and speculating. She put her foot to the treadle only on rare occasions, when Lilly pled with her urgently. The delivery of finished articles became more and more irregular, and the two women were in danger of losing their entire means of subsistence.

Lilly's vast hoard of youthful strength threatened to give out. Yet this did not cause her overmuch

concern.

"Something'll turn up," she thought.

If only she could have gotten one good night's rest, instead of lying dressed on the edge of the bed from two to six in the morning, she would not have grudged her mother her youthful intoxication born of young hopes.

Lilly sat in school with tired, reddened eyes, a filmy veil between her and the world, between her and the thoughts she was expected to think. Her teachers began to find fault with her.

It was high time for the new life to begin.

It began on a hot, drab July day.

On returning from school Lilly saw two waggons standing outside the door loaded with furniture smelling of fresh varnish. Even before she set foot on the lowest step she could hear her mother's shrill voice apparently raised in altercation with strangers.

Lilly ran upstairs, her heart beating fast. Two drivers wearing black leather aprons were standing there, one with a bill in his hand demanding money. A look of amusement was on their red faces. Mrs. Czepanek was tripping to and fro, running her fingers through her freshly-curled hair and screaming all sorts of things about rascality and broken promises and grinding down the poor. Whereupon the men laughed, and said they'd like to get back home that day.

This set Mrs. Czepanek off completely. She tried to snatch the bill from the man's hand. He refused to give it up, and she set to pummelling him with her fists.

Lilly sprang between them, caught hold of her mother, who fought desperately, and called to the men to leave, telling them everything would be arranged. So the men took themselves off.

Her mother's wrath now descended upon Lilly.

"If you hadn't come," she screamed, "I would have gotten hold of the receipt, and everything would have been all right. Now I have to go there to-morrow again, while if you hadn't mixed in, the furniture could have been unpacked in the new apartment this very day."

"What new apartment?"

Mrs. Czepanek laughed. How could Lilly be so stupid? Did she think her mother had been going about idle all that time?

Then everything was revealed. The nine-room apartment had already been rented, and all they needed to do was move in. Even the plate had already been made. When hung it would act like magic. So much for the outside. But hadn't she self-sacrificingly strained every nerve on the inside equipment, too? She wasn't going to describe the furniture, for it might make her angry again, but—

She had bought curtains for twelve windows—the pattern a Chinese lady and a palm leaf. And six rugs, good ones, because students usually have a pretty heavy tramp, and cheap stuff would wear out like chiffon. Big English wash basins with gold flowers, the pattern exactly matching the pattern of the ten stands. Unfortunately the dishes were not ready for delivery because it always took three or four weeks to have the monogram burnt in. But they would have to have something to eat from, so for the meantime she had bought a cheaper set—for eighteen people—everything thoroughly refined and respectable. She had been very clever and very careful in the entire matter.

While engaged in this description, Mrs. Czepanek walked about the centre-table with long shambling steps. Her small eyes, with the traces of many sleepless hours upon them, glistened and gleamed, and beneath the false glowed the genuine red on her haggard cheeks.

Lilly, who was beginning to be a bit uneasy, ventured to inquire concerning the payments. Her mother simply laughed at her.

"You are either a lady and impress the tradespeople, or you are not a lady. I think that I, the wife of Kilian Czepanek, conductor of the singing society, am thoroughly entitled to be treated with respect."

"Are the things at the apartment?"

Mrs. Czepanek laughed again.

"What should I do with them before the apartment is in order? Apartments have to be freshly painted and papered." Then with the graceful gesture which only the ability to pay bestows upon a person, she added: "I was especially careful in selecting the wall-paper to get artistic patterns."

Lilly had a sickish feeling. It was like being in doubt as to whether or not your schoolmates were teasing you.

Added to all the other annoyances nothing had been gotten for dinner.

Lilly set the coffee on to boil and put the afternoon rolls on the table. Well, then, they would simply skip a meal again. The two Czepaneks had grown nimble in that sort of skipping.

The mother hastily gulped down the hot drink. No time must be lost, she said, they would have to get at the packing.

At this point she was seized by another attack of fury.

"Hadn't you held my hands, you good-for-nothing, you," she screamed, "we should have had that lovely furniture in its place by to-morrow morning. As it is, we shall have to move in with all this trash. What *will* the people say when they see it?"

She tore at her artificial curls and despairingly brandished the bread-knife, with which she was slicing her roll.

Then she turned up the sleeves of her blouse, and said the packing should begin.

She emptied the wardrobe and piled the clothes over the bottom of the bed. The underwear and linen, the contents of their linen chest, she sent flying over the floor.

The sinews of her withered arms jerked, the sweat trickled down her forehead.

Lilly, watching the aimless pother with an oppressed feeling at her heart, noticed the score of the Song of Songs, the home's greatest treasure, lying on the floor, heedlessly thrown there by her mother along with nightgowns and bed-clothes.

She stooped to pick it up.

"What are you after with the Song of Songs?" screamed the mother. She had been kneeling, and now jumped to her feet.

"Nothing," said Lilly in surprise. "I was just going to put it on the table."

"You lie," the mother screeched, "you low-down thing. You want to steal it, the way you stole the receipt. I'll spoil your little game for you."

Lilly suddenly saw a gleaming something pass before her eyes, and felt a pain at her throat, felt something warm spread soothingly down to her left breast.

Not until her mother prepared for a second thrust did Lilly realise it was the bread-knife she was holding in her hand. She uttered a piercing scream, and grasped her mother's wrist.

But the mother had developed giant strength, and Lilly would probably have succumbed in the struggle that ensued, had not the noise they made drawn the neighbours to the spot.

Mrs. Czepanek was caught from behind, and bound with handkerchiefs. She held the bread-knife in a tight clutch, which the strongest man could not relax, and did not drop it until an opiate had been administered by the physician who had hurried to the scene.

Lilly's wound was dressed, and she was taken to the hospital, where she remained temporarily, because they did not know what else to do with her. While at the hospital she learned that her mother had been placed in the district insane asylum, and in all likelihood would never come out of it again.

Lilly was left alone in the world.

CHAPTER V

"Well, young lady," said Mr. Pieper, the prominent lawyer, "I have been appointed your guardian. I accepted the office because I thought it my duty—the papers in Lemke *vs.* Militzky," he interrupted himself to call to his managing clerk, who had just then entered. "What was I going to say? Oh, yes. Because I thought it my duty, despite my being an extremely busy man—to assist widows and orphans to the best of my feeble ability."

He passed his exquisitely cherished left hand over his shining bald pate and straw-coloured beard, beneath which a worldly mouth half concealed an epicurean smile.

"My wards all make their way in the world," he continued. "It's my pride to have them succeed. The way they do it—well, that's my affair, a business secret, so to say. I am convinced, my child, that you, too, will get along. If I didn't think so, I should not be so interested in you probably. The first thing is to get the young ladies the right positions. The homely ones give most trouble, unless they happen to possess a certain measure of self-abnegation. It pays them to assume the so-called Christian virtues. But of course you don't belong in that category—you probably know it yourself—I tell you merely that you may learn with time to make demands. I must explain—the main art in life is to determine the boundary line between demands justifiable and demands unjustifiable. That is, you must have a feeling for exactly how far your powers will reach in each circumstance as it arises. A girl like you—"

The managing clerk, a tall, bony fellow, suddenly appeared at the lawyer's side shoving a bundle of documents at him.

"At four o'clock the Labischin divorce case. At quarter past five Reimann—Reimann *vs.*

Fassbender—get everything ready, and have someone here to accompany this young lady—the papers will tell you where. That will do."

The managing clerk vanished.

"Well," Lilly's guardian resumed, "the time I have to spare for you is nearly gone. You cannot continue with your schooling, that's plain. There's no money for it. But even if you had the means, I'm not certain whether in view of your future—however, a governess may make a brilliant match—it sometimes occurs, chiefly, to be sure, in English novels—but there's the danger, too, that you might—excuse me for the word—on the spur of the moment I can't think of another—besides, it's the right one—that you might be seduced. What I'd rather see you than anything else is the lady in a large photographic establishment who receives customers. But it seems to me you haven't enough self-confidence as yet for that. One must make a deep impression at first sight, because people who leave an order have to have some inducement for coming back to call for their pictures. I've selected something else for you, for the purpose more of giving you a short period of trial than of providing you with a permanent position. It's in a circulating library. It will give you plenty of opportunity—discreetly, you know—not to hide your light under a bushel. The remuneration, I need scarcely say, will be moderate—free board and lodging and twenty marks a month. You will have a chance to let your fancy—I suppose you're not yet *blasé*—let your fancy roam at will in the fields of general literature. There you are, young lady! Mercy on us! Why are you crying?"

Lilly quickly dried the tears from her eyes and cheeks.

"I've just come from the hospital," was the only excuse she could find. "I'm still a little—I beg your pardon."

The prominent lawyer shook his head. His bald spot looked as petted and pampered as a lovely woman's cheeks.

"You must get out of the habit of crying, too, if you want to make your way in the world. Tears are not in place until you are 'settled.' Oh, yes, something else—the things your poor mother owned must be sold. The proceeds will serve as a small capital. I lay stress on having such a sum, no matter how insignificant. Now you will go back to your home with my man—the key was deposited at my office—and select what you think you absolutely need or"—he smiled a little—"what filial devotion leads you to prize. Good-by, my dear. In six months come to me again."

Lilly felt a cool, soft hand, which seemed incapable of bestowing a pressure, lie in her own for an instant; then she found herself staggering down the dark steps behind a clerk who had been waiting for her outside the door with the key to her home.

She wanted to speak to him, ask him questions, beg him for something. But for what? She herself knew not.

When the clerk opened up the musty room, where the twilight was broken by shafts of light, as in a tomb, the tomb of her life, the tomb of her youth, Lilly felt that now everything was over and all left her was to fall asleep here and die.

The clerk threw the shutters back and raised the windows.

The clothes were still lying on the bed, the underwear and bed-linen on the floor, and close by were two brown stains, the blood that had flowed from her wound. The knife, too, was still there.

Lilly restrained her desire to cry, shamed by the presence of the clerk, who stood there stupidly, whistling, with his lower lip thrust out.

Lilly threw her clothes into the basket-trunk which her mother had intended to use in moving to the nine-room apartment, added a few pieces of underwear and some books chosen at random, and then looked around for mementos. Her brain was befogged. She saw everything and recognised nothing. But there on the table, there, bound with rubber bands, soaked in her blood, untouched because no one knew its value, lay the Song of Songs.

Lilly snatched it up, shut down the trunk lid, and with the score under her arm, stepped out into the new life, hungry for experience.

CHAPTER VI

Mrs. Asmussen's two daughters had run away from home again. The whole neighbourhood knew it. Lilly had scarcely set foot in the dusky room smelling of dust and leather, where soiled volumes on pine shelves reached to the ceiling, when she, too, became acquainted with the fact.

Mrs. Asmussen was a dignified dame, whom nature had endowed with gracious rotundity. She received Lilly at the entrance to her circulating library, and amid kisses and tears declared that even before seeing Lilly she had conceived a love for her such as she would cherish for a child of her own; and now that she had met her face to face she was completely bewitched.

"And people speak of the cold world," thought Lilly, whom this sort of reception pleased very

well.

"What did I say—a child of my *own*? Nonsense! I love you more, much more, ever and ever and ever so much more. Daughters are venomous serpents, on whom love is wasted. They are parasites to be torn from one's breast—torn—"

She stopped because the stupid clerk, who had accompanied Lilly in a cab, was shoving her trunk over the threshold. After he left Mrs. Asmussen continued:

"Do you think I loved my daughters, or didn't love them? Did I, or did I not, say to them every day: 'Your father's a blackguard, a cur, and may the devil take him'? How do you think they rewarded me? One morning I get up and find they're gone—mind you, absolutely gone—beds empty—and a note on the table: 'We're going to father. You beat us too much, and we're sick and tired of that eternal mush.' Look at me, my dear. Am I not goodness itself? Do I look as if I could beat *any*body, much less my own daughters? And do you suppose this is the first time they did it, the first time they overwhelmed me with shame and disgrace in the eyes of the whole world? What would you say if I were to tell you it's the *third* time—twice before I pardoned them and took them to my bosom. I found them lying outside my door in tears and rags. Yes, yes, that's the way it was, that's the way it is, the way it is. But if they dare to return *again*, here's a broom, here, look, behind the door—I put it there the instant I found out they had gone, and there it will remain until I take hold of it and beat them out, beat them out through the door to the street, this way, this way, this way—"

With a gesture of ineffable disgust Mrs. Asmussen swept an invisible something through the hall, and let it lie outside, giving it a look of unspeakable contempt.

"The poor, poor woman," thought Lilly. "How she must have suffered!" And she registered a silent vow to do her utmost to replace the faithless children in the abandoned mother's heart.

At this point a young man entered, a customer, who wanted to exchange a book. He asked for one of Zola's works, and looked at Lilly triumphantly, as if to say, "You see, that's the kind I am!"

Mrs. Asmussen went to fetch the book, shaking her head softly in deprecation. The customer took it hastily without paying the least attention to the look of warning with which she handed it to him.

"Look, my dear," she said after he left, "that's the way youth goes to its ruin, and I myself am condemned to point the way."

"How?" queried Lilly, who had been listening with the keenest interest.

"Do you know what's inside an apothecary's shop?"

Lilly said she had often been in an apothecary's shop, but could not itemise the contents.

Her mistress continued:

"One closet is marked 'Poisons.' It contains the most awful poisons mankind knows. That's why it's always locked and only the owner and his assistant may have the key to it. Now look about you. Half of what you see here is poison, too. Everything written these days vitiates the soul and lures it to its destruction. Yet I must keep the wicked books, and though my heart bleeds I must hand them over to any and everybody who asks for them. Oh, I need but to think of my undutiful daughters. No use my telling them not to—they read at any rate. They read and read the whole night long, and when they were crammed full of impudence and corruption, they didn't like the food I prepared for them, and all they wanted to do was to go out walking. On top of it all they went sneaking off to their father, that miserable cur, that common cheat, that pock-marked scum of the earth. Child, I warn you against that man. Should you ever meet him, lift your skirts and spit, the way I'm spitting now."

Lilly shuddered at the man's frightful vileness, but took some courage in the thought that she had found her natural protector in this excellent woman.

An hour later they went to supper, which consisted of mush and sandwiches, with nothing but clarified fat between. Lilly, whose palate had not been pampered, was easily persuaded that nobody in the world knew how to prepare such dainty mush, and that the emperor himself was seldom served with more delicious sandwiches. Had a little ham been added to the repast, such as she had gotten for supper every evening at the hospital, the acme of earthly enjoyments in her opinion would have been attained.

Going to bed provided her with another pleasure. The books of the circulating library were kept in a large room with three windows, divided into four compartments by two bookcases running from the windowed wall deep into the room and by a counter opposite the door leading into the hall. A passageway along the wall dividing the library from the inner room was the only means of getting from one compartment to another.

When bedtime came Mrs. Asmussen had Lilly carry to the compartment farthest from the hall door two bench-like pieces of furniture and mount a spring-mattress on them. This completely blocked the space crosswise, so that, to get into bed, Lilly had to jump over the bottom rail of the benches. She thought it great sport.

Wedged in between perpendicular bookcases, the window-sill at her head, a chair holding her

impedimenta at her feet, the Song of Songs clasped in her arms, Lilly fell asleep.

The next morning her apprenticeship began.

Lilly was instructed as to the system according to which the thousands of volumes were ranged on the shelves. As she knew her A B C's, she would have been able to fetch any book from its place at the end of five minutes if only Mrs. Asmussen had followed her own scheme and not produced utter confusion by disposing the books arbitrarily.

Still harder a task was finding records in the large ledger. Here, too, the plan was supposed to be alphabetic; but some customers filled the space allotted to them more rapidly than others, and when there was no more room Mrs. Asmussen had simply turned to the next blank page regardless of alphabetic succession. The result was such a jumble that finally neither Mrs. Asmussen nor her decamped daughters knew where to look for what they wanted.

Inspired by holy zeal Lilly began the great task of getting order out of chaos. This constituted her entire life.

The very day after her arrival Mrs. Asmussen provided her with some singular experiences.

During the working hours the worthy dame had for the most part kept out of sight. When Lilly went in for supper she found her mistress dreamily inclined over a steaming cup of tea in a room pervaded by a pleasant aroma of lemon and rum.

"I suffer very much from a catarrhal affection of the mucous lining of my nose," explained Mrs. Asmussen, blinking at Lilly with somewhat watery grey eyes. "So I must take some medicine which one of the most eminent physicians in the city prescribed for me."

Lilly stirred her mush while Mrs. Asmussen sipped tea, every now and then giving vent to a distressed sigh.

"Have I told you about my daughters?"

"Oh, certainly," said Lilly, respectfully.

In the morning, too, Mrs. Asmussen had spoken of scarcely anything but those miserable creatures and the contemptible wretch they called father.

"I don't think it's possible for you to get even a remote conception of the charm of those two girls. They are my own flesh and blood, and modesty should forbid me to speak of them this way. However, from a purely objective point of view, I may say that never, never in the wide world have I ever seen, even from afar, two young ladies endowed with such striking qualities of mind and character. Such tender filial devotion, such self-sacrificing industry, such touching modesty, so much genuine feeling in all the small relations of life, such quiet strength in the judgment of great questions, have never before, I warrant, been united in two such youthful souls. Let them be an example to you, my child. You are far removed, far, far removed from those models of maidenhood."

In her astonishment and shame Lilly dropped her spoon. The old lady went on:

"It was with a bleeding heart that I had to part from them. As for them, they cried day and night before leaving me. But what was to be done? They had to go to their father. Have I ever told you about my splendid husband? An untoward destiny has separated us, but his love, I know, clings to me, and I will love him all the days of my life. Oh, what a man he was! My child, pray to the Lord that he may make you worthy to become the wife of such a man. Alas, I was not worthy, no, not I!"

Two tears of infinite contrition ran down her cheeks.

She related a good deal more on this second evening concerning the virtues of her two daughters, her husband's nobility of character, and her own unworthiness.

After she had taken several more doses of the medicine prescribed by one of the most eminent physicians of the city, she finally wept herself to sleep.

The next morning she began the day's work by bursting into a rage because Lilly had used the broom, which was to remain undisturbed behind the door, for sweeping the library.

"This broom is here for only one purpose—to beat those two monsters when they come to my door. And if you, wretched creature, take hold of it once again, you will be the first to make its acquaintance."

Lilly now began to divine that the strange world was not so roseate as her eagerness for experience had led her to picture it.

But worse was to come.

Mrs. Asmussen, who seemed to be greatly concerned for the salvation of Lilly's soul and the purity of her virgin fancy, immediately forbade her to read any of the books in the library.

"Experience with my daughters," she said, "taught me where such misconduct leads. And I will see to it that you are spared a similar fate."

So long as the work of ordering the books and the ledger continued, the temptation to disobey this mandate did not arise very frequently. But when fall came, when despite increase of custom, unoccupied hours grew more frequent, and the lamp hanging over the counter shone invitingly, when Mrs. Asmussen from day to day succumbed earlier to the effects of the medicine prescribed by one of the most eminent physicians in the city, and fell into an untroubled dream existence, curiosity and loneliness drove Lilly irresistibly on to commit the sinful deed.

The final impulse was given by a girl of about her own age, who had come one rainy October evening to exchange the first volume of a novel for the second. But the second had been loaned already, and the girl actually cried in disappointment. She couldn't bear waiting, she said. She *had* to know how the story ended. She would *die* if she didn't.

Lilly good-humouredly advised her to go to one of the other circulating libraries, which were said to be larger and more aristocratic. She even returned the three marks deposit for use at the other place. Happy in reawakened hopes the novel-reader left.

Lilly examined the torn and soiled volume on all sides and took a cautious peep between the covers.

"*Soll und Haben*, by Gustav Freytag," was on the title page. She recalled that even the girls of the first year high school had gone into raptures over the book. But the seamstress's daughter had had no time for reading novels.

Lilly glanced timidly at the first page, then slipped to the glass door and listened for a while to Mrs. Asmussen's peaceful breathing—now, with sails spread, she launched forth on the high seas of romance.

When she finished the volume at four o'clock in the morning she could have torn her hair in sheer desperation at having so lightly put the sequel into the hands of some stranger, who might not bring it back. She mapped out ways and means of unearthing his name and address and slipping to him secretly in order to hasten the return of the book. Then she fell asleep.

She spent hours going over the ledger time and again to find the name. In vain! The entries were made by numbers, not by titles, and each time she skipped the number of *Soll und Haben*.

So, like a toper who seeks intoxication in a new drink, she greedily devoured another book.

From now on Lilly's life was one great orgy, and bore all the marks of such an existence—blurred eyes, aching limbs, huge bills for midnight oil, and spying and lying every few minutes to allay Mrs. Asmussen's suspicions.

One winter morning the dreadful crime came to light.

The fire in the library stove would die out about midnight and Lilly's feet would then grow cold. So she got into the habit of reading in bed, with the lamp, which she removed from its hanging socket, set on the broad window-sill directly back of her head. She indulged in the luxury even though reduced to the bitter necessity of getting out of bed later to replace both the lamp and the book, for nowadays Mrs. Asmussen was frequently at her post earlier in the morning than Lilly. But Lilly, for the sake of the few extra hours thus gained, would not have been deterred from allowing herself this great joy, even if it had involved going out on the icy street in her nightgown.

But once she started up from sleep in terror to find Mrs. Asmussen standing at the bottom of the bed all dressed. A black strap lay across her white shirt, and the lamp, which she had gotten up at one o'clock to refill, was still burning behind her.

Never having been beaten in her life, she refused at first to take it seriously when Mrs. Asmussen, despite her corpulence, suddenly jumped over the bottom of the bed and squatted on the covers like a great turkey and began to strike her over the ears with the black strap.

Bad times set in.

Of what avail that Lilly felt genuinely repentant and swore to herself to reform. She was so steeped in the new passion, so absorbed by that lovelier existence, where people experienced and loved, suffered and enjoyed, where there were no pert servant girls who came to exchange books, no wet umbrellas, no second volumes loaned out, no ledger numbers not to be found, no mush, and no blows, that she could not have returned to her former self had she had the self-renunciatory ability of a martyr and saint.

To such an extent was she dominated by her fancy that what was her actual existence, moving on from day to day in monotonous prison-like loneliness, seemed to her a dream, an oppressive death stupour, painless, but also pleasureless. Her being did not expand in real life until the sticky pages of a novel began to rustle in her hand.

Intimidated and unresisting as she was, she did not find the courage to justify what was holiest to her even in her own eyes. She felt it to be a sin on which her hungry soul fed as on manna.

Mrs. Asmussen had bethought herself of a diabolic way of still further humiliating Lilly. Like many a believing Protestant, she regarded religion solely as a scourge. Hitherto she had not shown the least solicitude concerning Lilly's piety, but now she began each meal with a long prayer of repentance, and while the steam curled invitingly from the soup tureen, she would

beseech God with sighs and tears to raise Lilly from the depths to which she had sunk.

And woe to Lilly if caught backsliding!

That first chastisement was not the last. Every pretext was seized for beating and cuffing her. Storms of abuse showered down on her unprotected head. She did not dare breathe until the medicine prescribed by the eminent physician began to have its soothing effect.

Then she would pounce on the first book she came across, and amid the forging of signatures and broken marriage vows, amid death by poisoning and the mad acts of love, she would suffer and triumph, triumph and die, blissful in her sufferings, intoxicated to the very end.

CHAPTER VII

It was on a March afternoon, when the sun was shining with young impertinence and the heat was untimely.

The black slabs of snow at the edge of the pavement had melted into gleaming puddles, and a sparkling shower fell from the icicles clinging to the roofs. Over to the south-west the red evening glow lay spread on the house fronts like gay rugs separated by an oblique line from the shadow of the walls on the near side. The window-panes glowed as if they were suns radiating their own light, and the sparrows chased one another along the dripping eaves.

But best of all in this sorry spring of city streets was the rare spicy smell of thawing. Even the vapours rising from the gutters, now running again, gave an inkling of greening meadows and bursting boughs.

Lilly, who had gone out on hardly more than three occasions the whole winter, sat behind the counter and looked through the window longingly.

Everywhere she saw that windows and doors had been opened wide, everywhere breasts hungering for air greedily drew in the breath of coming spring. So she, too, opened the casement wide and gave the door to the hall a push, which sent it flying back and knocked down the broom, standing at its post, as always.

Through the open doorway she could see into the parlour of the tenant who lived on the other side of the hall and who, likewise, had flung back his door for spring to enter.

She saw a cherry-red sofa with embroidered antimacassars symmetrically plastered on its old-fashioned scroll arms. She saw framed wreaths of dried flowers with inscriptions hanging on the walls; she saw an artillery officer's helmet and two swords with sword-knots crossed beneath. She saw China lions serving as cigar holders, ladies in dancing attitudes holding tallow candles, photographs of family groups with peacock feathers stuck behind, a spherical aquarium containing gold fish, and a spotted goat skin. Amid all these comfortable-looking knick-knacks she saw a young man walking up and down with a book in his hand murmuring studiously. He would appear and reappear in the field of vision allowed by the hall door.

This young man awakened Lilly's sympathy at the very first glance.

He wore his waving light hair brushed from his forehead in free and easy fashion, and carried his head boldly erect. His brown and lilac necktie seemed to her aristocratic perfection.

She passed in review all her favourite heroes to see which of them he most resembled. After some wavering she finally decided he came nearest to Herr von Fink, the rogue in *Soll und Haben*.

Since the young man did not notice her, she could study him at leisure. Each time he appeared she felt a warm wave pour over her body, and when he remained away too long by the fraction of a second, she experienced a sensation of nausea, as if some one were trying to cheat her of a dear possession.

This continued until once he looked up from his book, became aware of the open door to the circulating library with the young lady on the other side observing him, started in dismay, and quickly stepped back to the invisible part of the room.

The next time he came into view he had assumed a conscious and studied manner. He looked at his book a little too closely and moved his lips one degree too zealously, while a severe frown clouded his countenance.

Lilly, too, had found it necessary somewhat to improve the picture she presented. She smoothed her hair, which she wore parted Madonna fashion, and let her arm droop over the side of the chair in idle dreaminess.

Some maids, who had come to exchange books for their mistresses, put an end to this dual posing. On leaving they closed the door and Lilly did not venture to open it again.

But that night she carried the vision of the new hero into her dreams.

It was too late in the day to speak to Mrs. Asmussen, who was now in the habit of preparing her

medicine some time before the evening meal. The next morning, however, she seemed to be in a gracious humour, and Lilly felt emboldened to make a few inquiries concerning the neighbours, of whom she knew practically nothing.

"What are the neighbours to you, Miss Inquisitive?"

Such was the tone of intercourse that had developed from the first state of enchantment.

Lilly took heart, and concocted a story of a steady customer who had asked about the neighbours the day before, and Lilly had not been able to give any information.

Mrs. Asmussen, who cherished boundless respect for the customers' wishes, forthwith became communicative.

They were two very good people, but of low station, with whom she, Mrs. Asmussen, a woman of greater aristocracy both of mind and heart, could not, of course, associate. The man, a sergeant out of service, was clerk in some office, and the woman sewed neckwear for a living.

Lilly blushed. She recalled the brown and lilac tie, the sheen of which had been dazzling her eyes since the day before.

An idea might be obtained of the vulgar existence those plebeians led, Mrs. Asmussen continued, if one knew they considered potato soup with sliced sausage in it a festal delicacy, whereas anyone with refined tastes would shudder at the mere thought.

Lilly, who, like the good-for-nothing daughters, had long lost her joy in the daily mush, could not quite sympathise with this statement. On the contrary, she felt her mouth watering, and in order to change the subject quickly she timidly inquired whether anyone else was living next door.

"Not that I know of," replied Mrs. Asmussen. "But there's a son. He goes to high school. I don't know why such people have their sons study."

"I know," thought Lilly. "Because he's one of the elect, because genius shines in his eyes, because destiny has marked him to be a ruler on earth."

That afternoon she kept the door open. But it had turned bitter cold, and the idea of friendly reciprocation occurred to nobody next door.

After an hour spent in studying the oval door plate on which was inscribed:

L. Redlich
Please ring hard

she found herself under the necessity of closing the door, because her legs were depending from her body like icicles and she had the humiliating consciousness of being scorned.

Henceforth she kept on the watch for one o'clock, when the students living in the house returned from school. Holding her forehead pressed against the window-pane, she could recognise at an inconceivable distance the blue and white rimmed caps worn by high school students.

When he came up the steps leading to the porch in front of the house, she slipped behind the curtain, and in a joyous tremour caught the shamed, sidelong glance he sent her. If he looked straight ahead she was unhappy and afraid she had hurt his feelings.

Other blue and white rimmed caps besides his entered the house. They belonged to friends who came to cram with him.

Lilly loved them all. She felt she was a secret member of the union of these young souls who were going to storm the world, and when they seated themselves in the room she took her invisible place in the circle.

Some of them Lilly recognised, not by their features, because they passed her too quickly for that, but by their caps, which she distinguished accurately. There was the "sad one," the "washed-out one," the "stylish one" and the "wireless one." She could also recognise their walk and the manner in which they rang the bell at the opposite door. Even if occupied with customers, she could tell, without having looked through the window, exactly how many and which of the friends were working with young Redlich, and she would revolve in her mind why this or that one had not come that day.

Spring advanced. The inmates of the house began occasionally to sit on the front porch, where there were benches on either side of the door.

Before leaving, the young gentlemen would remain there a while chatting, and now and then He would lean over the railing in the twilight, dreaming, no doubt, of future conquests.

With fluttering heart Lilly would stand behind a bookcase where she had cunningly contrived an observatory for herself by removing a number of books, and from there read the world-stirring thoughts that lay on the bold soaring forehead.

The benches on the right side of the porch, in front of the windows of the circulating library, generally remained unoccupied, because Mrs. Asmussen, to whom this side belonged, preferred not to desert her evening medicine, and Lilly lacked courage to ask for permission to sit there by

herself.

But one evening in May, when dark blue clouds hung in the heavens shot with red, enticing rather than threatening, when the streets were so quiet that Lilly could hear the distant plashing of the fountain in the market-place, when the only stir was created by swallows darting hither and thither, she could no longer stand the library's pasty, leathery smell, and fetching her embroidery—more for show than from eagerness to sew—she went out to sit on the porch.

She knew he had gone out and was not in the habit of remaining away after ten o'clock.

So he would be bound to pass her at all events.

Half an hour went by, another half hour, then a quarter of an hour. Finally she saw a blue and white cap come swinging down the street in the last glow of evening.

Her first thought was to run into the library with all possible speed. But she was ashamed of the idea, and remained seated.

He came, he saw her, he raised his cap and went in.

She thought gleefully:

"Well, he bowed at last."

At the end of scarcely ten minutes he reappeared on the scene, seated himself on the bench belonging to *his* side of the house, toyed with pebbles, whistled softly, and acted altogether as if he did not see her.

Lilly sat in her corner with her face turned aside, rolling and unrolling her embroidery, and every now and then fetching a little sigh, not to show her love—oh, certainly not!—but because her breath came short.

About half an hour passed in this fashion and Lilly was beginning to lose all hope of a rapprochement, when all of a sudden he said, half raising his cap:

"The front door, I believe, is soon going to be closed, Miss."

"Impossible!" she cried, feigning lively astonishment. But if she were to act on the suggestion implied in his words her chance of at last becoming acquainted with him would certainly be lost, and she added in a tone lighter than accorded with her mood: "But it doesn't matter. The window is open."

He uttered,

"H'm, h'm."

Whether in agreement or blame she could not determine, and the conversation would have come to a standstill without fail had not Lilly made an effort to keep the ball rolling.

"We are neighbours, aren't we?" she asked.

He jumped from his seat and with a sweep of his cap describing a semicircle between his head and his trousers' pocket, he said:

"Permit me to introduce myself. Fritz Redlich, senior in the high school."

Lilly once more experienced the reverential thrill that used to pass through her soul when she was in the Selecta and the last year class of the boys' high school was mentioned. The fact was suddenly borne in upon her that now she was nothing better than a shop girl, and she grew hot with shame at the thought.

But she would not have it that her glorious past was to have been lived in vain.

"I was in the Selecta. I left last autumn," she said, "and I got to know some of you then."

"Whom?" he asked eagerly.

Lilly mentioned the names of two young men who had fluttered about her at the skating-rink, and asked whether he knew them.

"Certainly not," he answered with scorn, which did not seem wholly sincere. "They loaf too much for fellows like us, and they're going to join a students' corps. We don't do that sort of thing."

Silence ensued.

It had now grown so dark that Lilly could see only the outline of his figure as he idly leaned against the corner post of the balustrade.

Fine drops of rain fell and lay in her hair. She could have remained there forever with the dark youthful form before her searching eyes and spring's blessing lying cool on her head.

"You are engaged here in the circulating library?" he asked.

Lilly said "Yes," and was grateful to him for the elegant word "engaged," which seemed somewhat to improve her position.

"And you are preparing for the examinations?" she inquired in turn.

"In autumn—if everything goes well," he answered with a sigh.

"Then you are going out into the wide, wide world," she said with the rapt expression that girls adopt in compositions. "Going out to fight your way through life. Oh, how I envy you!"

"Why?" he asked in wonder. "Aren't you fighting your way through life already?"

Lilly burst out laughing.

"Oh, if I were you," she cried, "what wouldn't I do—oh!"

She exulted in her sensations. She felt her limbs stretching. She knew a gleam of triumph was flashing in her eyes, a gleam which could not triumph simply because it dissipated itself unseen in the dark.

It was impossible for her, from sheer joy, to remain where she was. She would have gone mad had she been compelled to stay there, formulating stiff words, while everything in her cried out:

"I love you."

She bade him a hasty good-night and ran into the library, bolting the door behind her. She ran up and down the narrow aisles between the cases, laughing and sighing, raising her arms aloft like a priestess at prayer, and knocking her elbows painfully against the shelves.

A yearning for symphonies, for great sustained major chords, welled up within her. She wanted to sing the Walhalla motif, but the Walhalla motif cannot be sung.

Suddenly an aria flitted through her mind, one of those songs which had palpitated through her childhood, without conveying any meaning to her, but which, for that very reason, had been the more purely consecrated.

> I sought him whom my soul loved,
> I sought him, but I found him not.
> I called him,
> But he gave me no answer.
> The watchman that went about the city found me.
> They smote me, they wounded me.
> The keepers of the walls took away my veil from me.

She sang in a soft, uncertain voice, loud enough, however, to be heard through the window. But when she peeped from her observatory to convince herself that he was listening, she no longer saw him standing there.

She sang louder and leaned out. She tore open her tight-fitting dress to expose her bare breast to the rain drops.

Then all of a sudden she was overcome by a feeling of wretchedness; why, she did not know, but so strong it was she thought she would die of it. She felt how the cruel watchers seized her; she felt the smart of the wound which rude hands caused her; she felt how the veil was being torn away which concealed from the eyes of the world the holy nakedness of her body. In shameless nudity, yet weeping drops of blood for bitter shame, she tottered through the streets, and sought and sought, yet *he* was farther off than ever.

She sank on her knees at the window-sill, and pressing her face on its edge, wept bitterly in sweet dark sympathy with that image of herself straying through Jerusalem's nocturnal streets.

Yet all this was sheer happiness!

CHAPTER VIII

And the happiness endured.

It nestled in the dusty corners, it perched on the bookshelves, it span golden cobwebs from beam to beam, it rode on every ray of light reflected from the windows opposite on the leather backs of the books.

Wherever she went, Lilly was accompanied by a humming medley of quivering tones, half motifs and snatches of melodies, strains from an æolian harp, the chirping of a cricket-on-the-hearth, the singing of a boiling kettle, and the soft twittering of birds.

Awake or asleep, she always heard it.

Now and then a few measures of the Song of Songs joined in exultingly.

Outwardly everything went along in the old ruts. Mrs. Asmussen was sometimes sober, sometimes full of sweet drugs. Husband and daughters rose and sank, sank and rose, through the entire gamut of ethical appraisement, plunged one moment into the deepest pit of depravity,

exalted the next to the shining heights of apotheosis. One day a volume of Gerstäcker was missing, another day a Balduin Möllhausen seemed to have been sucked into the swamps of the Orinoco.

Sometimes a puff of wind blowing through the window carried a little cloud of yellow powder to the edges of the shelves, from which it was wiped off like ordinary dust. Yet it conveyed a greeting from swaying boughs in bloom, which was all this spring brought to Lilly, except for a loads of lilacs carted past the library on their way to market.

The young hero from the other side of the house had not approached her again.

She trembled whenever she heard him go down the steps, and twice a day with beating heart she received his shy greeting—that was all.

And he was not to be seen on the porch again. The digging and cramming with the other young men lasted until late at night, and it was often two o'clock before she heard their departing tread.

Not until then would she throw herself in bed, where she lay staring into the dusk of the summer night, her spirit roving over the world to find *the* throne worthy to serve as her hero's goal. She saw him a general winning epoch-making battles in the open country, she saw him a poet walking up the steps of the capitol to receive the laurel wreath, she saw him an inventor soaring through the ether in the airship he himself had perfected, she saw him the founder of a new religion—but here she came to a terrified halt, for in her heart she had remained a good Catholic.

Under the oppression of bodily and spiritual castigation she had not dared seek refuge in religion. Quickly enough the courage had gone from her to ask Mrs. Asmussen for permission to visit St. Anne's early every morning, and soon she had completely forgotten that such a thing as a confession or a mass ever took place.

Now, however, in the exuberance of her feelings, feelings such as she had never before suspected, her longing for spiritual disburdenment grew so strong that she decided to acknowledge her Catholicism to Mrs. Asmussen and beg for the privilege to pray in that quiet corner where St. Joseph, who had always been good to her, stood behind six gold-encircled candles and smilingly shook his finger.

In Lilly's avowal Mrs. Asmussen found an explanation of all her vices; her sneakiness, her hypocrisy, her laziness, her lack of a sense of order. Mrs. Asmussen, therefore, concluded her daily prayer with the wish for immediate and complete conversion.

Nevertheless she did not refuse Lilly two excursions a week to early mass, which was all Lilly had dared hope for.

The meeting between Lilly and St. Joseph was touching.

Really, going back to him was like going back home. The cherubs that fluttered in the gay glass case behind him greeted her with a knowing, confidential look, like brothers and sisters who have been let into the secret that the punishment after all is not going to be so very severe. The golden-yellow carpet extended a hospitable invitation to kneel, and the flowers on the Holy Virgin's altar close by perfumed the air.

The saint at first seemed a little hurt because she had not visited him for so long. But after she had made her moan—telling of her loneliness, the daily mush and the blows—he softened and forgave her.

Since her last visit he had received three new silver hearts, which shot out rays of light the length of a finger. She felt like dedicating one to him, too, but on what grounds she did not know, since the miracle to be worked in her was yet to be accomplished.

"Perhaps it's only jealousy in me, or a desire to show off," she thought, for it was painful to her that others should stand in closer relations to her saint than she. "After all," she comforted herself, "how can I expect anything else when I neglected him so long?"

After confessing everything—except, of course, her love story—he had become too much of a stranger for *that*—she hastened away. The clocks were striking quarter of seven, and if she did not meet her hero on his way to school, her morning meditations would have had neither purpose nor significance.

She met him and his companions at the corner of Wassertor street.

He raised his cap and passed by. But she, fetching a deep breath, remained for a time on the same spot, like one who has just escaped a great danger.

From now on there were two such encounters a week.

Her secret wish that some morning, when he was alone, he would stop and enter into a neighbourly conversation, was never fulfilled. Not the faintest glimmer of joy appeared in his face at her approach, and the tense concern depicted on his features did not relax even when—blushing a bit—he raised his cap to her.

Lilly had long given up all hope of his ever addressing her again, when one rainy July Sunday in the evening, when the door of the circulating library was closed to customers, she heard a faint tinkling of the bell. She opened the door—there *he* stood.

"Mercy!" she cried, almost shutting the door in her confusion.

Did she happen to have Rückert's poems in her library?

Lilly knew for certain she did *not* have them, but if she admitted forthwith her inability to furnish the book he would find no pretext for entering into a conversation, so she said she would go see, and wouldn't he step in and wait? He hesitated a moment, then seated himself on the customers' chair placed close to the door.

Lilly spent some time searching, because she was afraid the inevitable "no" would send him off with a curt "thank you," and she ran up and down the aisles between the shelves aimlessly, reiterating:

"I'm sure I saw the poems just a little while ago."

Then, in order to think the matter over more quietly, she seated herself opposite him with the counter between. But he encouraged her to renew the search.

"If you saw them only a short time ago, then they are bound to be here."

When finally convinced that Rückert's poems were not in the library, he fetched a deep sigh and murmured something like, "What shall I do?" and disappeared.

Lilly, completely dazed, stared at the doorway, which a moment before had framed his figure.

She wanted to cry out and plead, "Stay here! Come back!" But she heard the door on the other side of the hall fall shut, and everything was over.

She crouched at the window-sill indulging in speculations of what *might* have taken place if he had happened to remain.

Her heart throbbed violently.

About quarter of an hour later the bell rang again.

She jumped up. Supposing it was he?

It was he.

He begged pardon; he had forgotten his umbrella.

"This time you don't slip away!" something within her cried.

He caught up his soaking umbrella, which she had failed to notice despite the shining puddle which was crawling along the crack between two floor boards, and was about to escape again, when Lilly essayed:

"For what do you need Rückert's poems?"

He began to complain:

"Life is made so hard for us, you have no idea how hard."

He went on to tell about the speeches they had to deliver offhand on a subject sprung on them without warning, regardless of whether or not the students had prepared the theme. But this time they had gotten wind of the surprise in store—the next day in literature class they would be required to give a comprehensive view of Rückert. That was why he would have to glance over the poems once again to find out exactly who had been buried in the three graves at Ottensen.

Lilly thrilled with joy.

She could help him—she, the low-flying sparrow, could help *him*, the soaring heaven-dweller.

She timorously related the story of the poor, defeated count of Brunswick and Klopstock, the pious bard of "The Messiah." The only thing she had forgotten was who the twelve hundred exiles were who lay in the first of the graves.

He seemed unwilling to believe in this unexpected good fortune. Was she sure of what she said? That about Klopstock was correct; he knew it from the tables of his history of literature. But the rest of it? Oppressed by grave doubts he shook his triumphant mane.

Lilly eagerly allayed his fears. To be sure, it was more than a year since she had heard of those lovely things, but she had a good memory, and would certainly not misinform him lightly.

At last he seemed relieved. He drew a deep breath, and observed, with his mind bent more upon general matters:

"Yes, it's very hard, very, very hard."

Once embarked on the current of open talk, he went on to offer his views concerning the other difficulties of human life. Mathematics was all right; in fact, he had done very well in analytic geometry. But history and the languages, and above all, German composition! A fellow was

sometimes driven to despair by the wretched state of things in this world.

In this Lilly fully concurred. She, too, had little cause to be satisfied with the course of mundane events, and she gave eloquent and passionate expression to her sentiments.

"As for you," she concluded, "what tortures your spirit must undergo when it feels itself hampered in its flight by the humiliating demands of the schoolroom!"

He looked at her in some wonderment and remarked:

"Yes, indeed, it's hard, very hard."

"I in your place," Lilly went on, "would not care a fig inside myself for all that vapid stuff. I would just do what is necessary in an offhand way, and then in complete spiritual freedom climb to the height where the great poets and philosophers dwell."

"Yes, but the examinations!" he exclaimed, utterly horrified.

"Oh, those stupid examinations!" she rejoined. "What difference does it make whether or not you pass?"

Here he became eager.

"You don't understand at all, not at all. Examinations are in a sense the avenue leading to every good position in life, no matter whether you enter the university or study architecture, or merely try for a good place in the postal service. But that, of course, I wouldn't do."

"A man like you!" she interrupted.

He smiled faintly, feeling stroked the right way.

"I don't want to storm the heavens exactly," he said, "but I have my ambitions. What would a fellow be if he had no ambitions?"

"That is so, isn't it?" Lilly cried, looking up to him with a grateful gleam in her eyes. The feeling that she had never experienced such an hour of joy took complete hold of her.

When he arose to go—it had grown quite dark—she felt actual physical pain, as if a piece of her body were being torn from her.

He had almost closed the door when he turned and said as one who wishes to be sure where he treads:

"If it's not troubling you too much, do hunt for the poems once more. Perhaps you will find them."

Turning back a second time:

"You might lay the book under the door-mat if you find it."

Lilly hastily lighted the lamp and obediently started on the search. After a time the futility of doing so occurred to her.

He spent the summer vacation in the country with a companion in misery, with whom he crammed for the examinations. The written tests were to be given immediately after the opening of school, and the oral tests about the middle of September.

The young hero looked pale and exhausted, and reddish-brown stubble lay in the hollows of his cheeks like blotches of blood.

Lilly was unable to witness such wretchedness in silence, and one morning, when, returning from mass, she met him alone in the deserted street, she ventured to stop and speak to him.

"You must spare yourself, Mr. Redlich," she broke out anxiously. "You must keep well for the sake of your parents and those who love you."

He seemed more embarrassed than pleased, and before finding a reply, he cast rapid sidelong glances in all directions.

"Thank you," he stammered. "But later, if you please, later."

He dashed past, scarcely daring to raise his cap.

Lilly realised she had committed an indiscretion. The houses began to dance before her eyes, she chewed her handkerchief, and feared the passersby might laugh and jeer at her. When ensconced in her corner behind the entry book, she no longer doubted that she had lost him forever.

She had!

He came and went without greeting her—he came at suppertime and left—she heard his steps all the way down the street.

Over and done for! Over and done for!

But lo and behold! At dusk a knock was heard on the door. No, not exactly a knock, rather a scratching at the door, the way a dog with a guilty conscience scratches when he wants to be let in.

There he stood. Not with the embarrassed yet business-like manner with which he had entered that Sunday evening when the graves of Ottensen had justified his coming. No, this time his heart throbbed anxiously. He was like a thief who lacks skill in the art of thieving.

"Is Mrs. Asmussen here?" he whispered.

"Mrs. Asmussen doesn't come in here at this time," she whispered back, with a deep sigh of joy.

"Then may—I come in—for a moment?"

She stepped aside, and let him enter, thinking:

"How can a person endure so much joy without dying of it?"

He stammered something about "begging her pardon" and "not answering her."

She responded with something about "having reproached herself" and "having meant it well."

Then they sat down opposite each other with the counter between, and did not know what to say next.

He was the first to discover the way into the region of the permissible.

"A fellow sometimes likes to exchange thoughts with a congenial young lady," he said with an emphatic air of importance. "But he seldom finds the time—or the opportunity."

"Oh, as for the opportunity," thought Lilly.

Since she had manifested such kindly interest in him, and since an exchange of views would certainly be edifying to him, especially because of the growing emancipation of women—which—

He had steered into a tight place, but his sense of dignity did not forsake him. He looked at Lilly somewhat challengingly, as if to say, "You see how able I am to cope with this difficult situation."

Lilly had not caught the drift of his talk. From the moment she recovered her power of thinking, she was dominated by one feeling: help him, save him, so that he doesn't work himself to death.

"Once we girls had a teacher," she began, "who delivered glorious never-to-be-forgotten lectures in class. He worked too hard, like you, and by this time he must certainly have died of consumption. The same will happen to you, if you don't take care and go more slowly."

He nodded dejectedly.

"Yes, life's hard, very hard."

"You must get enough sleep, and go walking. Walking a great deal is the very best."

"Do *you* go walking?"

Lilly taken aback considered a moment. Since she had been in that hole among the books, she had not seen a field of snow or a green tree.

"Oh, I!" she threw out, shrugging her shoulders. "What have I got to do with it?" Then, inwardly rejoicing at her own boldness, she added: "How would it be if we were to take a walk together?"

Now it was his turn to be taken aback.

"There are such a lot of obstacles," he observed, thoughtfully shaking his mane. "The thing would be misinterpreted. There are considerations, especially so far as you are concerned—certainly, especially for you."

Lilly had read of young cavaliers whose solicitude for their lady's good name exceeded their very passion for her, and she looked up at him in gratitude and admiration.

"Don't bother about me! I'll manage. I'll just shirk early mass."

Though she felt a tiny prick at her heart because of her blasphemous words, she knew that for the sake of such a walk she would betray God, betray St. Joseph himself, without the least hesitation.

"But I've got to get through with the examinations first," he explained.

The matter was settled and the plan sealed with mutual promises. Accompanied by Lilly's good wishes and warnings, he took leave, but not before carefully scanning street, porch, and hall.

From now on Lilly's life was one glow of hope and dreamy anticipation. She would lie awake half the night, picturing to herself how she would wander over the golden meadows with him in the light of dawn, her hand pressed against her throbbing heart, her arm now and then slightly grazing his elbow. Each time she thought of this she felt a little shock, which quivered down to

the very tips of her toes.

She read nothing but hot, passionate books, in which there was much of "intoxication," "transport," and the "giddiness of endless kisses." But she did not dream of kisses in connection with herself. Whenever she found herself drifting in that direction, she checked herself in dismay —so exalted was he above every earthly desire.

Now she knew what reasons justified her in promising St. Joseph a silver heart.

One Sunday morning she told St. Joseph the whole story—about Fritz Redlich's examinations, his high ideals, and her solicitude for him. The only thing she refrained from mentioning was the walk they had planned; which she had to omit on account of the shirked mass.

She had saved about sixty marks, which she carried in a leather pocket next to her body. The silver heart would cost twelve marks at the very most. Plenty of money remained for buying a gift for her friend. She wavered long between a gold-embroidered college portfolio and gold-embroidered slippers, and finally decided on a revolver in a case, naturally assuming that in the wild struggle for existence he would be exposed to many dangers, from which only reckless daring and instant decision could rescue him. A revolver and case cost twenty-five marks, gold thread for embroidering the monogram, five marks. Thus everything was arranged in the best possible manner.

When she saw him step on the porch the morning of examination day, white as the glove with which he waved farewell to his parents—he seemed to have forgotten her—she felt as if she should have to run after him and press the weapon of deliverance into his hand without further delay. But she reflected that in all likelihood the examiners would not show themselves susceptible to that sort of eloquence.

At the last moment, as he stepped from the porch to the pavement, a timid glance of his fell upon her, and she was happy.

At one o'clock there was some stir on the street.

They were bringing him home. He looked weary and completely crushed, but the others whooped and huzzaed.

The old sergeant out of service ran to meet him in torn slippers, and violently wiped his green-grey bristly beard on his son's face. From the kitchen came the spicy smell of cooking sausages.

Lilly ran rejoicing up and down the aisles of the library, and thought with a sort of superior satisfaction:

"St. Joseph's fine! *Isn't* he fine!"

The very next morning she ordered the silver heart, and blushingly asked to have a monogram of L. C. and F. R. engraved on it.

When she returned she found an envelope addressed to her among the order slips in the letter-box. Inside was a soiled menu card from a restaurant, on which was written: "Sunday 5 a.m. on the porch."

The first grey of dawn entered the library through the lunettes in the shutters.

Lilly sprang out of bed and threw the windows open.

The street resembled a great bowl of milk, so heavily the white mist of early autumn weighed upon the ground. The cold damp drizzle did her hot limbs good. She spread her arms and washed herself in the icy air as in a bath.

Her light summer dress, which she herself had washed and ironed the evening before, hung like a bluish drift on the white wall. She smartened herself as never before. This festal day should find her worthily adorned.

With the paltry remnants of her savings she had bought a large yellow shepherdess hat tying under the chin, so doing away with the need for a collar. And openwork silk gloves suddenly came to light, having been discovered at the bottom of the trunk, where they had long lain forgotten.

She would carry the heavy revolver in her work-bag. Before slipping it in, she kissed it several times, and said:

"Watch over him faithfully, destroy his enemies, and lead him on to victory."

It was a genuine consecration of arms.

At five o'clock sharp the door opposite creaked on its hinges. She glided into the hall. On the porch they shook hands.

His eyes were bleared, yet he looked rather enterprising. There was even something of the beau in his get-up. He wore his hat tilted a bit to one side, and in his left hand swung a light bamboo

cane tipped by the head of a sea gull in silver.

Lilly stammered congratulations.

He thanked somewhat condescendingly, as if so insignificant a matter were not worth all that to-do.

"We loaf about dreadfully now," he went on. "I can't say I get a great deal of sport out of it, but a fellow has to know something of the follies of human life, too."

When they passed St. Anne's, a thought suddenly flashed into Lilly's mind, which filled her with bliss. If they were to go into the church for a moment, the sin of silence would be removed from her soul, and St. Joseph could even bestow his blessing on the day.

Timidly she gave voice to her wish—and found herself in a pretty mess.

"I am a free-thinker," he said, "I would never go counter to my convictions. Nevertheless, it is an enlightened man's duty to be tolerant, and if you want to go in, I will wait outside."

No, she no longer wanted to, and she was terribly ashamed. Of course, he could not know what close connection existed between St. Joseph and his good fortune. Otherwise he would not have been so ungrateful.

They walked in silence through the deserted streets of the suburbs. The fog lifted a little. Lilly chilled through and through shivered at each step. Perhaps excitement was the cause. On the whole, however, she felt much calmer than she had expected to. Everything was so altogether, altogether different. A little disenchantment had occurred, she did not know how.

She cast a yearning gaze down the street, at the end of which dark trees showed their heads.

"When once we are out there!" she thought, and clenched her teeth to keep them from chattering.

The silence began to paralyse her thoughts. She would gladly have started a conversation, had she been able to think of a suitable beginning.

A baker's boy was walking ahead of them whistling.

"When we worked all night," said Fritz Redlich suddenly, "we always bought warm rolls. We might get some now."

Lilly became joyous again.

To be sure, had he said "we might steal some," she would have liked it better.

The baker's boy was not permitted to sell his rolls—just the right number for delivery had been doled out to him—but on the opposite side was an open shop.

When Lilly saw her hero reappear with a large bag in his hand, she had a pleasant sensation, as if they were beginning housekeeping together.

They now walked along gardens under a veritable shower of dew falling from the trees. Lilly shrugged her shoulders, and did not know what to do she felt so cold.

At last they were out in the open country.

Mats of silver-grey cobwebs, each weighted down with a burden of dew, were spread over the fields of high stubble. Yellow ridges of hills bounded the semicircle of the landscape, and in the distance rose the walls of the woods.

Lilly stretched her arms like a swimmer, and drew in through her open mouth five or six deep breaths.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

Lilly laughed.

"I must make up for all I've lost," she said. "I haven't *breathed* for a whole year."

Feeling frozen still she began to run. He tried to keep pace, but soon fell behind, and panted after her, hopping rather than running.

When they reached the top of the first hill, the sun began to rise over the plain. The brushwood seemed to be on fire, and the cobwebs shone like silver. Each dew-drop became a glittering spark, a flame ran along each thread.

Lilly, warmed and excited from running, pressed her hands to her heaving breast, and stared into the sea of red with drunken eyes.

"Oh, look, look," she stammered, giving his face a questioning, searching glance.

She half expected him to recite odes, sing hymns, and play the harp.

He stood there trying to get his breath, to all appearances occupied exclusively with himself.

"Do recite something, Mr. Redlich," she begged. "A poem by Klopstock, or something else." She

had not gotten up to Goethe in school.

He gave a short laugh, and replied:

"Catch me! Now that examinations are over German literature may go to the dogs for all I care."

Lilly felt ashamed and said nothing more, fearing the expression of such crude desires must make her culture appear half baked. When she looked up again, the glow was gone. The fields still sent up yellowish-red vapours to meet the climbing sun, whose effulgence hung coldly, almost indifferently, over the earth begging for light.

They walked on toward the woods.

He swung the paper bag. From either side of the road she gathered blackberries, which depended like bunches of glistening black beads from bushes overlaid with a film of cobwebs.

Some distance on, at the edge of the woods, they came upon a bench. Without discussing it, they simply made for the seat. It was the place they needed.

Lilly felt a little oppression at her heart. Here she was finally to receive the revelations for which her soul languished; here she was to look into the heaven-gazing eyes of the young genius.

He opened the bag, and she laid her handkerchief filled with the blackberries alongside.

The work-bag containing the heavy revolver was deposited for the time being between the rounds of the bench. Lilly hollowed out the rolls, and filled them with blackberries, and the two breakfasted together very cosily.

The golden shimmer of early autumn poured its enchantment over them. Lilly's brain grew heavy with longing and happiness. She could have sunk to the ground, and laid her forehead against his knees merely for support, because approaching fulfillment was more than she could bear.

He had removed his cap. A curly lock fell over his forehead down to his eyebrows, giving his face a sombre expression, as if he were challenging the whole world. This "genius lock" was the fashion among the boys of the last year high school and was especially cherished by those who did not aspire to the stylishness of belonging to a students' corps.

His gaze rested on the church towers of the old city, which resembled awkward, faithful, sleepy watchmen looking down on the wide-spreading clusters of house tops.

"Will you tell me what you are thinking about?" asked Lilly, bashfully admiring. The great moment—at last it had come.

He gave a short and somewhat mocking laugh.

"I am calculating how many ministers get their living in a nest like that, and how comfortable it is for a fellow if he just studies theology."

"Why don't you? Learning flows in on one from all sides."

"You don't understand," he reproved her gently. "Learning is not the chief thing. Conviction is. One must do everything for the sake of one's conviction, suffer want, suffer all sorts of privations. The city has six scholarships to bestow upon theological students, but I would rather chop my hand off than accept one. A man must take up the fight for his convictions, and that's what I'm going to do—day after to-morrow."

His small, short-sighted eyes sparkled. He stroked the genius lock from his forehead with a trembling hand.

Now she had him where she wanted him. Perhaps this was the very instant in which to hand him the revolver. But out of respect for the greatness of his mood, she deferred the matter for a while.

Taking a firmer hold of the bag in which the revolver was lying, she went into raptures as once before on the porch.

"Oh, Mr. Redlich, what is finer than such a fight? To dive into the waves of life! To spite the dark powers who control our destiny, and wrest our fortune from them, to come out of the struggle each time with greater strength, a more iron will. Can you conceive of anything more up-lifting?"

But this time, too, her adjuration failed to awaken an echo.

"Good heavens," he said, "on close inspection what after all is this much-vaunted fight? Everybody walks over you, in winter you lie in a cold bed, and all year round you have nothing to eat. Of course, I'm going to go into it, of course I am, but it's hard, yes, indeed, it's hard! If I had a scholarship I should feel much better."

"So that's all the joy you have in facing the world?"

"My dear young lady," he rejoined, "a fellow who starts out with nothing but a satchel of darned wash and a hundred-mark bill—where's he to get much joy from?"

"He's the very one!" Lilly exclaimed, eager to cast a ray of her own confidence into his heart. "When somebody is like you, with the mark of greatness on his face, then the world lies at his

feet."

She described a semicircle with her right hand, taking in the entire plain, its green bushes and silvery streams and the city with its wreath of swelling gardens lying embedded in the fields like a lark's nest in a meadow. Lilly felt as if she were showing him a small copy of his future realm.

He nodded several times in the dejected consciousness of knowing better than she what the world is like.

"Dear me, it's hard," he observed, "very, very hard."

She wanted whether or no to convince him of his own ability to conquer, and growing warmer and warmer continued with her peroration.

"If only I could express what I know and feel. If only I could give you some of my own assurance. Look at me, poor thing that I am. I have no father or mother, and no friends. If at least I could have stayed at school and graduated. But here I am, without a vocation, without money, without clothes for the winter—not even a decent pair of shoes." She stuck out the worn tips of her old boots, which until now she had kept carefully hidden. "I don't get as much to eat as I need either; and if I come home too late to-day, I shall be whipped. Yet I know that happiness is lying in wait for me. It is here already—in every breeze that blows my way, in every sunbeam that smiles at me—the whole world is happiness—the whole world is music—everything's a Song of Songs—everything's a Song of Songs!"

She turned from him with an impetuous movement, to keep him from seeing how she was quivering all over.

Down in the city the chimes began to ring. St. Mary, once the cathedral, now the chief Protestant church, came first with its three resounding clangs. St. George uttered a clear third E-G—on high festivals it added a paternal, rumbling C. More bells followed. St. Anne's thin tinkling joined in—modest, yet to be distinguished the instant it began. There was a secret whispering and calling in it: "We know each other, we love each other, and St. Joseph says 'Good morning.'"

Lilly's friend seemed to have used the period of her silence in order to win back his spiritual balance. With the little air of didactic dignity that he liked to assume when he felt he had the advantage in a situation, he began:

"I am almost inclined to think we don't quite understand each other. I was at great pains to make a careful study of the problems of life, and so I see somewhat deeper into things than you. I'm up to snuff about the so-called illusions of youth. I know what men are worth, and I should advise you to be a little more cautious about what you do."

"What do you mean?" she asked, astounded.

He gave her a sidewise smile with an air of mingled superiority and uncertainty.

"Well, beauty carries certain dangers in its train."

"Nonsense, beauty!" Lilly cried, glowing all over. "Who thinks of such silliness?"

"The person upon whom nature has bestowed such a gift," he went on, "has many reasons for being on her guard. For instance, it's a piece of good luck for you that you chanced upon so strict and correct a young man as I am. Another man with a more frivolous nature than mine would have made an entirely different use of an excursion like this. You may be sure of that."

Lilly stared at him. She was carried away by a whirl of obscure and disagreeable thoughts. What did he want of her? Was he reproaching her? Did he scorn her because of her most sacred feelings?

"Oh, dear," she said, utterly discomposed. "I wish we were at home."

"Understand me," he began again. "I am by no means a Pharisee. I have a thorough comprehension of the weaknesses of human nature. I am only offering you a bit of advice in all modesty, and some day you will thank me for it. It is not for nothing that a fellow has his principles. Should we ever meet again later in life, you will, I hope, not have to be ashamed of the friend of your youth."

"If it's a question of shame," something within Lilly cried, "then I ought to feel ashamed now, and of myself."

Forward, undignified, ill-bred—that was what she held herself to be for having begged him to take this morning walk.

Yet there had been nothing evil in the thing! Where had the evil suddenly come from?

The chimes were still making music, the sun was still weaving its net of gold about her. She saw nothing, she heard nothing, so very ashamed she was. She wanted to run away, but did not dare even to stir.

As for him he no longer looked as if he needed comforting. His manner expressed the quiet satisfaction a man feels with a piece of work just completed.

A blackberry had remained sticking in a crevice in the seat of the bench.

"One mustn't get spots on one's clothes," he admonished, and stuck the berry in his mouth, slowly crunching the seeds between his teeth.

Lilly pulled herself together, and caught up her work-bag.

"What are you carrying there?" he asked. "It looks so heavy."

Lilly in terror clutched the bag tight.

"Only the house key," she stammered.

Then they went home.

"If only I could change his mind," she thought, "so that he would have a favorable opinion of me again."

Nothing better occurred to her than to stoop at the wayside and pluck the finest field flowers she could reach to offer to him as a farewell gift instead of that other gift, the mere thought of which made her feel like a goose.

She handed him the bouquet keeping her eyes turned aside. He thanked her with a pretty bow, and twirled the bamboo cane with the silver handle—an heirloom of which he had just come into possession. He swung it boldly about his head, the way future corps students do before making a high carte.

Lilly in her dejection and humiliation was unable to say a word.

"Doesn't an inner voice," he asked, "tell you we shall meet some time again?"

She turned her face away. She had all to do to force back the tears welling up in her eyes.

"Then I hope you will receive proof of what unremitting effort and unshakable fidelity to one's convictions can accomplish even with small means."

His voice now sounded full and vibrant with self-satisfied energy. While making her small and timorous he seemed to have sucked up some of her joyous mood.

When they drew near the Altmarkt, however, he became greatly disquieted again, and kept spying about on all sides. Finally he remarked that the streets were getting pretty lively, and it would be better perhaps if they were to part company and go back by different ways.

A few days later he left home, and the house was perfumed with the garlic of the sausage that Mrs. Redlich sliced into his soup as a farewell offering.

Lilly stood behind the window curtain with burning eyes, and thought in her sorrow:

"Oh, I wish I had never seen him!"

CHAPTER IX

One grey October morning, which hid the threat of approaching winter behind a mask of moist, warm mist as behind a hypocritical smile, the wonderful happened: Mrs. Asmussen's runaway daughters came back again.

Without casting a shadow before them, there they were all of a sudden, shoving several bulging hand-bags into the library, measuring Lilly with an astonished look of gracious frigidity, and ordering her to pay for the cab—they had no change.

Lilly felt the throbbing of her heart up to her neck. The moment the two grand, voluptuous figures appeared on the scene and, though looking a bit weather beaten and washed out, swept victoriously into possession of the territory, she knew they were Mrs. Asmussen's daughters.

She cast one anxious look at the pretty, pug-nosed faces, where two pairs of bright grey eyes challenged the door of the rear room, and another anxious look at the broom of welcome, whose hour had come. Then she hurried off to avoid the terrors bound to follow upon the opening of the middle door.

In the cab she found two withered bouquets of gladioli, a Scotch plaid rolled in a shawl strap, from which two umbrella handles—large blue glass knobs, the size of a man's fist—were sticking out, some cushions trimmed with diagonal bars, and a whisky flask. There was also a tin box of lemon drops sans lid, and a disjointed paper hat-box, between whose cracks a comb and a piece of buttered bread were striving in unison to find their way into freedom.

Lilly gathered up the effects, and stopped in the hall, listening in terror. She expected to hear the screams of the maltreated girls. But all was serene, and when she entered she saw mother and daughters hugging and kissing.

Since there was no time left before the midday meal to buy a roast in honor of the festive occasion, dinner consisted of cabbage as usual, with the addition of a mountain of cakes from the confectioner's, to which the girls helped themselves before the meal in order to lay some aside

for days of less plenty.

This was the first evidence of their housekeeperly thrift.

Mrs. Asmussen beamed with motherly joy and tenderness.

"Well," she said, "did I exaggerate when I told you about these glorious creatures? Too bad I had to do without them for so long. But I am modest in my demands, and I am glad enough to get what I do. I know their hearts draw them now to their father, now to their mother, because they cannot make up their minds to deprive either of us permanently of the gift of their pure filial love."

She was sitting between the girls, and she pressed a hand of each. All three looked into one another's eyes devotedly.

The absent pater familias was remembered touchingly. Their gay, talented father, the girls said, intended to give up his large business, to assume the management of extensive farms in the south of Russia at the urgent invitation of influential patrons.

Later, in Mrs. Asmussen's gloomier hours, it transpired that that "pock-marked scoundrel" had had to scurry off because of some questionable notes, and hide in Odessa until the atmosphere in the north cleared.

To Lilly's unpracticed eye the girls were as like as two sparrows—saucy, greedy, inconstant, and amorous. It was only after a time that she learned to distinguish between them. Lona, the older, who possessed some beauty of a coarse kind, had the ways of a clutching, grasping barmaid, and was the sharper of the two, usually dragging her sister Mi in tow, whose chief characteristic was a sort of flabby drollness.

In their treatment of Lilly they observed for the time being the pacific attitude of suspicion willing to bide its time. Hints were not omitted to inform a certain person that they would soon learn what position to take and whether there was to be peace or war.

When they were finally convinced that Lilly was shy and harmless, the waves of their tender confidences met over her head.

It now became the regular thing for all three of them to sit on the edge of the bed until late at night with their corsets open and their knees drawn up to their chins, talking, talking, talking, while they sucked candies bought on the sly, or dressed one another's hair. Beautiful souls poured forth confessions. Whispered confidences about love adventures and man-baiting flowed on steadily, flooding Lilly's pure fancy with a turbid stream of sexual mysteries.

What the Asmussen girls liked above all was to have their bodies admired.

"When I turn this way, isn't the set of my shoulders classic?"

"Haven't I a marble bosom?"

"If I weren't so bashful, I'd take off my shirt and show you my hips. They are like a goddess's."

They made less frequent appeals for criticism of their features.

"We've gotten so many compliments about our good looks that we can't have any doubts on that score."

Nevertheless when cold weather set in, and necessitated the wearing of woolen scarfs over their heads, they did not scorn to discuss the truly Greek way their hair had of growing low on their foreheads, or the seductive curves of their mouths.

They could also be severely self-critical.

"Our eyes are not beautiful, we know. Yours, for instance, are much lovelier. But whether *you* cast sheep's eyes at anybody or not, it's all the same. Now, if *we* just chuck a little sidelong glance—you'd think no one could possibly notice it—why, in a jiffy they're after us like mad."

Their iridescent, cattish eyes would twinkle with the pleasant sense of unbounded power and triumph over the weakness of that strong animal man.

The advice they dispensed liberally to Lilly might be summed up in one sentence: "Do what you please, but don't surrender yourself."

They laid no restraint upon themselves in retailing spicy stories, which set Lilly's pulse to bounding, and in which they proved their absolute seriousness in the observance of this motto.

They manifested a strong sensual craving. One of them once remarked:

"My highest ideal is to be queen of the bees, but to have no children."

The other, who seemed inclined to ethical speculations, rejoined vivaciously:

"My highest ideal is to be a nun and horribly immoral."

She pursued the theme, entering into all details after the manner of the Renaissance narrators, while Lilly's pious soul trembled and shuddered.

Their libertinism of thought notwithstanding, all their hopes and dreams centered about marriage.

To marry, as quickly as possible and as advantageously as possible, was salvation, career, a specific for all ills, earthly bliss, and eternal happiness.

"That is, he must be *old*, he must be *rich*, and he must be *stupid*."

This trinity embodied all their demands of fate. As others invest their husbands-to-be with supernatural virtues, these girls revelled in picturing their future spouses' infirmities and in recounting the tricks they meant to play upon them by virtue of their bodily and spiritual superiority.

They were not always agreed as to the ways and means of obtaining this precious possession so absolutely indispensable to life. A favorite subject of debate between them was: "Is it expedient, or is it not expedient, to compromise oneself with the man of one's choice?"

Lona, whose daring in hatching difficult schemes of action knew no bounds, upheld the positive side. Mi, who wished to be sure where she trod, inclined to the negative.

"If you knew those male milksops half as well as I do," Lona scolded, "you'd realize that the best way to catch them is through fear. Make them sin, and twist their sin about their necks like a halter. That's the only way to be sure of them."

"It's very odd," Mi returned with inexorable logic, "that you haven't practised what you preach, because if you had, you'd long ago—"

Discretion bade her break off. Her sister's fingers, crooked ready to scratch, boded no good.

Only a week after their arrival a love tilt took place between them, in which hair puffs and petticoat strings flew about, and from which Mi emerged with a laceration which Lilly had to treat with vinegar compresses the rest of the night.

The cause of their contention was a "swell" who had followed them on their afternoon walk, and who, according to Mi, had been discouraged from coming closer because her sister had not responded sufficiently to his advances.

Lona asserted the principle that one must have nothing at all to do with so-called "swells," while Mi was of the opinion that he would have been good enough for a husband at any rate.

Strolling through the streets and permitting themselves to be accosted soon became their chief and daily occupation. Lilly, who had credited, and been greatly disturbed by, the threats they first made that they would assume the management of the business, soon realized she had nothing to apprehend in this regard.

They slept until nine, and took two hours for dressing. Then they went out for their morning walk to make the necessary estimates of the gentlemen of the garrison, who at that hour of the day promenaded in groups near the main guard.

If the first half of the day was dedicated to the military, the second half was devoted chiefly to ordinary citizens.

It goes without saying that afternoon coffee was taken nowhere else than at Frangipani's confectionery shop, where a few lieutenants and a number of city officials and young lawyers gathered to play chess or skat; and where, too, many a more dashing high school teacher came to display his kinship with the proper world of fashion.

After this hour, spiced by all sorts of sweets, followed the promenade at twilight, which proved highly advantageous for establishing possible connections, and provided the subjects needed for discussion at home.

It would not be stating the full truth to say that Mrs. Asmussen brought a loving sympathy to bear in her judgment of this kind of life. Certainly not. The mutual adulation of the first few days had given place to a period of sultriness, when cutting remarks flashed in the murky atmosphere like streaks of lightning. Then a season of protracted storm set in, and mishaps occurred in swift succession, gradually becoming so purely a matter of course that even Lilly, who at first had wept and screamed along with the other three, began to consider this the normal condition of the Asmussen household. Abusive epithets of unsuspected vigor flew hither and thither, and the place resounded with cuffings. Even the broom, which in the beginning had not been given a thought, was now drawn into its strictly limited field of activity.

Peace did not come until evening, when Mrs. Asmussen's medicine asserted its rights. The two girls might have taken advantage of her oblivion to give free play to their desires, had not their highly developed sense of propriety strictly forbidden going out at night.

"Persons meeting us would take us for fast girls," they said, "and then no wedding bells for us."

One would scarcely believe with what a number of conventions the young ladies circumscribed their apparently unrestrained existence.

You may let yourself be kissed as much as you like, but on no account kiss back.

You may let a gentleman call you by your first name in conversation, but if he does so in a letter it

is an insult.

You may let a gentleman treat you to coffee and cake, but not to bread and butter.

You may let a strange man tread on your foot, but if he attempts to press your hand under the table you must get up.

And so on.

Lilly had absolutely no comprehension for this set of thoughts and desires. Hitherto man as a male had been a piece of life non-existent in bodily form, which came to her notice on occasions, but glided by like a stranger without holding her attention. She had solely loved the man of her dreams, the man of her novels, the man of her own creation. The thing that stared at her on the street, the thing that came to exchange books and found all sorts of little pretexts for entering into conversation with her, the thing that officiously held aside the wadded curtain of the church door as she entered, or played the amiable over a shop counter, this thing was a strange, annoying fact; it was stupid and brazen, a matter of unspeakable indifference, to think of which would be a waste of time and a degradation.

A girl's entire life, she now learned, was here simply for the sake of that gross and disgusting race; and a girl could concern herself about them from the moment she rose to the moment she fell asleep, without cherishing the thought of the one for whom she had been created as for work and faith and God.

Though Lilly knew she was infinitely above being influenced by the two girls' advice and example, she felt, in spite of herself, a small desire arising within her to find out what the nature of those creatures might be about whom such a fuss was made, whose approval brought pleasure, whose coldness meant annihilation.

She was beset by a tormenting fear of that dreadful, seething world outside there, of the dirt that was carried to her door every day anew, and of the disquieting curiosity with which she picked it up to examine it. For whether or no, her thoughts *would* return to the gay pictures, painted in colors of poison, which the two sisters, growing ever more demoralized, unrolled before her eyes evening after evening.

It was a piece of good fortune that the hot friendship both at first bestowed upon her cooled off somewhat after a month or so.

The cause was the enigmatic shortage in the cash box, which occurred time and again, and came to be a permanent phenomenon. Lilly would spend hours calculating feverishly, entering and counting every cent, until finally there was no other conclusion to be reached than that some one had used the few moments of her absence to dip into the drawer where the box was kept.

In order to save herself—in case of discovery she would be accused of the theft—she once carried the key of the drawer away with her as if unintentionally, and did so repeatedly, until the girls' manner, which had grown increasingly estranged and scornful, assured her that she was on the right tack.

On one occasion they gave vent to their wrath and disillusionment.

Did *she*, stray dog that she was, think she was mistress of the place? If need be, books and keys would be taken from her by force.

In mortal fright Lilly ran to the mother and threatened to leave that instant unless she was allowed to control affairs as before.

Mrs. Asmussen, who knew her scapegrace offspring through and through, took sides with Lilly, and the storm seemed to have blown over.

The girls took to entreaty and in reawakened intimacy gave Lilly new and comprehensive views into the depths of their soul life.

Did she think they cared a row of pins for the miserable little meringues they ate at Frangipani's? Not a bit of it. They were clever enough to know how to provide for the future. At any rate they couldn't stay with that old guzzler forever, especially since the place had turned out to be absolutely unproductive in regard to good matches. So for a long time they had been saving money industriously for another flight. It was no exaggeration to say they were starving themselves miserably. Lilly with her paltry desires could have no idea how many temptations they withstood when they sat at a table in the confectionery shop at suppertime, and had to look upon all sorts of glorious goodies without tasting them.

Lilly remained unmoved by their persuasive wiles. Their manner cooled off again, and they began to pass her by, tacitly showing their sense of injury.

Soon events occurred that fanned their enmity into a lively fire.

CHAPTER X

It was dusk of a wet November day. The spouts were streaming and an endless chain of grey drops glided down the iron rods of the porch railing and fell precipitously into the pool gleaming on the pavement below.

A miserable sort of sport to watch the game! But what better diversion had the day to offer?

Suddenly the front door opened, the library bell rang sharply, and in came a nimble little fellow, capering and stamping, and exhaling an aroma of Russia leather and Parma violets. His coat collar was turned up and his hat pulled far down. His close-cut blond hair shone like yellowish-white velvet.

He measured Lilly from between lids masterfully narrowed to a slit with a cursory and apparently disillusioned glance, threw out a strident "good evening," and examined the back part of the room, as if expecting some one to emerge from behind the bookcases and give him a special greeting.

Lilly asked what she could do for him.

"Oh, you are the young lady in charge of the circulating library?" he asked. The existence of such a young lady seemed to transport him into a kind of careless gaiety.

Lilly said she was.

"Splendid!" he replied. "Just splendid!" And a thousand little merry devils danced in his blinking, white-lashed eyes.

Lilly asked what book he wished.

"Be it known to you, most honored and erudite miss, I am not exactly familiar with German literature and the allied sciences, but ever since yesterday I have been possessed of a fabulous and downright sophomoric zeal for culture. If you would help me with your valuable—"

He came to a sudden halt, stuck a monocle in his eye, looked her up and down, first on the right side, then on the left, the way an intending purchaser scrutinises a long-legged horse, murmured something like "the devil," and asked to have the light turned on immediately.

Since it had actually grown so dark that the numbers on the backs of the books were illegible, Lilly saw no reason for refusing his request.

When she reached up in all her glory to raise the chimney from the hanging lamp, he uttered a second and more audible "the devil." And when she stood there before him, the light shining on her sidewise, with an uneasy, questioning look in her improbable eyes—those long-concealed "Lilly eyes"—he sank back on the customers' seat to show how utterly nonplussed he was, and folded his hands and implored her forgiveness.

Lilly felt a hot sense of insult rising in her. So low was she esteemed in her position that an aristocratic young man—the first who had strayed in to her in the course of one and a half years—did not deem it necessary to show her the most ordinary courtesy.

"If you do not wish to borrow a book, sir," she said, giving him a superior look, "please leave the place."

"What—what did you say?" he rejoined, outraged. "I borrow a book? *One* book? One beggarly book? For every five minutes I am permitted to stay here I will take out a whole shelf of books, for all I care, a whole case of books—but with the proviso that I may return them to-morrow. I will immediately contract with the best express company in town to keep hauling the cases away and back again. But one moment—one moment. It seems to me I once heard that for every book taken from a circulating library you have to leave three marks deposit. Isn't that so?"

Lilly stared at him in blank astonishment and said it was so.

"Well, since I haven't such an amount of money in my possession just now, I must ask you to keep *me* here as a deposit. So, in a measure, I yield myself up to you for imprisonment. Very vexatious for both parties, I'm sure. But what else is to be done in the circumstances?"

In spite of herself Lilly had to laugh.

"Oh, she's reconciled!" he cried triumphantly. "Her majesty is reconciled. And now let us speak to each other as decorous friends. Observe me well. Do I look as if I read books? To be sure I have my favourites, Schlicht, Roda-Roda and Winterfeld, and others who purport to know the humour of soldiering life. But if I come here, it's not to get books. The thing goes deeper than that. I hope I may confide in you."

"If you think it necessary," stammered Lilly, whose eyes were fascinated by a gleaming chain peeping from under the sleeve of his tan overcoat. She did not know men ever wore gold bracelets.

"Evenings I like to get into mufti—the rest of the time, you know, I wear uniform—but not for long any more—in a few weeks I depart this life, because—do you know what debts are? No? Then rejoice. Debts are the sour sediment in the lemonade of human existence, and the lemonade at that is none too sweet. But what was I going to say? Oh, yes—evenings I like to play Harun-al-Rashid and strive to win the favor of the populace by honouring the populace's more

commendable daughters with a little conversation. Understand? So, in remoter districts, where high are the hedges and silent the new villas—so yesterday I—behind two young ladies—laughing over their shoulders and swinging their skirts, exactly the way well-bred girls are wont to do—"

"I beg your pardon, but I should like this talk to end," said Lilly, red with shame.

"Not at all," he said; "I knew at once you are a perfect lady, and have nothing to do with such ticklish matters. I am merely confessing in order to secure a little absolution from your purity."

This turn did Lilly's soul good, and she did not oppose him further.

"So the two young ladies were walking in front of me arm in arm. The moment I reached-them I slipped in between like a slice of sausage in a sandwich. They weren't a bit offish. They told me they owned a large circulating library and intended shortly to open an art shop in Berlin, and so on. But they didn't mention their address, and since—I admit it with shame—until a few moments ago I thought they had some good points, I am simply making the rounds of all the libraries in the directory. Besides the well-known bookstores there are only three. I investigated the other two, and now that I know the third, the art shop proprietresses may go to the devil for all I care."

A feeling of scorn and mischievous delight arose in Lilly. She gave a short laugh, but took good care not to disclose the existence of the Asmussen girls.

To prove to her that in the presence of her majesty all desire for an adventure ended, he presented himself formally: "Von Prell, future ex-lieutenant."

Observing her questioning look he continued:

"As I delicately indicated, my days in the regiment are numbered."

Lilly timidly inquired whether an officer's life no longer pleased him.

"Until now I knew of no sort of life that would *not* have pleased me." Wanton spirits shot little gleams from his small grey eyes. "But the paternal riches have taken wing, and my wages as army serf will just about buy radishes, and even radishes get expensive around Christmas time. So the best thing for me to do is to buy an old herring keg and let myself be salted and packed. If you should happen to know of one to be had cheap, I give the best prices."

Lilly frankly laughed a joyous laugh. He joined in, holding his hands to his hips and emitting a thin, falsetto tehee, which, though scarcely audible, shook his slim, sinewy body as with a storm of merriment.

They now sat opposite each other like two good friends, with the counter between. Lilly wished the hour would never end.

A maid entered to exchange a volume of Flygare-Carlén for her mistress. He unassumingly disposed himself for a stay, examined the backs of several books, and acted altogether as if he were at home. When the maid left he pulled the door open obsequiously and bowed and scraped as she passed through.

Lilly grew more and more hilarious and restrained her laughter with difficulty.

"Before the next customer comes you must go," she said, "else they'll begin to think something."

"Why?" he asked. "The customers change."

But Lilly insisted, whereupon he took to pleading.

"Listen," he said. "I am known as a man utterly devoid of moral fibre. Do *you* be my stay in this mundane existence—at least until the door opens again. While I'm sitting here I can commit no follies, and that must convey some consolation to your charitable heart."

It was agreed, therefore, that he might keep his place until the next time the bell rang. He leaned back in his chair comfortably and scanned Lilly with the tender emotions of unlimited ownership.

"All earthly ills flow from garrulousness," he began. "If Columbus had just kept the discovery of America to himself nobody would have made it disagreeable for him. I will be wilier. I will consider my discovery as a family secret between you and me. What a feast for the fellows! Let them keep to the moths that fly at twilight, like the two prospective art-shop proprietresses, to whom I owe the good fortune of your acquaintance."

Lilly had completely forgotten the sisters. It was about time for them to be coming home. Suppose they were suddenly to open the door!

The bell rang. No, it wasn't they. It was a spinster, who daily devoured several volumes of love affairs, and came every evening for fresh fodder.

The blithe lieutenant, remembering the compact, shot up out of his chair. His demeanour stiffened into business-like coolness.

"If you please," he twanged, "will you kindly let me have the latest work by—by—" Evidently no German author occurred to him. After racking his brain the delivering name came, "by Gerstäcker."

Lilly brought him the "latest work," which bore the date 1849. He deposited the requisite three

marks, and took leave with too sweeping a bow, while the little imps frolicked between his silver-white lids.

Soon after the sisters came home, cast a suspicious look at Lilly's flaming cheeks, and passed by without greeting her.

The next day went after the fashion of every other, but something troubled Lilly, something like Christmas expectations, a premonitory restlessness, which pressed on to a new life.

And behold! At the same time as the day before the door opened, and in stepped two elegant young men, who emitted a strident "good evening." Their manner was both a bit assured and a bit abashed as they asked for "an interesting book," while measuring Lilly with the stare of a connoisseur.

She felt her limbs grow heavy and rigid, as always when conscious of being observed and admired. But she maintained her dignity, and when the young gentlemen after selecting their trash (which they scarcely glanced at) wanted to start up a bantering conversation, she tossed her head and withdrew behind the bookcase L to N, which sheltered her when she sat at the window-sill making her entries and calculations.

The gentlemen took whispered counsel with each other, said a low "good-by," and beat a retreat.

So her jolly friend had betrayed her after all!

From now on Mrs. Asmussen's poor little hole of a library swarmed with slim young men of fashion, who were driven by an insatiable desire for reading to exchange one musty old volume for another.

Only a few dared come in uniform, but they did not withhold their names, and the last page of the customers' book looked as if extracted from an Almanac de Gotha.

Some wrapped themselves in a coat of business-like correctness, others came with careless assurance of victory. One man began to make love on the spot, and another even had the audacity to bandy gross language over the counter. The naïvest one condescendingly inquired when within the next few days he might expect a visit from her.

Lilly soon came to see that these attentions neither honoured nor gave hurt. She chatted freely with those who were courteous, refrained from replying to those who were impertinent, and the instant a conversation threatened to become lengthy she disappeared behind case L to N.

Within a few days the sisters had discovered the aristocratic visitors.

Their rage knew no bounds. Decency was thrown to the winds. Lilly was not spared a single insult, a single abuse. Vile epithets such as she had never heard poured over her in a dirty stream. The girls demanded that she cede her place at the counter to them. She refused point blank, whereupon they took to maltreating her.

On occasions of greatest need Mrs. Asmussen came to her assistance. The broom rained blows on the white nightgowns of the jealous furies, and drove them into the back room, where the battle was drowned in rivers of tears.

Hostilities continued. In case business exigencies necessitated some self-restraint during the day while customers were present, feelings were given all the freer play in the morning and evening.

Lilly's life became a veritable hell.

A crust of hate and bitterness laid itself over her soul. Partly in fright, partly in satisfaction she felt herself growing harder and sharper. It was only at night that she melted, when she buried her burning head in the pillows and gave vent to her misery in silent weeping.

The merry friend with the white lashes, who had caused the entire catastrophe, did not put in appearance for about two weeks. He came in dragging his legs a little, and his eyes were swollen and bleared.

"This flower," he said, undoing the tissue paper of the package in his hand, "is the picotee, which keeps fresh five or six days longer than any parting pangs."

At the sight of him Lilly felt a little comforting joy light up within her. She took the bouquet as a matter of course, and reproached him for not having kept his mouth shut.

"I told you," he replied imperturbably, "that I am a man utterly devoid of moral fibre."

Then he informed her that the regiment had given him a farewell dinner for good and all, and now there was nothing more urgent for him to do than secure passage for somewhere—if he only knew where.

"But we won't scratch our heads about *that*," he continued. "Brilliant people such as you and I have brilliant careers. The path of my life leads by still waters of cool champagne, and is paved with little meat patties. That's kismet. No use struggling against it. Even if it finally leads to a sugar-cane plantation in Louisiana, it's all the same to me. One always comes across something new, and that's the main thing. For the present the old man, who's taken a tremendous liking to me, wants me to run about his estate as Fritz Triddelfitz."

He laughed his high-pitched, almost inaudible laugh, which shook him like a storm.

Lilly wanted to know who the "old man" was.

That a person should have to ask this seemed inconceivable to him.

"Have you the least idea of life, if you don't know who the old man is? The old man is the cat-o'-nine-tails. The old man decides what is good and what is bad on earth. The old man breaks one man's neck and pays another man's debts. He is the punch bowl of all our virtues and all our sins. Withal the old man is eternally young. The old man sees you and says to you: 'Come here, little girl. I'm a grey old horror, but I wish to have you.' Then you have just enough courage left to ask 'When do you want me, high and mighty lord?' You see, child, that's the old man. They hist him on to you long ago, and if ever he should find his way to you, then may the Lord have mercy on you! Then all's over and done for with my poor young queen."

"But I don't know yet who the old man is," said Lilly, whom this enigmatic alarum was beginning to make a little uncomfortable.

"Then don't ask," he replied, and held out his freckled hand in good-by. "It's a pity for us two," he added, smiling at her tenderly and compassionately from between his blinking lids. "We could so cosily have enriched history with another famous pair of lovers." Leaning far over the counter, "Since I am a man utterly devoid of moral fibre, I should like to bestow one kiss upon you before I go."

Lilly laughingly held her mouth up.

He kissed her and walked to the door stiffly.

"I can scarcely crawl, I'm so knocked up by my bout," he said, and with that was outside the door.

After this visit Lilly was seized with the same disquieting sense as after his first visit. It seemed to her she was being flicked in sport with tickling switches. But this time, joined to the other feeling, was a certain anxiety which set her nerves a-tingle with a tormenting yet soothing sensation, as if she were waiting outside a locked door of gold, behind which an unknown fate was crouching ready to pounce on her.

CHAPTER XI

Outside on the street the hilt of a sword and the buttons of a uniform glittered in the noon sunlight of a December day.

"A new one," thought Lilly. The stiff, thickset figure of the man who clanked up the steps of the porch was unfamiliar to her.

A masterful stamping outside the door. The bell rang more sharply than usual.

No, she did not know him. He was not a frivolous lieutenant, nor yet one of the maturer ones, who played the dignified and watched with an expectant smile for the first shy glance in order to extract from it whatever they dared.

She saw eyes piercing sharp as a falcon's with a close ring of mobile crows' feet about them; she saw a severe high-bridged aquiline nose, and gaunt cheek bones on which lay a well-defined spot of red finely chased with purple veins. Under a short, bushy moustache she saw thin, compressed lips, the corners of which turned up in a smile of mocking benevolence. She saw a receding chin, polished to a shine by the shave, and disappearing in two limp folds near the high collar.

She saw all this as in a dream. Her heart began to throb so violently that she had to lean against the bookcase.

"Why, this is what I was afraid of," a voice within her spoke. "This is the old man."

He raised his hand carelessly to his cap, but did not think of removing it.

"Colonel von Mertzbach," he said in a voice whose rough intonations spread a whole world of authoritative power before her. "I should like to speak to you a few minutes. I have reasons for wishing to know you."

Lilly felt she was to be subjected to a humiliating examination, which she was by no means in duty bound to suffer. But never in her life had she seemed so defenceless as at that moment. She felt as if she were standing in the presence of a judge who had the right to pardon or condemn entirely at his own discretion.

Her lips trembled as she stammered something meant to express consent.

"You seem to be an extremely dangerous young woman," he said. "Why, you've fairly crazed my men, especially the younger ones—there's no managing them."

"I don't understand," replied Lilly, summoning all her courage.

He uttered "h'm," stuck a monocle in his eye, and looked her up and down, or rather looked down

to the point where the top of the counter cut her figure off. Then he uttered another "h'm," and observed:

"It's very easy to play the innocent in cases like this. However that may be, I can thoroughly comprehend my young men. Probably I myself should not have behaved differently. But it seems that despite your youth and—inexperience, you possess a very respectable amount of feminine cunning, otherwise you would not have succeeded, in spite of your irreproachably reserved manner—or, perhaps, just *because* of your manner—you would not have succeeded, I say, in bringing the young men here on repeated visits—they are somewhat fastidious."

Lilly felt the tears rising. It would have been easy to repudiate the insults he offered her; but from where derive the strength to oppose a word in defence to this man whose eyes disrobed her and drilled her through and through, whose smile held her in a wire net?

So she sat down and cried.

He, in his turn, rose from his seat and stepped close to the counter.

"How deeply your sense of honour has been wounded I cannot say offhand. At any rate, it is not my intention to make you cry. On the contrary, I should like you to give me with the utmost composure possible a little information which will enlighten me and which may be of some importance for your future."

Lilly was conscious of only one thought: "You must pull yourself together because he wants you to."

She wiped her eyes and looked at him obediently, sniffling a little, as when she had been scolded in her childhood.

He asked her name, where she had been born, where her parents were, what school she had attended, and what she was doing in the library. At the mention of her guardian's name an ironic smile passed over his face.

"I know the gentleman's views," he said. "So, in short, you have been left absolutely alone in the world?"

Lilly assented.

"And it would not be disagreeable to you to have some mainstay—to know someone to whom you could turn in moments of need?"

"Where is a person like that to come from?"

"Let me think it over at leisure," he said, wrinkling his forehead. "In any case, you cannot remain in this hole. Do they treat you well here at least?"

"Oh, tolerably," said Lilly, and added between laughter and tears, "Only—the food is bad and sometimes I get—" she was going to say "beaten," but was ashamed to, and substituted "punished," which was a perversion of the truth.

The colonel burst into a laugh that sounded like the crack of a whip.

"Very commendable in you to take the matter humorously," he said, and rose to go. "Well, I know what I wanted to know. My men may continue to come to you—in uniform, in civilian's clothes, whichever way they want. They will find no more irreproachable company among the young ladies of this town. Should they ever forget their manners, just drop me a line. But I am sure they won't. Good afternoon, Miss Czepanek."

Lilly watched him walk across the porch with the jerky, springy strut of an old cavalry man. The wintry sun seemed to be shining for the sole purpose of casting a dancing radiance about his figure.

When he reached the pavement he turned to her window and lifted his cap slightly but respectfully. The eyes behind the lowering brows pierced hers, searching, almost threatening. Then he passed out of sight.

Lilly's soul was assailed by a tumult of questions:

"What was it? What was expected of her? Why wasn't she let alone?"

She wanted to cry, wanted to pour out complaints and feel herself pitied. But her trouble had a certain festal tinge, a certain shadowyness and unreality. She bedizened herself with it as with a new hope, and what he had said about some one to whom she could turn in moments of need re-echoed in her soul like a soothing, easing melody. Didn't it seem almost as if he himself wished to be the mainstay so sorely lacking in her floundering young life?

Perhaps he would get Mr. Pieper, who did not concern himself about her at any rate, to give up his guardianship over Lilly. Or, perhaps the colonel might even adopt her, or something like that. There was no knowing.

If only there had not been those dagger eyes, that amused laugh, and that evil, evil look at the end, and above all her friend's warning: "If ever he should find his way to you, then may the Lord have mercy on you!"

However, for all that, what could possibly happen to her behind the counter? Nobody had ever dared to raise the drop leaf and pass through. And surely she was safe behind the bookcase L to N, where she could not even be seen.

The colonel's visit seemed to have acted like a cold douche on his men, despite—or, perhaps, on account of—the guarantee he had given for their good behaviour. Not one of them came to visit her again.

"Is that a sign of the protection he is to favour me with?" Lilly wondered.

Something was missing, she did not know what.

A week passed, and one day the younger sister, who held watch every morning for possible billets-doux, threw an envelope at Lilly's feet, saying:

"Something else again, with a coronet on it, you flirt, you!"

"Flirt" was one of the milder titles of honour that the sisters lavished upon her.

Lilly opened the letter and read:

> "My dear Miss Czepanek:—
>
> Remembering the interview that took place between us recently, I take the liberty of making a proposition to you. The position of private secretary and reader with me is open. Would you be inclined to accept it? Since I am an unmarried man, it would be in better form for you not to live in my house, but I pledge myself to provide for your maintenance in a suitable and respectable family. Your guardian, whom I took the opportunity to consult in the matter, has given his consent to the plan.
>
> —Respectfully yours,
> Freiherr von Mertzbach,
> Colonel and Commander of the——Regiment of Ulans."

So here it was—her fate!

It was there, on the other side of the gleaming snowy street, beckoning and calling to her:

"Come out of your hole. I will show you life. I will show you something new."

But then she pictured herself sitting at the colonel's great desk writing at his dictation. She saw his eyes drilling her, searching her soul, and threatening, always threatening. The pen would fall from her fingers, she would have to jump up and run away, but she would not be able to; the eyes would hold her in a spell.

So Lilly sat down and wrote a very correct letter declining his proposition. She fully appreciated, she said, the honour he did her, but she felt she was not qualified to assume so difficult a position, and she thought that even if she was not so well off she did better by remaining in her modest situation, since she could fulfil the duties it involved. "Very gratefully yours, Lilly Czepanek."

Done! Peace at last restored—as much peace as the bad sisters permitted.

Christmas was drawing near. It cannot be stated with accuracy that the preparations in the Asmussen household produced an atmosphere of mirth.

For weeks Mrs. Asmussen had been sighing over the bad times and the nuisance of having to give everybody in the world a gift. The sisters discussed as frequently and as loudly as possible the question whether it was necessary for refined and aristocratic young ladies to share a Christmas tree with low and vulgar hussies. There was no indication whatsoever of those gladsome mysteries that at this time brighten the saddest of human habitations.

Lilly knitted a brown sweater for her mother, bought her two picture puzzles, a box of sweets, and a wooden vase for flowers—objects of china, being breakable, were not desired—and sent them to the asylum.

At this time her thoughts frequently wandered from her mother to her father, who had now been gone four and a half years, and in that time had given no sign of his existence.

In the forlorn condition she was in, her confidence in his return waxed strong. Christmas eve, about six or seven, he would suddenly enter, snow covering his havelock, and draw her into his embrace with that demonstrative ardour peculiar to him. She almost breathed in the fragrance always streaming from his anointed locks. That was one way. Another was, a servant would bring a little package as a preliminary greeting. Inside would be costly material for a dress. A hat would come, too. She needed it badly.

After the others had gone to sleep she would fetch from the bottom of her trunk the score of the Song of Songs and softly hum the more beautiful arias.

There were some passages which always made her cry. Oh, she cried a great deal these nights. Yet at this very period a tiny, hesitating sense of happiness found its way into her being.

It was a lovely, dreamy feeling of being lifted up, of growing wings, of astonished listening to

inner voices, which sounded sweet and familiar as words from a mother's lips, yet strange, like a gospel from the mouth of one who was still to come.

Now and then she found herself kneeling in her nightgown, but not praying, merely dreaming, with arms outspread and rapturous eyes raised to the lamp, as if the salvation she was awaiting would approach from somewhere up there.

Thus, after all, she celebrated Christmas in the quiet of her soul.

Christmas eve was at hand.

At the eleventh hour a few gifts were scraped together. The sisters ran about like wild animals making their preparations. They even bestowed a few kindly words on Lilly, who showed her gratitude by winking when the older sister had to look for something near the cash box. Lilly knew there was not much inside, and should anything be missing later she would replace it from her own funds.

A few minutes before suppertime she was summoned to the back room, where the Christmas tree was already lit. The company was embarrassed.

The sisters held out their hands. Mrs. Asmussen, who was already sitting over her medicine glass, delivered a few dignified words about the significance of Christmas in general and her misfortune in particular in having to forego the company of so splendid a husband on such an occasion.

Then everybody asked everybody else's pardon because the presents were not more munificent. First of all, there had been a "must," which ought not to exist for refined souls, and which at first caused great chagrin. Then all of a sudden time had grown short. Besides, the apron with the red edge was very decent—they themselves had long been wanting one like it—and the pen-wiper was not to be despised, either. Above all, business had been bad.

"I am ashamed to say, I have nothing at all to give," Lilly answered. But what she was most ashamed of was that she now felt kindly disposed toward the sisters.

"I haven't a bit of character," she thought, as she bit into the marchpane which the older, the wickeder one, offered her.

The library bell rang. A lackey loaded with parcels stumbled in and asked:

"Does Miss Czepanek live here?"

Lilly's heart leapt.

"From papa—actually from papa!" she rejoiced.

For a few moments she scarcely dared touch the packages. She ran about the room helplessly passing her hands over her hair. She did not venture to undo the cords until urged on by the sisters. They stood next to her, staring with great, greedy eyes.

The things those boxes contained! A light cloth dress trimmed with lace, a delicate foulard dress, a pink silk petticoat, black patent leather and tan shoes, six pairs of glacé and undressed kid gloves, some of them elbow length, three kinds of collars, a fichu of Valenciennes lace to wear with empire gowns, books, writing paper, conserved fruit, and more things, and still more, many more—the boxes seemed bottomless. Even the hat she had hankered for was there, a simple shepherdess shape of light grey felt, which shape had always been most becoming to the grand style of her features. It was trimmed with light brown ribbons and silver-tipped pompons.

A veritable trousseau!

The sisters began to pull long faces. Lilly, too, soon ceased to rejoice. She was full of apprehension. All she wanted now was to find a letter, a card, some token of the sender's personality, which surely accompanied the gifts. She groped for it nervously. Though she had long given up all thought of her father and his return, an instinct of self-preservation impelled her to pretend in the sisters' presence that it was he, and only he, who had poured this flood of treasures over her.

At last—underneath the gloves—she found an envelope and ran off to the library with it.

There beneath the hanging lamp she drew out a visiting card and paled with fright as she read:

"Freiherr von Mertzbach, Colonel and Commander of the——Regiment of Ulans," followed by a few lines in the heavy, bold strokes with which she was acquainted: "from the depths of his own loneliness wishes his lonely little friend an hour of Christmas joy."

She returned to the back room, where the sisters, green with envy, received her with a chilly smile, while Mrs. Asmussen, nodding over the steaming glass, dropped fragments of mysterious words.

"The things actually do come from papa," said Lilly, amazed at the strange, stifled sound of her own voice.

The sisters gave a short laugh, and silently began to put the gifts back into the boxes.

Lilly was holding a little porcelain bon-bon dish filled with fragrant, odd-looking confections. She glanced hesitatingly from one sister to the other without daring to offer them the sweets for fear of being repulsed with some abusive word or other. She set the lid—a little rose-wreathed Cupid—back on the delicately cut rim, let the dish sink down among the other gifts in one of the boxes, crawled to the corner where she slept, and cried bitterly.

The sisters whispered together a long time. They built a pyramid of the boxes on the counter and passed by it at a respectful distance.

The next morning Lilly summoned a porter from the street and returned everything to the donor without a word of explanation.

Then she went to the sisters and said:

"I didn't tell you the truth yesterday. The gifts did *not* come from papa. So I returned them."

The sisters, who had come toward her with a sweet-sour air of attentiveness, made no effort to conceal their disillusionment.

"Well, I didn't take her for such a muff!" said the younger.

"She's not," said the older sarcastically, who, true to her nature, scented an *arrière pensée*. "On the contrary she's particularly calculating—wants to drive her adorer still madder. I hope she doesn't get stuck at her own game. Even the blindest mortal soon comes to know the difference between false and *genuine* worth."

Therewith, in order to furnish on the spot an example of the genuine quality, she drew her petticoat tight about her legs with her left hand and with her right hand gathered her matinée close under her bosom, and sent Lilly a smile of utter contempt from over her shoulder, such a smile as only lofty souls can summon on occasion.

Nevertheless, Lilly noticed that from now on she was treated with a certain heedfulness, from which she deduced that something was still expected of her.

During the next few days nothing of importance occurred, though the day after Christmas a few of the young gentlemen had put in appearance again. Their manner was jerky as they exchanged their books, they outdid themselves in politeness and they showed no disposition to make themselves at home on chair or counter.

Then—the day before New Year—Lilly received this letter:

> "Dear Miss Czepanek:—
>
> You shamefully mistook the motives that led me to send you those Christmas gifts. I feel I must justify myself and bring about a perfect understanding between us. I have plans concerning you which I should like to set before you personally, but my position forbids my visiting you repeatedly, and I would ask you, if your future is dear to you, to come to my house to-morrow evening. I shall expect you some time before eight. I give you my word of honour for your safe return. Yours,
>
> Mertzbach."

To go or not to go.

That night Lilly did not sleep a wink.

If only the feeling of dread had not obsessed her, dread which robbed her of breath and the power to defend herself. If the mere thought of him brought it on, what would become of her should she stand before him face to face?

She finally decided not to go, while she knew for a certainty she *was* going.

She lived through the day as in a dull dream.

In the afternoon she obtained permission from Mrs. Asmussen to attend New Year's eve service. The sisters, who spied upon her every movement, exchanged significant looks, but seemed too preoccupied with their own affairs to give hers their usual sweet attention.

Lilly donned the old felt hat which many a storm had buffeted and many a shower discoloured. Her winter coat made her look narrow shouldered, and tug as she would, the sleeves refused to reach her wrists.

If she had had her wits about her she would have been much too ashamed to show herself before so aristocratic a gentleman in that garb. But she was driven to her acts by something outside herself, not by her own volition. Strange, mysterious powers seemed to be pushing her, invisible hands to be helping her dress, smoothing her hair lower on her forehead, raising the arch of her brows, and opening the buttons at her throat to give her constricted chest the freedom of its young fullness. They rubbed her cheeks, pale from lack of sleep, until they glowed with a triumphant red.

When she reached the street and the frosty breath of the winter evening stroked her gently, she felt she was waking up at last.

"Where are you going?" a voice within her asked.

"Perhaps to St. Joseph," she answered evasively.

But she did not go to St. Joseph. She made a wide détour about St. Anne's, crossed the Altmarkt diagonally, saw the sisters sitting at Frangipani's in the company of two admirers, with difficulty avoided the assiduities of a gallant, and suddenly found herself in front of the latticed gateway behind which, four flights up, the sewing machine had rattled and clattered the last remnant of reason out of her poor, ruined mother's head.

Light was shining from the two dormer windows up there where Lilly had once lived.

Some one else was probably sitting there now, sewing shirts and drawers and nightgowns, day and night, night and day. Lilly, too, would be sitting there some day, bitterly ruing her lost youth as one regrets an act of criminal folly.

"If your future is dear to you," he had written.

She faced about abruptly, and ran—ran—ran—without coming to a stop until she reached the lighted house, in front of which a sentinel was pacing and freezing as he kept guard over the highest dignitary in the city.

"Where are you going?" the voice within her asked again.

To avoid answering, she rushed up the wide carpeted stairway and came upon a lackey in silver-striped knickerbockers, who without question quietly relieved her of her umbrella, while the shadow of a mischievous smile flickered across his pudding face.

High white doors were held open for her, red-shaded lamps shone like great flowers, beautiful bare-shouldered women with tiaras in their hair smiled down on her from oval gilt frames.

It was so silent and warm in the spacious rooms you could lie down on the soft carpet and go to sleep. If only there had not been that feeling of dread which was tightening about her throat and brow like a net drawn closer and closer.

Another door flew open. Beyond was green twilight, as in a thick forest, and from out of the twilight *his* figure came toward her, broad, resplendent, clanking. She felt her hand being taken, felt herself being led into the green dusk. Bookcases towered before her like black walls. From somewhere came the threatening glitter of swords, helmets and armour.

She did not dare look at him. Even after she had been seated in a tall, dark arm-chair, whose top hung over her head like a canopy, she had not given him a single glance.

She heard his voice, whose resounding roughness seemed to have been muffled to vibrating organ tones.

It was all unearthly, all that she perceived and felt. It was not heaven, it was not hell. It was a region of anxiety and dreams, where souls hovered between deprivation and fulfillment in a state of lethargy.

At last she understood his words. There was nothing unearthly about them. They dealt most rationally with the Christmas gifts, the return of which he did not consider final. They were securely stowed away biding the time when their mistress would graciously deign to receive them.

Lilly with a frozen smile on her lips merely shook her head. She could not summon the courage to voice a refusal.

"And now you will ask me, my dear," he began anew, "what impels me, a man advancing in years, to hang on to your skirts like a pertinacious lover."

At the words, "advancing in years," she looked up instinctively.

There he sat, too sharply illuminated by the light of the green student's lamp. The orders on his breast gave out a subdued, golden lustre. The silver tassels of his epaulets quivered and glittered like little snakes. There was a shimmer upon and around him like the halo about a saint in gold and brocade.

Confused and abashed by all this glory Lilly quickly sank her gaze again.

"I went to you that time," he continued, "because a dispute had broken out among some of my younger men, of which you were the subject. The matter promised to take a dangerous turn and it had to be adjusted. I expected to find a pert, coquettish little shop girl, and I found—well, I found—*you*. Now you will ask what I mean by 'you,' because you yourself cannot possibly be aware of your good points, or, rather, your potentialities—everything in you is still in process of becoming. I am what they call a connoisseur in women, my child, and behind that which you are to-day, I see that which you will be some future day, *if*—this 'if' is the main thing—if the opportunity is afforded you for proper development. You might go to ruin among your old books. In case you have the courage to entrust your fate to my hands, I should like to assume the care of directing your life into fitting channels."

That sounded composed and paternal.

Lilly felt herself breathing easier, experienced a little relaxing hopefulness. She ventured to raise her look once more, and beyond the gold and silver dazzle she saw a pair of brilliant glassy eyes, which had lost their sharpness and were fairly forcing themselves on her with a mighty, greedy questioning. The shuddering and stiffening came upon her anew. She sat there motionless with paralysed will, while she thought:

"Of what avail? He will do whatever he wants with me at any rate."

He went on.

"I own a beautiful old estate, Lischnitz, in West Prussia, near the Vistula, to which my duties prevent me from going frequently. My household there is managed by a middle-aged aristocratic lady, Miss von Schwertfeger—but her name's immaterial. If you were to go there she would receive you with open arms, I promise you that, and you would have an opportunity to develop under the most favourable conditions into the woman I already foresee in you. Your problems for the time being would be solved, and I should benefit by finding my home, when I visit it, lighted by a ray of youth and beauty."

He had risen and in his eagerness to persuade began to pace about her with short see-sawing steps. Each time he moved there was a clinking and jingling like delicate dance music played on small bells. Finally all she heard was this metallic ringing, and she no longer understood what he said.

She pressed against the back of her chair with an indistinct feeling that he was tying her with cords, packing her up, and carrying her off to some spot where no rescuer could hear her cries of distress. She knew she would not offer the least resistance, so completely was she in his power.

"Look at me," he said.

She wanted to obey, certainly—oh, she was so obedient! But she could not.

He put a finger under her chin and shoved her head back. She kept her eyes almost closed and saw nothing except the red border of his military coat.

Suddenly she felt herself sinking. The red border mounted to the ceiling, bees buzzed about her ears—then nothing.

When she came to, something cold and wet was lying on her breast, and a woman's clothes smelling of smoke grazed her cheek.

The green twilight was still there.

A breastplate was hanging in front of her. It looked like a brightly scoured kettle.

She did not dare move, she felt so comfortable and easy.

A rough, bony hand kept chafing her forehead and a kindly voice repeated two or three times in succession:

"Poor little thing! Poor little thing! So young!"

After a time Lilly could not help giving a sign of consciousness, and the instant she stirred a sure arm came to the support of her head, and the kindly voice asked, was she feeling better and did she want anything?

"I want to go home."

"Not so easily done," said the voice, "because he gave orders that he wanted to speak to you again. But if you'll take a good piece of advice, say 'much obliged,' and 'good-by,' and be off as quickly as you can. This is no sort of place for a poor young girl like you."

Lilly sat up, and pulled down her waist.

The cook was standing beside her—a brown, furrowed, thick-lipped face. Stroking Lilly's shoulder she asked if she should bring her something to strengthen her heart, a cordial beaten up with the white of an egg, or something else.

"I want to go home."

"You shall, pretty soon, my dear. But I must call him in first."

She hustled out of the room.

Lilly reached for her hat, on which she must have been lying, because it was completely crushed and misshapen.

"Now I must certainly get a new one," she thought, and tried to reckon how much she could spare for it.

The door opened. He entered, followed by the cook.

Lilly was no longer afraid. Everything seemed far, far away. Even he. Nothing seemed to concern her any more.

"I think she's fit to be taken to the cab already," said the cook.

"You are no longer needed here," he said imperiously.

The cook ventured to stammer another suggestion.

"Get out!" he thundered.

With that she was outside the door.

Lilly experienced merely a lazy sensation of being startled.

"Nevertheless, I'm curious to know what he means to do with me now," she thought.

But her interest in her own fate was not great.

He walked up and down with a heavy tread. The silver spurs on his heels jingled.

"We'll have some light," he said. "The subject we're now to discuss requires clearness."

He summoned the lackey who had smiled the furtive, cunning smile. The lackey lit the gas jets of the chandelier, and on leaving the room gave Lilly a glance of wildly eager curiosity, this time without a smile.

Lilly still sat on the couch on which she had come back to consciousness, twirling her old hat without a thought in her brain.

In the full light of the chandelier she saw the colonel in all his resplendence still pacing silently up and down.

Lilly could look him in the face without a flutter.

"It's all the same to me what he does," she thought. "I cannot defend myself at any rate."

He moved a chair in front of her, and sat down—so close that his knees almost touched her.

"Now listen to me, my child," he said. His words rang out steely and choppy as words of command at a drill. "While you were lying here in a faint, I thought about you in the other room, and came to a decision—but more of that later. You have long noticed, I suppose, that my feeling for you is not paternal. The older I grow the less I comprehend so-called fatherliness. To be brief—I am seized by a passion for you which—rather upsets me. If I were ten years older than I am—I am fifty-four—I should say: 'That's senile.' Do you know what I mean?"

Lilly shook her head.

She saw his face next to hers so distinctly that, had she never looked upon it again, she would have remembered it to the end of her days.

His eyes embedded in red puffs, burned and bored again in the way that had frightened her so at first. His hair lay in bristling strands of grey at his temples and over his ears, but his moustache was black as coal, and shadowed his dark teeth like a spot of ink with a white line down the centre. From his mouth started the two limp folds which passed his shiny chin and disappeared in the collar of his military coat.

"How strange," thought Lilly, "that I must be the mistress of that bad old man."

But he wanted it so, and there was nothing else to do.

"If you were to make inquiries concerning me," he continued, "they'd tell you that despite my age, I know how to subdue women—probably because I never respected them any too highly. But this time—how shall I say?—the affair is in a manner peculiar. I need not conceal it—I cannot sleep. I haven't slept for many nights; which has never happened to me before. Such a state of matters may not continue, and I pledged myself to make an end of the absurdity in some way or other at the death of the old year." He looked at the clock. "I have half an hour still. I'm expected at a function. In short: it's true, I wanted to seduce you. That is, for a man of my years, who hasn't anything seductive about him any more, seduce is not the right word. At any rate not here; I'd given my word of honour in my letter. But you *were* in my power—you need not doubt that an instant."

"I don't," thought Lilly, who was listening to all he said with as little concern as if she were reading it in a thrilling romance. The old fear had not returned. She was still waiting with lazy curiosity for what was to follow.

"If you had showed fight, you would have been defeated all the more certainly. I am somewhat of an adept in such things. But your fainting spell occurred, and gave me an insight into your soul. I had to admit I should never have taken joy in my conquest. You're fine stuff, and I have no use for someone who would pine. Tearful mistresses have always been a horror to me. I love my comfort. I have had experiences I should not like to repeat. So, while you were lying here with my cook to take care of you, I determined I was on the wrong course."

Lilly had a warm sensation of happiness, as if some great act of kindness were being shown her.

"How noble, how glorious of him," she thought, "to let poor stupid me alone."

She cast a furtive glance at his hands hanging between his knees. They were yellow and long and bony. Had she not been ashamed to, she would have leaned over and kissed them, to show her

gratitude.

The next moment she felt almost sorry that so noble a man should have nothing to do with her any more.

"I took further counsel with myself," he continued, and his voice was still steelier, as if tempered in the fire of his resolve. "The idea was not a new one. It had occurred to me frequently. At first it seemed ridiculous, then it came to be a last resort, from which I would not cut myself off, in case circumstances warranted—I am taking that way now. Why shouldn't I? I'm not very ambitious. I'm too well acquainted with the vile machinery of the government. It doesn't pay to oil it any longer than need be with one's sweat and blood. So the idea of quitting doesn't frighten me—of course I shall have to leave service. Perhaps I should at any rate. There are days when I can scarcely keep the saddle because of that cursed rheumatism in my hips."

"Why is he telling me all this?" thought Lilly, not a little flattered that so great and aristocratic a man should discuss such weighty matters with her.

"What exercises me more is that a whole generation stands ready to revenge itself for the robbery perpetrated upon it. To be sure, a strong hand would do some good. We should have to dare something—why not our side as well as the other? Well, what do you say, child?"

Lilly did not reply. She was ashamed that she was so stupid as not to have extracted a single idea from all he said. His words sounded like Hottentotese.

"Well, will you—yes or no?"

"I don't know—I don't understand what you mean," she stammered.

"Good Lord! I've been asking you all this time whether you'll be my wife," said the colonel.

CHAPTER XII

The great moment of her hopes had arrived.

"Is this you, Lilly Czepanek, to whom such things happen? Or, is it someone else, with whom you changed places, some character in one of your brown-backed books, who will cease to live the instant you close it?"

He had not insisted on an answer that New Year's Eve. When she had fallen back in a tremble, incapable of uttering a syllable, incapable of thinking, he had taken her hands in his, and with the smile of a gift-giving god had begun to talk to her in a softer, gentler tone than she had thought possible in him. He told her to think the matter over; she might take three days, no, a week; he would have patience. But she must promise not to say a word about it to anybody.

She promised willingly, though she could not look him in the face, she was so horribly ashamed.

Then she had run home, and cried and cried without knowing whether from bliss or misery. When the sisters came creeping in at four o'clock in the morning—they had let down the bars of their propriety on New Year's Eve—she was still crying.

On rising, she came to the conclusion he could not possibly have been serious and he would take the first opportunity to recant—perhaps that very day.

She would not complain if he did. On the contrary she would breathe freer, and thank God for having rid her of the presence of a phantom.

At ten o'clock the bell rang.

A box of roses was delivered, the size and cost of which aroused the disapproving amazement of the sisters, who knew to a penny the price of roses at that season, and reckoned a sum greatly exceeding Lilly's wages for several months.

"I cannot for the life of me see," said the older, "why you don't yield to such a magnificent admirer. With us, of course, it's different. We belong to society, and we cannot give ourselves up. But you, nothing more than a shop girl, with no family to have to consider! Besides, there's no doubt but that shame has its charms. I in your place would make a venture—"

The younger and more sentimental sister opposed the older one's advice.

"The first time it should be from pure love," she said. "You owe it to your own soul, even if you are only a shop girl."

Without coming to an agreement upon this debatable point, they went off to witness the change of guards, which Colonel von Mertzbach, they said, contemplated directing in his own person on New Year's day, and the Colonel, reputed to be a very handsome man pursued by all the marriageable girls in society, was someone they wanted to see.

Lilly patted and kissed the roses of the upper stratum, and would have done the same to all in the box, had there not been so many.

Then she took heart, locked the door, and went to St. Anne's to pay St. Joseph a visit.

She nearly met the officers hastening to the main guard face to face, but managed in the nick of time to escape down a side street.

High mass had just concluded and had left an odor of incense and poor people between the arched aisles. A few persons were still praying at the side altars.

Lilly kneeled before her saint, leaned her head against the velvet-covered rail, and tried to lay bare her torn heart in order to obtain counsel and help.

"May I? Shall I? Can I?"

Oh, she longed to. Such a piece of fortune would never come her way again, never, never. To be rich, a baroness, to have all the splendours of the universe laid at her feet. Where outside of fairytales do such marvels occur?

If only there hadn't been one thing about him. But what that one thing was she could not determine.

It wasn't his eyes, no matter how dagger-like they looked. It wasn't the bristly hair on his temples either, nor the grating voice of command.

Now she knew! It was the two dewlaps that fell from chin to throat. Yes, that's what it was. No use trying to dissemble with herself and pretend she did not see them. She shuddered at the mere thought of them.

None the less, the sisters had called him a *handsome* man, and rich, aristocratic women ran after him. It would be sheer folly to refuse.

And wasn't he the noblest, the best, the most exalted of men? Wasn't he like God Himself?

She imagined herself living and breathing for him. She would sit at his feet and learn. She would flutter about him like a gay bird. No, she could not imagine a person being gay in his presence. But a person could be poetic. You could languish away into unknown remotenesses, gaze at the evening clouds, present a noble, pale picture, up to which strange young men would look with consuming passion, and be honoured by not a glance in return—she could do this, because her life would be dedicated to the one who was to be her protector, friend, and father, who would elevate her to heights from which otherwise a ray would never have fallen upon her.

"I will, I will!" life within her cried. "Dear St. Joseph, I will!"

St. Joseph raised a threatening finger.

But St. Joseph always raised a threatening finger. He couldn't help himself. That was the way the sculptor had made him. The sight of that finger, however, was vexatious and not calculated to help a poor human being out of a dilemma.

The next day she received a letter from Mr. Pieper, asking her to call at his office on a matter of great importance.

Hot and cold waves shivered up and down her back.

"He knows," she said to herself.

Mrs. Asmussen was greatly displeased when Lilly asked for permission to go out.

"You get flowers and expensive gifts, and you want to leave the library every day. I very much fear me I shall have to offer up a daily prayer for you again."

But Lilly showed her the guardian's letter, and she yielded.

Lilly had not seen her guardian since the day, a year and a half before, when she had left the hospital tottering from weakness. Timidity had prevented her from availing herself of his invitation to visit him again. Besides, there had been no occasion to. Nobody had inquired for her. From time to time a tall, dry man, whom she recognised as Mr. Pieper's managing clerk, had called on Mrs. Asmussen and held a short conversation with her. This was the one sign that the man to whose protection Lilly had been consigned thought of her.

"Mr. Pieper says, will you please walk in," said the clerk.

The prominent lawyer, as on the previous occasion, was sitting behind his desk. When Lilly entered, he raised his head, and inspected her a few moments in silence. Then he smiled and rubbed his shining pate, and said in a long drawl:

"U—m—m! So—o—o!"

His eyes glided over her body as over a piece of goods for sale.

Lilly, whose respect for the man rendered her breathless, made a gesture which was half bow, half courtesy, and pulled at the short sleeves of her overcoat.

"Now I understand," continued Mr. Pieper. "You have developed in a way, my child, which in a measure excuses all sorts of masculine absurdities, even if it does not justify them—the masculine intellect is here to suppress all ebullitions. I forgot my manners—good morning, Miss

Czepanek."

He rose and held out his cold, spongy hand, which under pressure felt as limp as if it were boneless.

"Oh, do please show me your gloves," he said.

Lilly started like a guilty thing, drew her elbows back, blushed and stammered:

"I was just going to buy a new pair."

"Don't!" he rejoined, smacking his lips with gusto. "Grey rags like these arouse emotion. Your cloak arouses emotion, too. Your clothes make a piquant contrast to your general appearance. Lovers of such naïve, sentimental things are easily moved by them to lyric outbursts, even if lyricism is not their forte."

He laid his arm in hers with a confidential manner, and led her to a heavily upholstered settee.

"Be seated in this chair of torture," he said, "though to-day we're not going to extract even a tooth. Taking everything into consideration, you have done well for yourself. I am content with you, my child."

He stroked his straw-coloured beard complacently, and grinned like a trickster after the performance of a particularly artful dodge. "When do you think the wedding will take place?"

"Why, there has not been—an engagement—yet," stammered Lilly.

"Well, there won't be what is called a real engagement—sending out notices and receiving visits, and so on. As little stir as possible, Miss Czepanek, as little stir as possible. That's my advice. In the delicate situation in which we find ourselves, contrary influences are always to be feared."

"I haven't said 'yes' yet," Lilly ventured to interject.

This amused him immensely.

"Who'd have thought it! A mock refusal! Who'd have thought it! I didn't take you for so good a business woman, Miss Czepanek."

"I am at a loss as to your meaning," said Lilly, who without fully realising why, was growing hot with indignation.

He put one hand to his hip, and continued to be amused.

"Well, well, that's all very fine and practical. But you can't carry such jokes too far. Let *me* arrange matters. I have some knowledge of these affairs, though, I admit, so important a case has never come to me before. I will endeavour to hasten the wedding as much as possible—for the reasons I have already mentioned. I will also ask for all possible secrecy, at least until his resignation has been accepted. Then nothing need stand in the way of securing the banns, since getting an adequate trousseau need concern us in only a lesser degree. As for your conduct, my dear child, I advise you for the present to remain as undecided, as maidenly, as fresh as possible. The only change I suggest is to use better soap. Everything else may continue to be just as it is. Perhaps you will have to be placed with another family. In that case it will be necessary, of course, to get an outfit, for which the sum realised from the sale of your mother's effects, amounting to—one moment, please." He opened a large account book lying on a rack next to his desk, "amounting to—A, B, C, Czepanek—amounting to one hundred and thirty-six marks and seventy-five pfennig, will come in very handy. Æsthetic enjoyment of the circumstances leads me to place my own purse also at your disposal. Well, so much for the time preceding the wedding! As to the incomparably more important time following, I should not like you to leave my office before I had given you a few delicate hints, although *unfortunately*, I must deny myself the pleasure of—"

He paused a moment, and rubbed his hands, while an epicurean, satyr's smile widened his broad face.

"The pleasure of taking a mother's place and giving you the advice with which a mother usually sends off a bride."

This time Lilly understood him, and her hot shame seemed to spread a red mist before her eyes.

"You may trust me implicitly in such matters as a will, life insurance, and alimony in case of divorce, provided, of course, you are the innocent party—or even, in a sense, a bit guilty. You were not placed in my keeping for nothing. However, there is *one* circumstance—which circumstance has to be taken most frequently into consideration in marriages like yours—*one* circumstance in which my professional skill, I am sorry to say, cannot provide you with adequate security. As to that, you must keep your eyes wide open for yourself. We human beings have been put in this world, my child, to do what gives us pleasure. Whoever says the reverse steals the sun from your heaven. But I warn you of three things: first, exchange no superfluous glances; second, demand no superfluous rendering of accounts; third, make no superfluous confessions. You cannot fully comprehend this yet—"

As a matter of fact Lilly comprehended not a single word.

"But when the occasion arises, think of what I've said. The recollection may prove useful. And—

here's something very important—do you love jewels?"

"I cannot say I have ever seen any."

"Well, in the jeweler's window at the Altmarkt?"

"We were always forbidden to stand in front of shop windows."

Mr. Pieper laughed his vilest laugh.

"I advise you when you are out walking with your husband to stand in front of *every* shop window. Such little attentions may seldom be reclaimed. Pay special regard to pearls. In that way you will lay by a little reserve which will stand you in mighty good stead in your hour of need—and your hour of need will come, you may be sure it will."

Lilly nodded her head and thought:

"I will never, never, do that."

Mr. Pieper stroked his shining bald spot several times with his plump, white hand, and continued:

"Well, what else have I to say to you? I have a good deal more advice to give, but I fear not being understood. Just one thing, for the first few months. Marriage, no matter what sort of marriage, causes a peculiar derangement of the nervous system in natures like yours. Should you feel an inclination to cry, take a bromide. In general, take plenty of bromides—whether in case of great love, or—hm—great aversion. At certain times pull a cap over your head, so that you see nothing, hear nothing, and feel nothing, and, as it were, shunt yourself off from what goes on around you, yourself, your volition, and your feelings. The close atmosphere of the chamber which will at first envelope you will gradually evaporate—in this case probably at the end of a few months. Then you will breathe fresh air again, and instead of a tester, you will once more see the heaven of your maiden days. But, whatever happens, it is dangerous when one's nerves are overstimulated, to direct one's fancy too much upon the immediate environment and seek the necessary compensation that very instant. Turn from what is near, and dream about the remote blue mountains. Let your happiness ever dwell at a safe distance. You are young. It will draw closer. Give it time to become full fledged. I assume you haven't understood a word."

"Oh, yes I have," stammered Lilly, who wished not to be considered stupid, though he was right—his words fell upon her like hailstones, of which she was able to gather only a few here and there. Nevertheless, she had understood the last part, that about dreaming of the remote blue mountains. It did her heart good, and she would take his advice.

"However that may be," Mr. Pieper continued, "some sentence or other will occur to you on occasion. One point more, the most delicate of all, because it is, so to speak, the most spiritual. If what is about you gives no sound or response, if it does not echo to your call, you must not grieve, nor attempt to alter it. Cracked bells should not be rung. Rather make your own music. If I am not mistaken, you have a whole orchestra at your disposal."

"I have the Song of Songs," thought Lilly, triumphantly.

"You cannot imagine, my child, how important it is, when one lives in such close contact with another human being, not to lose one's touch with oneself. Keep a corner reserved for your own thoughts—they will amuse you greatly. He who likes to eat fresh eggs must raise his own chickens. Don't forget that. But keep your corner to yourself. Offer no superfluous resistance. No obstinacy. From the very start you must provide the course of your life with a double track, so that you can ride in either direction, as need be. I shouldn't wonder if under such conditions it wouldn't turn out to be quite a happy marriage, entirely apart from the external advantages—so long as they last—these are matters of adaptation and good luck which our will cannot control in advance. I will send you the marriage contract sealed. Until your coming of age—in about two years, I believe—I am at your disposal. If after a time you see that the milk in your cup has turned permanently sour, break the seal. A thorough lawyer can read all sorts of surprises out of the contract, which laymen do not immediately realise. But, as I said, in *one* case he cannot. Beware of that one case. It is called *in flagranti*. Some time cautiously inquire into its meaning. There you are! Now, may I give the colonel your consent?"

CHAPTER XIII

The train rumbled on in the night. Showers of sparks flew past the window. When the stoker added coal, a beam of light was projected far into the darkness, and for an instant created out of the black void purple pine trees, snowy roofs gleaming golden, and fields mottled with yellow.

How beautiful and strange it was!

Lilly leaned her head, heavy with champagne, back against the red velvet cushion.

It was over. A whirl of images, real and imaginary, flitted back and forth in her brain.

A great black inkwell and a little man with a grey beard behind it asking all sorts of useless questions. A white cloud of lace and a myrtle wreath thrown over her head by the wife of the

manager of the war office, who fell from one fit of rapture into another. A hateful Protestant minister with two ridiculous little white bibs. He looked like a grave-digger, but he spoke so exquisitely, after all, that you wanted to throw your arms about his neck, and cry. Two black and two gay gentlemen. One of the black gentlemen, Mr. Pieper, one of the gay gentlemen, the colonel.

"The colonel's wife—the colonel's wife," throbbed the wheels.

But if she listened carefully, she also heard them say what the gentlemen had kept saying to her that day:

"La—dy Mertzbach—La—dy Mertzbach."

Keeping time. Keeping time.

The ice cream had been a perfect marvel, a regular mine with shafts and tunnels and mineral veins, and little lights, which set the cut-glass a-sparkle. She could have sat there forever staring at it, but she had to dig in with a large gold spoon, so that a whole mountain side gave way.

Then she had asked him whether she might have ice cream to eat every day, and he had laughed and said "yes." If she had not been a bit tipsy, she would not have been so bold, certainly not. And she determined to ask his forgiveness later.

There he sat opposite, piercing her with his eyes.

That was the only embarrassing thing. If she weren't such a chicken-hearted ninny, she would ask him to look somewhere else for a change.

But to-day she did not experience actual fear. Latterly the old dread had gradually left her, as she came to realise how supernaturally dear he was. Express a wish, and it was fulfilled.

There was something else, about which, of course, she couldn't speak to anyone. Merely to think of it was a crime. He was bow-legged. Regular cavalry legs. They were a little short, besides, for his powerful body, giving his stiff stride a springy sort of uncertainty, as if he were endeavouring all the time to toe the mark, especially since he had donned civilian's clothes and kept his hands stuck in his coat pockets.

From time to time he leaned forward and asked:

"Are you comfortable, little girl?"

Oh, she was ever so comfortable. She could have reclined there the rest of her life, her head leaning back on the red velvet cushion, the soft kid gloves on her hands and the natty tips of new boots every now and then peeping from under her travelling gown.

What a crowd there had been at the station!

No uniforms, of course, because he had not desired an official escort. To compensate, the number of veiled ladies had been all the greater. They pretended to have business to attend to on the platform, and tried to be inconspicuous.

When Lilly walked to the train leaning on his arm, she caught two or three muffled cries of admiration. And God knows, they did not issue from friendly lips.

It all circulated about her heart like a warm, soothing stream.

At the last moment, as the train was moving off, two bouquets flew in through the window.

She looked out. There were the two sisters, making deep courtesies, and weeping like rain spouts.

So great was Lilly's fortune that even envy was disarmed, and all the evil poison in these girls was transmuted into pained participation in another's joy!

And there he sat, the creator of it all.

Overcome by a sense of well-being and gratitude, she knelt on the carpeted floor of the compartment, folded her hands on his knees, and looked up to him worshipfully.

He put his right arm about her, pulled her close to him, and let his left hand stray down her body. Fear came upon her again. She slid from under his grasp back to her seat. He nodded—with a smile that seemed to say:

"My hour will come in due time."

It was there sooner than she had suspected.

"Put on your coat," he said suddenly, "we shall be getting out soon."

"Where?" she asked, frightened.

"At the station—you know—from which a branch line goes to Lischnitz."

"Why, are we going to your place?" Lilly was terrified, because he had always spoken of going to Dresden.

"No," he said curtly. "We remain here."

In a few moments they found themselves on a dark platform among their bags and trunks.

The icy mist formed rainbow-coloured suns about the few lanterns, and white clouds of frozen breath enveloped each shadowy form as it stepped into a circle of light.

The train glided off.

They stood there, and nobody concerned himself for them.

The colonel began to swear violently, a habit acquired probably at drill, when the world did not wag as he wished it to wag.

His cries of wrath fell upon Lilly like great hailstones. Her whole body quivered, as if she were at fault.

Some of the station guards, to whom this tone of command seemed familiar from times of old, loaded themselves with the baggage, and presented a lamentable spectacle in their deep contrition.

A hotel coach was waiting on the other side. Lilly thoroughly intimidated squeezed into the farthest corner.

The miserable little oil lamp burning dimly in a dirty glass case, threw confused shadows upon his sharply cut face, and seemed to endow it with a new flickering life, as if the wrath that had long been stifled were still seething within him.

"You are completely at the mercy of this bad old man, whom you don't know, who doesn't concern you in the least, and never will concern you." A chill ran through her. "Supposing you were to dash by him, tear open the coach door, and run away into the night?"

She pictured what would take place. He would have the coach stopped, would jump out, and give chase, calling and screaming. In case she managed to keep well concealed, he would rouse the police, and the next morning she would be discovered cowering in a corner, asleep, or frozen perhaps.

At this point in her thoughts he groped for her hand as lovers are wont to do. The phantom world vanished, and blossoming into smiles again she returned his pressure.

Nevertheless, when they reached the hotel where they were received by the proprietor and clerks with enthusiastic bowing and scraping, and Lilly felt a stream of light, sound, and warmth pouring toward her, the fleeting thought beset her again:

"If I were to say I had left something in the coach, and were to run away and never come back?"

She was already walking up the steps on his arm.

They were ushered into a large, awe-inspiring room with a flowered carpet and a bare, three-armed chandelier.

In one corner was a huge bed, with high carved top and tail boards, smoothly covered with a white counterpane.

She looked about in vain for another bed.

"St. Joseph!" shot through her mind.

The colonel—when thinking of him, she always called him the colonel still—behaved as if he were at home in the room. He grumbled a bit, fussed with the lights, and threw his overcoat in a corner.

She remained leaning against the wall.

"If I want to flee now," she thought, "I shall have to throw myself out of the window."

"Don't you intend to budge until to-morrow morning?" he said. "If so, I'll engage your services as a clothes horse."

A smirking calm seemed to have come over him, as if he were at last sure of his possession.

He threw himself in a corner of the sofa, lighted a cigarette, and looked at her with a connoisseur's gaze, while she slowly divested herself of her cloak and drew out her hatpin with hesitating fingers.

A knock at the door.

A waiter entered bearing a tray with cold dishes and a silver-throated bottle.

"Champagne again?" asked Lilly, who still had a slightly sickish feeling.

"The very thing," he said, pouring a foaming jet into the goblets. "It gives a little girl courage to dedicate the lovely nightgown waiting for her in the trunk."

She clinked glasses with him in obedience to his demand, but scarcely moistened her lips with the wine.

He jokingly took her to task, and she pled:

"I shouldn't like to be drunk on such a sacred evening."

Her answer seemed to gratify him immensely. He burst into a noisy laugh, and observed:

"All the better, all the better!"

He attempted to draw her down to him, but contact with him made her uneasy, and she eluded his grasp with a quick movement.

"You said you wanted me to hunt for the nightgown."

She knelt at the trunk, which she herself had packed the night before, lifted the trays out, and from near the bottom fetched out the nebulous, lacy creation, which was one of the many things he had bought her before the wedding.

She looked about for a retreat, but nowhere on earth was there escape from that pair of eyes which swimming in desire followed her every movement.

Hesitating, faint-hearted she stood there, her fingers hanging to her collar, which she did not venture to unfasten.

Growing impatient he jumped up.

He was about to seize her, but the look she gave him was so full of despair that a knightly impulse bade him desist.

To account for his action he picked up a roll of paper that had dropped from the trunk while she had been rummaging for the nightgown.

Lilly saw something white gleam between his dark fingers.

"The Song of Songs!" occurred to her.

With a cry she jumped on him and tried to snatch away the roll. But his hand held it as in a vice.

He defended himself with ease, laughing all the time.

The thought that the secret of her life had strayed into alien hands, deprived her of her senses. She cried, she screamed, she beat him with her fists.

The matter began to look suspicious. A doubt as to the virginity of her soul, yea, even of her body, began to assail him.

"One moment, little girl," he said. "There are no nooks or crannies for hiding in now. Either you'll kindly let me see what this is without further delay, or I'll take you between my knees and hold you so fast you won't be able to move a muscle."

Lilly took to pleading.

"Colonel, dear, *dear* colonel! A few sheets of music, and some songs, that's all, I swear to you, *dear* colonel."

The droll innocence of her plea stirred his emotions; that humble, unconscious "colonel" set him laughing again. Besides, the daughter of a musician, as he knew her to be, might be expected to have ambitions.

"You yourself probably compose?" he asked.

"No—no—no—it's not that," she moaned. "But don't look in—give it back to me—if you don't, I'll jump out of the window. I will, by God and all the saints!"

She pleased him so well with her eyes stretched in deadly terror, with her hair loosened by the struggle, with the expression of a tragic muse on the sweet, delicately cut child's face, that he wanted to enjoy the rare sight a little longer.

Accordingly, he assumed a black expression, and pretended to be what a few moments ago he had actually been.

She fell on her knees, and clasping his legs, stammered and whispered, almost choked with shame and distress:

"If you give it back to me, you can do with me whatever you want. I will do whatever you want. I won't resist any more."

The bargain, it struck him, was to his advantage.

"Shake hands on it?" he asked.

"Shake hands," she replied. "And never ask questions—yes?"

"If you swear to me by your St. Joseph it's nothing but music."

"And the libretto, I swear."

He handed her the roll, and she gave herself up to him—sold herself to the man who already

possessed her for the Song of Songs, of which he had robbed her.

The rays of early morning shining on her eyes through curtains striped with yellow awoke her. She was resting comfortably pressed against something warm. She had slept deliciously.

What had happened to her came back to her slowly.

She leaned over and wanted to kiss him.

He was lying with his head thrown back, his mouth open. The light from the windows was playing on his shiny, furrowed chin. Little veins crisscrossed his gaunt cheeks like streams on a map. The inky moustache glistened with pomade. His eyelids were folded over so often that Lilly thought if they were stretched to their length they would reach to the tip of his nose.

"He doesn't look bad," she said to herself, but the idea of kissing him passed out of her mind.

She got up without making a sound, and all the time she dressed he did not stir. The old cavalry man was blessed with sound sleep.

She wrote on a sheet of hotel paper, "have gone to church," laid the sheet between his fingers, and slipped out, down the steps and past the porter, who was so astonished he forgot to pull off his cap.

The streets of the little town were dreaming in the quiet of the winter morning. Hillocks of snow swept from the middle of the street were heaped in rows along the gutters. A black swarm of crows squatted in a circle about the frozen fountain in the market-place. The faint sound of sleigh bells penetrated the grey air.

Boys carrying bags were wending their way to school. In some of the sorry shops lights were still burning. Apprentices with ruddy cheeks sweeping the steps stopped at Lilly's approach, and stared, or called to others inside; whereat more youths appeared and all, as if moved by one spring, goggled after her.

Marching steps beat a tattoo behind her. A long line of infantry wearing gloves—but no overcoats—came tramping along the middle of the street, puffing clouds of frozen breath in front of them at regular intervals. All turned "eyes left" toward her, as if that had been the word of command, and the officers walking at the side of the line threw one another questioning glances, and shrugged their shoulders.

She did not have far to search for the Catholic parish church, which towered above the roofs round about. It was a clumsy stone structure with remnants of Gothic built over and stopped up with bricks.

The alcoves along the side aisles were filled with altars barbarously gilded and decorated with cheap garish vases. Her St. Joseph was nowhere to be found. So she contented herself with Our Lady of Sorrows, who, however, did not have much to say to her.

An inexplicable feeling of oppression and emptiness seized her, as if she had broken something, she did not know what.

She kneeled and mumbled her prayers so unthinkingly that she was ashamed of herself.

Then she caught herself ogling her kid gloves which enveloped her fingers with velvety, inconspicuous aristocracy.

Every now and then a shiver ran through her body, which forced her to close her eyes and clench her teeth—she was ashamed of the shiver, too.

Soon she gave up praying entirely, and regarded Our Lady, who was pulling a doleful face, as if to say: "Do, please, draw this thing out of my body." Yet the seven swords piercing her heart had handles set with pearls and precious gems.

"If only I were unhappy," thought Lilly, "I'd have *something*. Then I could carry on a conversation with her, the way I used to with St. Joseph—and the swords in *my* heart would be sumptuous to behold."

As sumptuous as the pearl chain he had put about her neck yesterday at the wedding.

She recalled what she had been like two months before, when she had stolen off for half an hour in the grey of early morning to lay her hot, surcharged heart at the feet of her beloved saint—how she had been borne off on clouds by the intoxication of youth, her gaze turned upon the fair and blessed distance.

None the less she had been steeped in misery and utter destitution.

"If that's the way happiness looks," she went on with her thoughts, and shrugged her shoulders.

Suddenly she was beset with fear that those times would never return, that she would have to live on eternally as now, empty-hearted, distraught, tortured by a dull oppression.

"This comes of not loving him enough," she confessed to herself.

At last she knew what she had to pray for to Our Lady of Sorrows.

She hid her face in both hands, and prayed long and fervently. She prayed to be able to love him—with as much passion as she had drops of blood—with as much devotion as she had hopes in her soul, with as much delight as there was laughter in her heart.

And behold! Her prayer was heard!

With the burden removed from her soul, her eyes shining, she arose, and returned to the place where she belonged, to serve him in humility and trust—as his child, his handmaiden, his courtesan, whichever he happened to wish.

CHAPTER XIV

The colonel wishing, on account of his mésalliance, to avoid his many military friends, did not stop over at Berlin with Lilly, but went directly on to Dresden, which they reached in three hours.

He had engaged rooms at Sendig's, and the proprietor had done his utmost to fit up snug and aristocratic quarters for the newly-wed couple. Sitting-room, bedroom, and bath—that was all they needed. Close companionship, the outer appearance of intimacy, would naturally bring about inward intimacy.

The colonel had good cause, indeed, to be satisfied with his honeymoon!

He, who in the course of his many amours had probably dandled hundreds of girls on his knees, who thought he knew women through and through, the tart and the sweet, the chaste and the coquette, the sensitive and the bold, the genuine and the flashy, those who confined their coy caresses to a man's hand and lower arm, and those who hung on men's lips biting and sucking them in a wild frenzy, he, the old voluptuary, to whom nothing feminine ought to have been strange, stood astounded, incredulous before this lovely marvel.

So much abandon and so much pride, so much tenderness and so much fire, so much ready comprehension and so much artless childishness, all mingled in one dreamy, laughing Madonna head, had never before presented itself to him, for all the fine art he had exercised in his roué's career.

What touched him most and completely puzzled him was the modesty of her desires, the fact that she made no demands of any sort.

When they took dinner *à la carte* he might be sure her eye would travel to the cheapest orders for herself; and the expression with which she would sometimes prefer a request to be allowed to drink orangeade, was as hesitating and shamefaced as if she were making a love avowal.

One day, on returning from the Grosser Garten by way of side streets, Lilly stood still in front of a poverty-stricken little provision shop. As a rule nothing could induce her to look into shop windows, and the colonel, curious as to her interest in the place, extracted from her the confession that she loved sunflower seeds—and would he be very angry if she asked him to buy some?

The more he overwhelmed her with gifts, the less she seemed to realise that money was being spent for her sake.

The long dearth she had suffered prevented her from appreciating the value of money, and whatever he put into her purse she handed out again without hesitation to the first beggar she met on the street. Then again it smote her conscience when he gave a flower girl two marks for a rose.

Once, upon her doing one of these incredible things, which usually sent the colonel into epicurean transports, he was seized with sudden distrust.

"I say, little girl," he said, "are you an actress?"

Lilly did not even understand him. She looked at him with the great, sad eyes of innocence she always made on such occasions, and said:

"What are you thinking of! Since papa left I haven't even *seen* an actress. I haven't been inside a theatre once."

That very day he ordered a box, and she danced about the rooms with the tickets in her hand wild with joy.

But her delight was dampened by his injunction to wear evening dress. Lilly could not comprehend why one should have to bare one's neck and shoulders in order to be edified by "The Winter's Tale." Besides, the magnificence of the gowns filled her with discomfort. She would walk in awe about the gleaming gala robes as circumspectly as about a thicket of nettles. The colonel had had them made when in a giving mood, for no real purpose, since it was impossible, of course, for the present to introduce Lilly to society.

When she appeared before him stiff and constrained, her eyes severely fixed, her cheeks,

however, glowing with the fever of festivity, her delicately curved breast half concealed in a nest of white lace, the fabulously exquisite chain of pearls about her swan-like throat—taller, lither, apparently, more of a blossoming Venus than ever—the old robber was seized by intoxication in the possession of his booty, the magnificent gown came near being consigned to the wardrobe, and the tickets to the waste basket; but Lilly begged so hard, that he choked down his feelings, and got into the carriage with her.

The colonel thought he had long ago outlived the banal delight of shining in the eyes of strangers. He found he was mistaken. The old bachelor experienced a new, unexpected sensation, to which he gave himself up disdainfully, though feeling immensely flattered. After a time he accepted his triumph as a matter of course.

The instant Lilly appeared in the box the whole house had eyes for her alone. The handsome, aristocratic couple, whose very being together aroused speculation, busied everybody's imagination, and as soon as the lights went up at the end of the first act, the whispering and questioning and pointing of opera glasses began anew.

Lilly had never before been in a box, and on entering she had started back instinctively, feeling confused and alarmed. But accustomed as she now was to implicit obedience, she took the chair to which the colonel pointed without a word of protest. When she realised she was the object of general attention, the old numbness came over her. She felt as if the woman sitting there speaking and smiling were not herself but someone else whose connection with her person was purely accidental.

She did not awake from her torpor until the hall was thrown into darkness again, and the curtain went up. Then the play wafted her to the land of the poet, breathless, exulting, dismayed.

After this, two Lillies sat in her seat—the one in blissful self-forgetfulness flitting on the rainbow-coloured wings of childlike fancy through heavens and hells; the other making precise gestures like a wound-up doll, unconsciously imitating the manners of the well-bred; at the same time feeling a strange, hot, torturingly sweet sensation creep over her being: the intoxication of the vain.

The triumph he had celebrated in the theatre was not enough for the colonel. On returning to the hotel he did not have supper served as usual in their rooms, but led Lilly to the general dining room, where a gypsy band was playing and elegant folk of all descriptions were spreading their peacock feathers.

The game of the box was repeated in all but one respect. Lilly, carried away by the dreamy magic of the violins, dropped some of her coyness. Her cheeks glowed, her eyes swam, and stretching herself a bit she ventured to take a tiny part in the sport.

Two tables off sat a blond young man in full dress—white shirt front and black tie like all the others. He kept staring at her with hot persistence, as if she were a strange animal.

She moved uneasily under this gaze, which caressed and gave hurt, which spoke wild words in a foreign tongue, yet was nothing else than that sob of the violins which feverishly quivered through her limbs, up and down her body.

Suddenly her husband faced about and surprised the admirer in the very act. He stabbed him with one of his piercing glances, and soon the miscreant vanished.

The colonel's mood seemed to be spoiled somewhat.

He said, "It's time to go," and led her upstairs.

When he had her to himself, joy in his possession got the upper hand again, mounting to a sort of triumphal ecstasy.

Others might pasture on the delights of her evening attire; the winsome asperity of her childlike features, on which life had not yet left its traces, were good enough for display down there in the dining room—off with the pearl chain! Down with the laces!

He wanted her without covering of any sort, wanted to drink in with greedy eyes the secret of her proudly blooming body, wanted to satiate his hungry old age with the long-forbidden charms of strange, stolen youth.

Lilly, helpless, without will of her own, did what she had often done. In shame that flamed afresh each time, she allowed him to tear the last veil from her body. She threw herself on the carpet and rose again—she danced, she posed as a worshipper, as a maiden in distress begging for help, as a Mænad, a water-carrier, a coquette laughing between her fingers—as anything he wished.

This evening there was an additional something, which burned in her blood like venom. A diffident desire, which was really a feeling of repulsion—a love that clung to him in grateful self-abandon, while secretly hankering for something else—for the sobbing of violins and the hiss of conflagrations, a purple heaven dotted with stars, and the deadly sweet yearning that dwelt in Hermione.

When he had had his fill of the spectacle—and this came soon because of his years—he made her don the loose gauze shirt worked with silver thread with which he had presented her at the very beginning of their stay in Dresden. Before he went to sleep she always had to dance in it a while.

Although the metal woof was icy cold and pricked like needles, she soon became accustomed to it, since his will was her law. Then, while she sat beside him on the edge of the bed, he smoked a cigarette in bed, and laughingly retailed smutty jokes; which he called, "singing his baby to sleep."

Henceforth it was the colonel's pleasure to take meals in the common dining room. He wanted to re-experience the prickly delight of seeing his young wife admired and regarded with desirous eyes. The value of his property seemed to be enhanced in the degree in which people smiled, and envied him the possession of it.

As for Lilly, she always took interest in perceiving the drunken sensations of that evening arise in her again. With drooping lids she might feel the silent flame of hopeless desire burn in so many hot young eyes round about. And, carried away by the lamentations of the violins and the hymns of the cymbals, she might flee to those dark and blessed distances to which the way had been barred—she did not know by what—since the hour her great happiness had come to her.

Never did she permit it even to occur to her to return one of the glances that forced themselves upon her by so much as the quiver of her lids. The young men remained mere figurants on her stage, as necessary as the other accessories, the lights, the music, the flowers on the white napery, and the cigarette smoke ascending to the ceiling in blue spirals.

Nevertheless it happened that one day while she was walking along the street on her husband's arm a look pierced to her heart.

It came from a pair of dark eyes, which from afar had been turned on her in a friendly, searching manner. On coming nearer they flared up, as with a flash of recognition, into a sad fire.

She felt as if she would have to hurry after the passerby and ask:

"Who are you? Do you belong to me? Do you wish me to belong to you?"

She was incautious enough to turn around and look back at him.

For only the fraction of a second!

But the incident had not escaped her husband. When she faced about again, she saw his vigilant eyes resting upon her in distrust.

And he nodded several times as if to say:

"Aha! That's the point we've gotten to already, is it?"

He remained absorbed and ill-tempered the rest of the day.

That encounter was only the first of an endless series for Lilly.

To be sure, she never met the same young man again, despite her diligent watch for him; but a host of others took his place.

Passersby no longer remained mere figures in a dissolving view, through whom one looked as if they were non-existent. When she saw a slim man at a distance whose contour and bearing appeared youthful she wondered while waiting for him to draw near:

"What will he be like? Will he look at me?"

If he found favour in her eyes, and if his glance was not impudent, yet was full of astonishment or desire, she would often feel a pang, which said to her:

"You suit him far better than this old man at whose side you are walking."

And each occurrence saddened her.

It saddened her also if one she was pleased with happened to pay no attention to her.

"I'm not good enough for him," she would think. "He scorns me. I wonder why he scorns me."

In the dining room, on the Brühlsche Terrasse, and at other elegant places where there is a constant crossfire of furtive glances, her bearing in its relation to her environment began gradually to change. She acknowledged the incense offered her by a little grateful uplift of her eyes, and she looked without embarrassment directly into the faces of the scrutinising ladies; and although she had the keen vision of a falcon, she would gladly have turned a lorgnette on them. But of this she did not venture to breathe a word to the colonel.

She was often tormented by the desire to bury her eyes in those of the man looking at her, without decorum, without fear, without reserve—just as he was doing. It would have been a mystic union of souls which would do her endless good. Of this she no longer harboured a doubt. She was starving, starving, starving—as she had never starved in her life.

The colonel seemed not to notice in the least what was going on in her, though a state of bitter warfare existed between him and all whose glances besieged her. The eyes of the old Ulan were ever on the look-out, and the one who was too persistent, ardent or melancholy was stabbed with a dart from his eyes.

It happened, however, that some paid no attention to his threats, and even had the audacity to

return what they received with raised brows. This would cause him uneasiness. He would play with his card case and begin to write something, then put the pencil back into his pocket, and, as a rule, wind up with:

"It seems to me we've strayed into bad company. We'd better be going."

Despite his uncomfortable experiences he could not get himself to live alone again with his young wife. Habituated from youth up to motley associations, he required noise and light and laughter. But his suspicions waxed, and finally fastened upon Lilly, too.

He forbade the matinal visit to church, to which she clung so ardently.

What she had done, following a mere impulse, after the first awaking at his side, had by and by become a custom; and while he slept his profound sleep she dressed without making a sound and slipped out into the freshness of early morning.

Going to church served as a pretext.

Generally all she did was dip her fingers in the holy water and make her three genuflections. Sometimes she even contented herself, untroubled by scruples, with merely passing the church.

For here was an hour of golden liberty, the only one throughout the day.

First she hastened to the Augustus bridge to offer her breast to the winds always blowing there and watch the waters course by far below. Then she walked along the banks of the river, usually at a wild pace, in order to gather in as large a harvest of pictures and incidents as possible before creeping back to her husband's home.

Everything the hour brought was pregnant with significance.

The early morning mist lying red on the hills and descending to the river in golden ribbons; the chorus of the bells in the Altstadt; the first timid bursting of the boughs already russet with sap; the joggling carts on their way to market; the hissing and sparking of the swaying wires when the trolley-pole of an electric tram swept along underneath them—all this was joy, it was life.

Since she was not threatened with a gift in consequence she ventured also to look into shop-windows, and greedily, in amazement, devoured every morsel of art.

An end to all this from now on!

The gates suddenly swung shut through which she had escaped for a single hour her perfumed life-prison overheated by desire and indolence.

But she was so soft and pliant that she yielded without a murmur even in her innermost being.

It was his wish—that was sufficient.

Such a quantity of love lay fallow in her soul and cried for activity that in this time of inner conflicts she proffered him a double measure of tenderness. She had to, whether she wished to or not, whether her thoughts dwelled with him or glided off on the viewless path of dreams.

She was his slave, his plaything, his audience; she dressed him, admired his good looks, rubbed his hips with ointment, adjusted the hare's skin about his loins to protect him against his gout; brought him his sodium carbonate when he had eaten too much; massaged his grizzled head with hair tonic, the pungent perfume of which nauseated her, and stood by to help and advise when he trimmed his moustache.

She did it all with eager devotion and ingenuous confidence, as if in ministering to her husband she had found the end and aim of her existence.

Nevertheless he lost his supernatural, god-like qualities in her eyes, became nothing more to her than a man, knightly to be sure, but whimsical and vain; for all his mental force intellectually indolent; for all his sensitiveness utterly brutal, and for all his thirst for love an oldish man, whose powers had long been enervated.

Not that she ever put it in this way to herself.

Had she seen his characteristics so clearly she might have come to hate and scorn him; for she was too immature to know that the witch's cauldron of worldly life brews the same out of most men's souls, provided the great feelings grow grey along with a man's hair, and he has erected no altar for himself at which he may seek refuge while sacrificing to it.

But the picture her fancy had made of him shifted and changed colours from day to day, taking on now one aspect, now the reverse, until a little pity mingled with her terrified respect, and her childlike relation to him was tinged by a certain motherliness, which would have been ridiculous had it not had its roots in the unfailing warmness of her heart, which transmuted another's weakness into cause for her solicitude.

Oh, if only she had not had to starve so!

Starve, when sitting at a festive board each day decked anew with choice viands.

Every morning Lilly eagerly read the theatrical and musical announcements posted in the hotel lobby, only to be drawn away swiftly by the colonel, who in his little garrison town had lost all

interest in the arts. For lack of exercise his organs for perceiving and enjoying had lost their functions, and he shrank back petulantly from the intellectual work she expected of him.

Everything in which he took pleasure, the exaggerated gaiety of the music halls, the display of physical strength and agility, the loud colours, soon became an abomination to Lilly after her first curiosity had been stilled.

Wild horses, the colonel said, could not drag him to Shakespeare or Wagner again, then certainly not to a concert, the object of Lilly's profoundest cravings.

One day she saw an announcement of the Fifth Symphony, which was bound to her childhood days by a thousand ties. She maintained silence, as was proper; but when she reached their room she threw herself on the bed and cried bitterly. He questioned; she confessed. With a bored laugh he made the sacrifice and took her to the concert.

She had not been at a concert since her father's last performance.

When she entered she trembled, and suppressing her tears, drew the air in through her nose.

"You snuffle like a horse when he smells oats," joked the colonel.

"Don't you notice there's the same atmosphere at all concerts?" she asked in a joyous tremour. "Our concert hall at home smelt just like this."

But he had not noticed the similarity of smell, and he did not recall the Fifth Symphony.

"Such matters—" he began.

She was indifferent to all that preceded the symphony. She wanted to hear nothing but that trumpet call of fate which had once filled her, when just blossoming into womanhood, with a shudder of foreboding.

The call came and knocked at people's hearts, and set the knees of all those a-tremble who, companions and fellow-combatants, filled with the same fear and the same impotence, writhed like worms under the blows of fate.

Her husband amusedly hummed:

"Ti-ti-ti-tum, ti-ti-ti-tum." That was all he understood of it.

Turning about softly to urge him if possible to keep still, she noticed for the first time a profusion of yellowish-grey hair growing in his ear. It disgusted her.

"If he has hair in his ears," she thought, as though that were the reason of his deafness to music. A profound despondency seized her. Never again would she rejoice in the beautiful, never again stretch arms in prayer to wrestling heroism, never again quench her thirst for a higher, purer life at the sources of enthusiasm.

Between her and all that stood this man, who sang "ti-ti-ti-tum," and in whose ears there was a little bush of hair.

The soft consolation of the violins died away unheard, the melancholy acquiescence of the andante found no echo in her soul, and the triumphant jubilation of the finale—it brought her no triumph.

Tortured, debased, undone in her own eyes, she left the hall at the side of her yawning husband.

But her vital energy was too sound, her belief in the sunniness of human existence too lively to permit her to succumb to such moods.

Moreover, an event occurred which lent new wings to her being and flushed her with the intoxication of bold hopes.

Though little was said about plans for the immediate future, it was settled that they should remain in Dresden, or some other large city, until May, and then go to Castle Lischnitz, where the household, as always in the master's absence, was conducted by the oft-mentioned Miss Anna von Schwertfeger.

The colonel, forever hovering between trust and distrust of his young wife, was seized one evening by a fresh attack of doubts, and tried to get a view down to the bottom of her soul by questioning her as to how often and whom she had loved before she met him.

Unsuspecting as always, Lilly blurted out her two little experiences.

She told of Fritz Redlich first—because that had been the greater love—and then of the poor, consumptive teacher.

Despite his petty misgivings her husband's judgment had remained clear enough to appreciate the trustful purity of her conscience, and he sent his doubts to the devil with the laugh he usually reserved for his vulgar jokes.

But Lilly wanted to see his emotions stirred, and warming up over her own words, she described the lessons on the history of art and told of the yearnings to see Italy which the poor moribund had enkindled in her with the flame burning in his own heart.

Her cheeks glowed, her eyes swam beneath lids drooping as if with the weight of wine; she dreamed and fantasied, and scarcely heeded his presence.

Suddenly he asked:

"How would it be—would you like to go there?"

Lilly did not reply. That was too much bliss.

He began to consider the matter seriously. Instead of poking in one place and vexing himself over all sorts of stupid people, a man might just as well take a seat in a railroad coach and make a short day's run down to Verona or Milan.

She flung her arms about his neck, she threw herself at his feet—it *was* too much bliss.

Life now became absolutely unreal, a constant change from ecstasy to anxiety and back again, because something might intervene to prevent the trip.

First of all he had to have a pair of knickerbockers and a Norfolk jacket, such as every aristocratic traveller wears. Then there were a dozen other hindrances.

The fact was, he probably felt he had grown too unwieldy to keep pace with her in her ability to enjoy herself. But something occurred to hasten their departure.

The last few days, the colonel noticed, they had been followed by a pale, bull-necked individual, six feet tall, who tried with stupid pertinacity to attract Lilly's attention.

To judge by the man's appearance he was a tourist of the Anglo-Saxon race. His manners indicated a certain loftiness, and the colonel's threatening looks glanced from him without leaving the faintest trace.

Lilly saw her husband fall for the first time into a lasting mood of thoughtfulness. He paced up and down the room, repeatedly muttering:

"I'll have to box his ears," or "I'll have to look for a second."

The next day, when the colonel observed the importunate person trotting about ten feet behind them, he veered about suddenly and accosted him.

The blond Titan looked him up and down without so much as removing the short pipe from his mouth.

"I may look at anyone I want to, and I may go anywhere I want to," he declared.

With that he slightly shoved up the sleeves of his overcoat and struck a boxing attitude, which, foreboding a street row, stifled all desire for a knightly mode of chastisement.

The colonel in a final attempt to settle the matter in an honourable fashion handed the stranger his visiting card, which was received with a friendly "Thank you, sir." And the colonel's opponent stuck the card in his pocket evidently without the least inkling of the ominous import of the formality. Passersby began to gather and there was nothing left for the colonel to do but turn his back.

The upshot of the rencontre was that the Englishman now assumed the right to honour Lilly and her husband with a greeting, and the colonel, who tried to drown the consciousness of having made himself ridiculous in a torrent of oaths, decided to leave Dresden immediately. This was about the middle of April.

In Munich, where they stopped off a few days to render homage to the Hofbräuhaus, nothing especial occurred.

But the colonel had grown nervous. He cast challenging, pugnacious looks at the most harmless admirers and began to heap reproaches on Lilly's head. "It seems," he would say, "everybody can tell at a glance that you are no lady; otherwise you would not be the object of such a number of indelicate attentions."

At any other time Lilly would have grieved bitterly. Now she listened to him with an absent smile on her lips. Her soul no longer dwelt on German soil. She was breathing the air of the beloved country on whose threshold, she thought, she was already standing.

One night's ride still, a short day in Bozen, and then the gates would open.

Now nothing could intervene.

It was in a section of the express that leaves Munich late in the evening and crosses the Brenner Pass in the dusk of early morning. Lilly and her husband sat in the seats by the window. The seat next to the corridor had been taken by a young man, who on assuming it had saluted the other occupants with a smile, and then paying no further attention to them had become engrossed in a book written, apparently, in Italian.

So he was an Italian, a messenger from Paradise, who had come to bid them welcome. That was

enough to ensure Lilly's interest.

She regarded him from under lids to all appearances closed in sleep.

He had a clear-cut, high-spirited face of a peculiar, milky yellow tint, without lines or shadows, as smooth as if enameled. A small, dark moustache, somewhat crispy, and the hair on the temples cropped so close that the skin shone beneath.

Lilly wanted to see his eyes, too, but he kept them obstinately bent on his book, though he seemed merely to be skimming through it.

What she admired most was the peculiar roundness and softness of his movements. You might suppose a woman was clothed in that black and white checked suit, which attracted her by its unusually aristocratic appearance. The silk shirt was violet and dark red, and a green necktie was tied carelessly about the soft collar.

All these colours, strange as they looked, went so well together and seemed to have been selected with so much care and refinement of taste, that Lilly grew quite uncomfortable. She almost felt the young stranger was trying to force himself upon her by his manner and bearing and dress, and above all by his ostensible disregard of her.

It was ridiculous; she was afraid of him.

When the customs officers entered the compartment at the Austrian frontier he uttered a few strange-sounding words, which the officers understood, for they turned away from him with deep bows.

At that moment he raised his eyes and let them rove about the compartment; and while the colonel was opening his bag they rested for an instant, as if by chance, upon Lilly.

What singular eyes he had!

They sent out sharp rays like black diamonds, yet they gave a caress, a wicked, sure caress, which asked impatient questions, questions that made one blush.

The next instant nothing had happened. He was bending over his book as before and seemed not to notice her.

But her husband scrutinised her with watchful cunning, as if he had found a something in her face for which he had long been searching there.

When the train started again the colonel disposed himself to sleep. For the sake of greater comfort he chose the unoccupied seat next to the corridor. The stranger in order not to be opposite him instinctively moved nearer to the centre, by this greatly diminishing the distance between Lilly and himself. A little more and he would have been sitting directly face to face with her.

If she had harboured an *arrière pensée*, she would have bestowed more attention upon her husband's sleep. But all her senses were engaged in the desire to avoid the stranger, whose proximity pricked her with a thousand needles.

She pressed close into her corner, and spasmodically stared out of the window, where the illuminated interior of the coach was reproduced on the black background as in a dark mirror.

Thus she could observe the stranger quietly, without his catching her in an occasional raising of her lids.

The light of the ceiling lamp sharply lit up his smooth, soft cheeks, whose even sheen merged into bluish darkness at the temple, a cheek formed for pressure and petting. To let your hand stray over it gently must be a great delight.

And what long, dark lashes he had, longer than her own. Their shadow formed dark semicircles reaching to the finely cut nostrils.

Suddenly he raised his eyes and looked at her.

There it was again, that black-diamond, caressing gleam, cold, yet how seductive!

She started in fright, and grew still more frightened at the thought that he might have noticed her fear.

He smiled a very, very faint smile and continued to read.

Her fancy wove more and more anxious, flattering thoughts about him, thoughts tantamount to a crime, which weighed upon her like a nightmare of which she could not rid herself.

Suddenly—an icy stream poured over her heart—she felt a soft, tender pressure on her left foot, which she must have moved nearer to the centre quite involuntarily, for only a short time before it had been close against her right foot, and her right foot touched the outer wall of the compartment.

What should she do?

A rebuking "I beg pardon!" an angry flaring up, would have roused the colonel and given

occasion again for suspicion, perhaps even for an encounter. So she slowly withdrew her foot, using the utmost caution, and pressed it against the wall to prove to herself she had rescued it.

But those few moments of hesitation, she knew it well, had made her *particeps criminis*, and this consciousness tormented her as the thought tantamount to a crime, which she had permitted to obsess her before.

Dishonoured, besmirched, she seemed to herself, a prey to each and any man that waylaid her path.

Why find fault with him? The thing he had impudently desired, was it not the fulfillment of her own impure wishes?

This notion fairly stifled her. She wanted to jump up, cry aloud, and beg for forgiveness. The stranger continued to read quietly, as if nothing had occurred.

When Lilly started out of a state of wakeful torpor a grey day was peering in through the window. She saw a foaming torrent tumbling into depths below, and beyond gigantic green masses towering into the heavens. It was a picture she had seen only in her dreams, convincing in its greatness, dwarfing all else with its might.

What she had experienced before falling asleep was now a grotesque dream and had lost its vital essence.

She looked about the compartment cautiously.

The stranger was lying stretched out in repulsive sleep. His cheeks swelled and sank as he puffed heavily. He looked sallow and effeminate, and disgusted her.

She turned more to the side and suddenly saw her husband's wide-open eyes resting upon her with a rigid, chastising look. She started as if caught in guilt.

"Are you awake already?" she asked with a constrained smile.

"I didn't sleep a wink all night," he replied.

Something in the tone of his voice set her a-tremble. It was both a rebuke and a sentence.

And how he looked at her!

They rode on without speaking. Lilly utterly disregarded the stranger.

At the hotel in Bozen the colonel entered Lilly's room and said:

"My dear child, I have something to say to you. I am tired of the annoyances to which we are subjected day after day. To what extent your appearance and conduct are to blame, or to what extent my age is the cause, I will not discuss. However that may be, I do not reproach you with gross infringement of the laws of duty or good taste. And I may not demand a *grande dame's* matter-of-course reserve of one who two or three weeks ago was serving behind a counter. To teach you propriety requires time, and it is a matter that I may leave entirely without qualms of any sort to Miss von Schwertfeger. We will take the noon train back to Germany and we will reach Lischnitz day after to-morrow in the evening, perhaps earlier in the day."

Lilly did not even grieve, she felt so humiliated and bruised.

And the land of her dreams sank below the horizon.

CHAPTER XV

They reached Lischnitz late Saturday night. Since the colonel had prohibited a formal reception, all Lilly could see of the castle and outbuildings were black shadowy masses, which the veiled moon painted light on the edges.

A couple of servant maids stood on the steps holding lanterns, and a very slim lady with a wasp-like waist and a halo of red hair streaked with white put a pair of long, extremely thin arms about Lilly's neck, and in a melancholy, cracked voice spoke motherly words of welcome, which, though intended to bring about a speedy friendship between them, intimidated Lilly and inspired her with dread.

Overcome with weariness, Lilly sank into a swelling white bed, with gleaming brass rods draped in light blue ribbons, the bows of which perched there like great exotic butterflies.

It was these butterflies which the next morning carried her from a doze into full wakefulness, into the new existence.

From the ceiling hung a gilded lamp with opaline shades and blue silk covers over the shades. A white-enamelled wainscoting about four or five feet high ran about the entire room, and the walls between the wainscoting and the ceiling were panelled in silk of the same light blue as the counterpane and scarfs set in frames of white enamel.

All this was revealed by a beam of light, which came in through the narrow space between the curtains and threw a shining bridge across the Persian carpet of a yellowish colour intertwined with blue.

Joyfully Lilly sprang out of bed and trod on the carpet, which seemed to ripple in waves, so soft and long was its nap.

Nothing of the colonel was to be seen or heard.

Long before, he had told Lilly his bedroom would be apart from hers. "But it cannot be far off," she thought; "it must be on the other side of that shining white carved door."

Opening it softly she peeped into the next room.

The window curtains had scarcely been drawn aside. The bed, a huge piece of dark mahogany, was empty, though the crushed sheets and pillows testified to its having been occupied. There were engravings of racers on the wall, tall boots, whips, pistols, some uniforms, and on the round side-table a rack for pipes, and next to the bed the tube of gout ointment. So, the evening before, though it was her sacred duty to massage him, he had treacherously done it himself.

She felt hurt, and then a little shudder ran through her. It was all so strange and hard, as if mysterious threats were lurking somewhere.

She hastily shut the door and retreated into her sky-blue silk realm.

Her room had two other doors, one of which opened on the corridor. This was the one through which Miss von Schwertfeger had led her in the night before.

Lilly shuddered again. Without question, without asking permission, the thin, melancholy person of the extinct eyes and commanding manners had taken possession of Lilly. The colonel and his housekeeper had exchanged a glance, a brief glance of mutual understanding, which, on the colonel's part, said:

"I put her into your charge."

And Lilly was thrown on Miss von Schwertfeger's mercy.

The lady, to be sure, had afterward tried to insinuate herself into Lilly's good graces by calling her pet names and embracing her, and with her own hands bringing the comforting cup of tea to Lilly's bedside. But a voice within Lilly, who usually flew to meet everybody, whether man or woman, with expectant trustfulness, had called to her:

"Be on your guard."

While staring at the door which the spidery fingers had thrown open for her the night before and faint-heartedly recalling the incidents of the arrival, Lilly was overpowered, there in the midst of her gay glory, by a feeling of strangeness and solitude, which nearly broke her heart.

She rapidly put on the morning gown, which Miss von Schwertfeger must have unpacked and hung next to Lilly's bed after she had fallen asleep.

The third door had still to be investigated. Lilly hoped it would lead out into the open.

She cautiously turned the knob and drew back with a little cry. What she saw fairly dazzled her.

A small room flooded with sunlight and filled with flowers smiled at her like a tiny paradise. Azaleas as tall as a man spread their rosy coronets over a much-becushioned couch. And there was a dear little secrétaire inlaid with mother-of-pearl and tortoise shell, over the top of which a palm placidly waved its flattering fronds. But that was by no means the most beautiful thing. The most beautiful thing was the toilet table, which sent a lovely, shamefaced greeting to her from the corner where it stood. It was draped with white lace and the surface was covered with a large, smooth, even-edged plate of glass. The mirror was tall and composed of three adjustable faces, so that you could see yourself on all sides—the hair at the back of your neck, the fastening of your dress, everything.

Lilly had long desired such a mirror, but had not dared to ask for it.

The room, doubtless, was her "boudoir."

She, Lilly Czepanek, owned a "boudoir!" Was the wonder conceivable?

On the glass plate lay all sorts of things which you couldn't take in at first glance, yet expanded your eyes and your soul like a divine revelation. There were ivory-backed brushes—three—four—of varying degrees of hardness or softness; an ivory-backed hand-mirror with a charmingly carved handle, a powder puff in an ivory box, a glove buttoner, a shoe horn, everything of silver and ivory. And many more things, mysterious in their functions, the significance of which would have to be learned gradually. On each shone resplendent the gold monogram L. M. with a seven-pointed coronet above.

It was enough to set one wild.

After having inspected her treasures to her heart's content, Lilly prepared to extend her expedition of conquest to outlying districts.

The room in which she was had only one window, or, rather, a glass door, leading to a balcony, on which there was a rocking chair, and the high railing of which was partly overgrown with young creepers. Later in the season, when the leaves had unfolded all the way, a person standing on the balcony would be completely screened by walls of green; but now, in early spring, there was still so much space between the shoots that he might easily be seen from below.

Lilly softly opened the casement door and slipped out into the open air.

To the left, rising above a wall, were the barns and stables, which formed a large quadrangle about the yard. To the right, giant trees, a chaos of mazy, moss-green branches set with the golden-green buttons of the leaf buds. Inside the labyrinth the birds kept up a scandalous riot, which deafened one's ears as with a hail-storm of sounds. Straight ahead, about thirty paces away, rose the gable roof of an ancient one-story structure, which also bordered on the park wall and seemed to open in front on the yard.

There at last a few mortals were to be seen. Two gentlemen, one with a round grey beard, the other stout, middle-aged and copper-coloured, were walking up and down the lawn at the back of the house smoking and conversing, while a third—

Who was that?

The slim, sinewy young man with the high collar and light yellow gaiters, sitting at a window, pulling a red dog to his lap by a thin chain, that was—no, impossible!—yes, it was—it actually was —Walter von Prell!

It was her merry friend, who had, so to speak, slunk off around the corner, the little lieutenant, famed as one utterly devoid of moral fibre—the only man that had ever kissed her mouth.

Except the colonel, of course; but the colonel didn't count.

There were the silvery white lids and the clinking bracelet and the mute laugh, which shook him like a storm each time the red dog with the pointed ears fell from his knees. The only change in him was that the close-cropped, velvety head of hair had been replaced by a somewhat unkempt growth shining with pomade.

Lilly laughed aloud and stretched her arms to him.

"Mr. von Prell! Mr. von Prell!" she was about to call out, but checked herself in time.

No matter—now, she knew, she was no longer solitary in that strange world. Her merry friend was here, her comrade, her playmate, the man to whom she owed her good fortune.

She remembered his having said, "The old man has taken a tremendous liking to me and wants me to run about his estate as Fritz Triddelfitz"—Lilly knew her Fritz Reuter well.

Strange that in all these months it should not have occurred to the colonel to mention a word about Von Prell's being at Lischnitz. To be sure, he had seldom spoken of his estate. Even Miss von Schwertfeger cropped up in his mind only when he wished to reprimand his young wife.

Perhaps he suspected it was Von Prell and no other who had discovered Lilly and brought her forth from concealment. However, she would tell the colonel and Miss von Schwertfeger without an hour's delay that she had met an old acquaintance. They need not be informed of the kiss. To what end? It had no more significance than a kiss in a game of forfeits.

She slipped back into the bedroom, and a moment later, while she was drawing aside the window curtains, someone knocked at the door—three short, sharp, rapid taps, which seemed to probe to the marrow of her bones.

It was Miss von Schwertfeger, of course. Who else would have frightened Lilly so?

Lilly received a kiss on her forehead; and her cheeks were patted with every appearance of consideration and fondness. But the great colourless eyes travelled silently up and down her body, and a wry, bitter smile hovered about Miss von Schwertfeger's fleshy yet severely cut mouth, the skin about which was reddened, as often happens when women with a fine skin age before their time.

She carried clothes thrown over her arm, which Lilly recognised as her own.

"I brought you these necessaries, my dear," she said, "so that you can dress this morning. Here in the country we don't go about in matinées. Besides, directly after you have breakfasted, we will make a little tour of the grounds to give you an opportunity of getting acquainted with the household and the people."

"May I keep house myself?" asked Lilly, hesitatingly.

"If you know how," said Miss von Schwertfeger, and gnawed her lips and squinted.

Lilly vaguely felt that her harmless query suggested the infraction of the housekeeper's rights, and, trying immediately to atone for her thoughtlessness, she added, stammering:

"That is—I am only asking for what I will be—"

She was going to say "permitted," but Miss von Schwertfeger interrupted her and said, drawing

herself up:

"My dear child, you are the mistress here; nobody is better aware of that than I. But I mean well by you when I advise you to ask for nothing at present. Pay attention to nothing but your deportment. Upon that depends how soon you will really be that which, unfortunately, you are now merely in name."

Lilly, depressed and humiliated, maintained silence.

The disciplinarian was already showing her fangs.

"And I advise you," she continued, "to bear in mind that you must first study the ground you will have to tread in the future. For this you need a guide, who knows a thing or two of which you are ignorant. Otherwise you will find yourself in difficult situations, from which it will be impossible to extract you. And that in view of your relations with the colonel, would be greatly to be deplored."

Lilly felt the tears rising. The old inability to defend herself, which was her gravest weakness, took hold of her again.

"Oh, please," she begged, folding her hands, "don't *you* feel hostile to me."

Miss von Schwertfeger's extinct eyes, which lay half buried under heavy lids, lighted up—was it with a question, or with amazement, or pity?

For a moment she stared into space, turning her head aside, and Lilly saw a noble, bold profile of cameo cut, which appeared to belong to a different person.

Then Lilly felt long arms about her neck. The embrace in which she was held seemed warmer, more genuine than any of the caresses Miss von Schwertfeger had yet bestowed upon her.

"You're a dear child, you *are* a dear child," said she, and with that left the room.

Half an hour later Lilly, dressed in the garments Miss von Schwertfeger had brought, entered the dining room, where breakfast was being served by old Ferdinand, a dried-up, spindle-legged heirloom of a servant. That smooth, round-faced fellow with the mischievous smile, had been dismissed, thank goodness!

The colonel came in from his early ride, his eyes sparkling with the pride of proprietorship. The little crisscross veins of his gaunt cheeks were filled with blood, and the grey brushes over his ears glistened with dew drops. The heavy jacket he wore was becoming to him, and the O-shaped legs were hidden under the table. He looked like a kingly old warrior, both evil and kind-hearted.

Lilly flew into his arms, and he said with a sweep of his hand about the place:

"Well, do you like—your home?"

She kissed his hand for the "your home."

The dining room was a long chamber, arched at each end and filled with carved pieces of furniture darkened by age. It was only moderately lighted by three large bow-windows giving upon the terrace, from which a flight of railed stone steps led down to the park.

At breakfast they discussed the walk they had planned for showing the young mistress her new realm. The colonel would not hear of such a thing as having the people come to the castle and wait upon Lilly ceremoniously. They were wearing their Sunday-best that day at any rate and with no derogation to themselves could receive her in the spots where they lived and toiled.

The upper employés, the inspectors and bookkeepers, would come to dinner Sundays, as had been the immemorial custom, and take that as the occasion for paying their respects.

"The youngest of them used to be one of my men," remarked the colonel, "a Mr. von Prell—" He stopped short, looked Lilly over thoughtfully, then, as if reassured, continued: "But he left service some time before I did, and he's to learn farming on my estate."

This was the very moment for Lilly's happy avowal. But the words died on her lips. She could not—for all her good intentions, she could not. As it was, those great colourless eyes, resting on her face, were putting her to the proof.

However, one thing was certain—the colonel knew nothing. His silence had been due simply to the fact that he had not deemed the gay dog worthy of mention.

"How's he behaving?" asked the colonel, turning to Miss von Schwertfeger.

"Oh, Colonel," she said with a smile, regarding her long, bony fingers, on which her crescent-shaped nails shone like mother-of-pearl, "you know I never denounce unless I have to."

"Such a good-for-nothing rascal," laughed the colonel.

Lilly, instinctively taking her friend's part, thought the lady's words were in themselves sufficient denunciation.

After breakfast they started out on their little expedition.

Lilly was placed between the colonel and Miss von Schwertfeger, and a pack of dogs all of a

sudden appeared to keep them company. Lilly thought them more likable than anything else about her.

The kitchen was visited first. A perfect marvel of a kitchen, with tiled walls, porcelain sinks, and all sorts of up-to-date arrangements. Lilly did not know at what to look first.

A face was there, an old, brown, furrowed, thick-lipped face, with a pair of moist eyes turned upon Lilly in mute questioning:

"Don't you recognise me?"

Lilly's eyes answered:

"Yes, I do."

But she did not dare to speak with her lips as well as with her eyes, for fear Miss von Schwertfeger would inquire concerning the decisive moment of her life and come to despise her still more.

She gave the old woman her hand, and the bond of friendship was renewed.

Next they went to the servants' kitchen, where the Sunday soup was bubbling like a seething sea in a huge copper vessel. After this came the laundry with its wringers and mangles resembling brightly armoured monsters. It was good to smell the ancient odour of soap which had nestled permanently in every nook and cranny.

In the pantries and storerooms, rows of hams wrapped in grey gauze depended from the rafters like gigantic bats. Sausages hung there, too, and last winter's golden pippins and other fine apples were still lying on straw beds. Long lines of wide-mouthed jars were ranged on the closet shelves—you could pilfer sweets to your heart's content.

The party now cut diagonally across the paved yard, where the waggons and harvesters stood like soldiers on parade, to the barns and stables.

The stable of the pleasure horses! Heavens! It was like a drawing-room. Upholstered wicker chairs with footstools in front stood about invitingly. A matting strip ran along the stalls, over each of which a porcelain plate proclaimed the name of the noble animal within. The horses moved supple, slender, lustrous necks and turned knowing human eyes to greet their beautiful mistress.

"You will choose one of these for yourself," said the colonel.

"I don't know how to ride," replied Lilly, embarrassed.

The grooms standing about, cap in hand, grinned at her uncomprehendingly. A lady who could not ride had never before stepped into their world.

The home of the draught horses was not nearly so interesting; it was dirty and malodorous, and the cow stalls nauseated Lilly.

But she took good care not to betray her sensations. Ready to learn, she patiently listened to the explanations the colonel and Miss von Schwertfeger gave in turn.

A difficult piece of work was still ahead of them, the visit to the cottagers, who had just returned from church and were standing before their doors in expectant groups.

The oldest and most trustworthy came first. There were many new names to learn, many dirty hands to shake and many eyes to look into which stared at her in respectful suspicion.

Lilly felt she was fairly well able to cope with the situation. She found a few friendly words to reach the hearts of the old and the sick; and when she stooped and drew on her lap a blubbering little urchin a pleased whisper ran before her to smooth her path.

At the end of the settlement were two structures originally erected for barns, but later converted into dwellings. Small windows in red and blue frames were set in the walls at irregular intervals, and what had once been the broad entrance had been built up with yellow bricks.

Here lived the Polish immigrants, who had come as contract labourers from distant regions. The district in which Lischnitz lay had been German from times of old and had remained a German island amid the invading flood of Slavs.

For this reason it was necessary to hold aloft the banner of Germanism, as Miss von Schwertfeger admonished lovingly. And Lilly felt mortified, as though she had been in the habit of disavowing it.

Red head cloths gleamed. Great, blue, intimidated eyes prayed to her. Here and there an awed bobbing to the hem of her skirt, a shy attempt to kiss her sleeve.

"*Niech bedzie pochwalony Jezus Chrystus*," she heard in a whisper about her, and involuntarily she answered: "*Na wieki wiekow!* Amen!"

In the course of her Catholic bringing up she had learned that this is the answer to a Polish greeting.

A glad humming and buzzing, a ripple of happiness ran through the fearsome huddling little group. The lovely young *pana* had spoken their language, the language of their God.

"I had no idea you could speak Polish," said the colonel, his voice grating with blame of her.

Lilly gave an embarrassed laugh and explained.

They tarried a shorter time at the next entrance, where a group of young fellows in heavy grey jackets were twirling their caps and making awkward bows. Lilly scarcely ventured to give them a cordial nod. Even that, she felt, was forbidden.

Miss von Schwertfeger said not a word, but with aquiline nose in the air held aloft the banner of Germanism.

"Now, my dear," she said when they reached the castle door, "put on your dark blue cloth dress. I have already had it taken from the trunk and pressed. You will find it in your room, and a lace collar to wear with it. That is the correct thing here for Sunday dinner, which we take in the middle of the day."

Lilly obediently donned the blue gown. It enhanced her slim grace. Her heart beat for fear that her merry friend, who could not suspect she had disowned him, would betray both of them at the first meeting by a careless word of recognition.

The dinner bell rang and the next instant came those three probing taps on the door.

Lilly in alarm started away from the mirror. Miss von Schwertfeger should never discover she was vain. She looked Lilly up and down a while, then grasped both her hands, and buried her pale blue eyes, which now flared up again, in the improbable eyes.

"God grant," she said, "that you don't cause too much mischief in this world, my child."

"Why should I cause mischief?" Lilly faltered, mortified again. "I don't do a bit of harm to anybody."

Miss von Schwertfeger laughed.

"The one good thing is, you don't know who you are," she said, and drew her to the corridor and down the old stairway, which cracked at every step.

In the dining room were four dark men's figures besides the colonel's. At Lilly's entrance they hastily drew up in line.

One was the man with the round grey beard—"Mr. Leichtweg, our chief inspector," said the colonel. The next was the stout, copper-coloured man—"Mr. Messner, our bookkeeper." Somebody else was introduced, and then—then—

"Lieutenant von Prell, who is learning farming here," said the colonel.

Just a slight inclination of her head, the same as to the others, no more.

But my poor, merry friend, how you look!

A long frock-coat fell below his knees, his narrow-pointed head was lost in his high collar, his clothes hung in loose, limp folds. Every feature of his, every marionette movement bespoke rigid formality and obsequiousness.

Lilly stood there lost in pity and astonishment. If she had not seen him that very morning while he was—

"Shake hands with the gentlemen," she heard whispered behind her.

She started and pressed the honest country fists more firmly than beseems a chatelaine. But she quickly let go Von Prell's freckled hand, which was still well kept.

"Thank the Lord, he won't betray us," she thought.

Then came grace.

CHAPTER XVI

The finches were the maddest of all. The titmice, too, made a racket, and so did the nuthatches, and the blackbirds behaved as if they were lords of the place, while the stay-at-home starlings formed in groups among themselves and paid no attention to the rest of the world. Beside, there were the hedge-sparrows and wrens, who added a fair share to the chorus. But the fanfare of the finches was too much for ears accustomed to the tiny twittering of a caged canary.

Old Haberland knew them all. Old Haberland was the gardener, who pottered about in felt shoes and lived, in a measure, from the colonel's bounty, since he held sway now over nothing but the lawn sprinkler. He knew which birds nested on the ground and which in the branches. He knew the time each began to sing and the best place to stand if you wanted to study their plumage and

habits.

It was terrible to think that the squirrels had to be shot. Lilly almost hated the old man when he sallied forth, his pea-rifle under his jacket, with evil intent against the jolly little marauders—Haberland maintained the vermin recognised his gun and scurried off when they saw it. The magpies and jays were no friends of his, either. His love was the shy, green woodpecker, whom he had actually coaxed into nesting in the park. And that gay marvel of a bird, the hoopoe, came without fear at any hour of the day to the back of the castle, where it sang its hututu and transfixed the insects in the grass with its curved sabre of a bill.

Those were mornings full of glow and brilliance, such as could not have been since the creation of the world.

When you opened the door at five o'clock in the morning the cool purple mist crept in and folded itself about your body like a royal mantle. On the pond, where the reeds rose up over night, pushed by underground powers, lay sunlit vapours, which gradually lifted and ascended heavenward. Everything steamed. Sometimes white lights seemed to have been kindled on the lawn, and the little clouds in evaporating rolled heavily from the glistening campions, as though surfeited with the dew they had drunk.

Such mornings!

Who can describe the mad delight of the dogs when their beautiful young mistress appeared on the steps smiling, clad in a white blouse and short skirt and armed with garden shears? They had been awaiting her there a long time, every now and then emitting short, impatient sounds, half whine, half yelp. For *they* had not hesitated an instant to recognise her absolute rule, in utter disregard of the pitying benevolence with which Miss von Schwertfeger—whom they detested—stood by and smiled.

Bebel, the terrier, the cleverest of all, did not count, because he sped after the colonel on his early cross-country gallop. But there was Pluto, the long-eared setter, who, out of employment at this season, gave chase to the rabbits on his own account. There were Schnauzl, the poodle, and Bobbie, the dachs, living in constant feud with each other for the first place in Lilly's favour. Dearest of all was Regina, the panther-like Great Dane, one of whose forelegs had been broken. As if to apologize for her disgraced existence, she always crept back of anyone she met; but at night, to compensate, she was untiring in her watchfulness, and maintained a steady reign of terror.

Who can describe the joyous caracoling of the colts in the pasture, the craving for love the yearling manifested when the mistress, who always carried sugar with her, pushed back the bars, and stretched her arms to caress the slender heads of her favourites?

Who can describe the chagrin of the turkey cock, great enough when the pheasants got first peck at the bread crumbs, but knowing no bounds when those stupid ducks squatted right on Lilly's feet, as though that were the most natural thing in the world? At times his jealousy so swelled him with rage that he even dared to nab one of Pluto's ears. But Pluto disdained to do more than shake him off in scorn.

Yes, those were wonderful mornings!

And when the height of the flowering season came, she never wearied of wandering about and filling baskets with blue, golden and snowy blossoms until she was fairly drowned in a floral sea.

After the morning stroll came breakfast, when from sheer joy and tenderness Lilly hesitated about whose neck first to throw her arms, the colonel's or Anna's—on certain confidential occasions she was called Anna. Lilly, in general, was very affectionate with Miss von Schwertfeger, despite her fear of that lady's censoriousness and despite other fears of which she could not rid herself.

Yes, she thought, it was a strict school, indeed, which she had entered.

Not a word, not a step, not a movement remained unobserved, or, if necessary, unreproved. She learned to sit at table and in an arm-chair, how to prepare and serve tea, how to invite a person to be seated, how to begin a conversation, how to introduce strangers to each other without getting into a muddle, how to pass over forgotten names, and offer everybody at table a fair portion of cordiality. All these things Lilly learned, and, oh, much more.

But they were only the rudiments to be practised in the small world of the castle or when occasional visitors dropped in. Real instruction was to begin in the fall; for then expeditions to neighboring estates would be undertaken. In the meantime the colonel wished to avoid all contact with the families round about. He could do this without provoking comment, his long bachelorhood serving as a plausible pretext for wishing to prolong his honeymoon to the utmost.

By autumn Lilly was to have been converted into a veritable *grand dame*, who would do honour to her husband's name and rank, and whose tact and ease would conquer all mistrust whether at the festivities in the homes of the gentry or in the club house.

This, the highest ideal on earth, Miss von Schwertfeger kept before Lilly's eyes every minute of the day, and Lilly dreamed of it as she had dreamed of approaching examinations when in the Selecta. Full of fears and doubts she worked over herself night and day.

Her soul found calm only when she went on one of her rambles, or, better still, when she sat behind locked doors in her boudoir.

No, no, Heaven preserve her! Not her boudoir! That wasn't its name.

The first time she had said "boudoir," Miss von Schwertfeger turned very condescending. It was a sitting-room. Only butchers' and bankers' wives—in Miss von Schwertfeger's eyes one and the same—would disfigure it with the other name.

Thus Lilly stumbled at every step.

Occasionally, when he quartered officers on their way through the country, the colonel, as if to test Lilly's social ability, would have her preside at table with Miss von Schwertfeger's assistance.

Each time the same scene was enacted. At first Lilly would be stiff as a mechanical doll, incapable of addressing a word she had not learned by rote to these guests gleaming in military resplendence. A glass or two of wine would give her courage. Gradually she would liven up, and even grow merry, and finally bubble over with harmless pleasantries—from where they came flying into her head she did not know—which would so enrapture the gentlemen, most of whom were well past their prime, that they directed all their remarks to her, as if to pay her court, while their eyes hung on her face in enjoyment and desire.

Now the colonel would grow uneasy. He would cast furtive glances at Miss von Schwertfeger, who usually sat with her eyes on her plate and a wry smile on her lips; and then despite the gentlemen's protestations of regret, the ladies would leave the table.

Lilly grew hot with the fire she herself had kindled in the heads of her guests. It caused her pleasure and distress, and forced her to sit at her window until midnight, staring into the blue twilight of the park with beating heart and quivering nerves and flushed cheeks streaming with tears.

Forebodings of mad acts and riotous self-abandon flashed up in her brain. A parching fever enervated her body. Her clothes, her room, the park, the world became too contracted. A wild dance of looks and flames, a whirl of fiery red, inured, desirous masculinity chased through her head.

On such nights, when the guests had at last retired, the colonel, more or less intoxicated, would force himself into her bedroom, and begin by reproaching her for not having been ladylike enough. Lilly would cry and try to excuse herself. Then he would kiss the tears from her lashes, snatch her clothes from her body, and throw himself next to her in bed.

Shuddering with foolish pangs of conscience, quivering in disgust of his drunkenness, happy, nevertheless, to feel that tormenting tenseness relax, she gave her body up to him.

On other nights when she felt uneasy and alone and desired his presence, when her body as well as her soul longed to cling to him in the humble sense of belonging to him entirely, then he was not to be had. He kept his door locked.

On the whole he was loving and gracious to her. He handled her as if she were a gay, fragile toy, to be wound up not too often, and each time it has been played with enough, to be laid aside carefully for use on the next occasion. This treatment suited her. At least she was spared dread of those outbursts of wrath which set the walls a-tremble two or three times a day, and frightened every living thing in the vicinity. Even Miss von Schwertfeger was not sure how to take them. She silently set her teeth, and bowed her head as before the inevitable.

Lilly could never fathom the relation existing between the colonel and his housekeeper. Usually it seemed to her the many years of mutual confidence had welded them together inseparably. Then came times when they studiously avoided each other, the colonel in haughty preoccupation with his own affairs, Miss von Schwertfeger squinting sarcastically and suggesting by her manner a feeling of rancor, a menace.

Now and then it even occurred to Lilly that when the lady had been young and fair, she had been the colonel's love. But Lilly dismissed this idea. Miss von Schwertfeger was far too proud to endure the bitterness of such companionship, and *he* was too dominating to tolerate the presence of such a creditor.

All that Lilly learned of her past was that she was the daughter of a poor yet aristocratic army officer, and had been left an orphan with her own living to earn after her confirmation. She had now been managing the colonel's household for nearly twenty years. The fact that Miss von Schwertfeger, homeless and without resources, like herself, had also been thrown upon the colonel's tender mercies gradually aroused in Lilly a sense of sympathy and kinship, although she could never cast off a slight feeling that she must be on her guard against this woman.

She really owed Miss von Schwertfeger a debt of gratitude. Without her ready advice, Lilly would have fallen innumerable times from the road leading to the lofty heights where she would sit enthroned as aristocrat and lady of a manor. Ridiculers would have taken base advantage of her modesty; her sportive manner of equality would have invited impertinence; she would have ended in losing every vestige of power. Perhaps people would even have come to despise her.

As it was, everybody loved her. She found shining glances to greet her in the kitchen, in the stables, among the villagers, and at the lodge; while in the barn, where the Polish women dwelt

behind smouldering brushwood and drying wash, she was a veritable idol.

Whether a rumor had gotten about of her Slavic name, or her Catholicism, could not be determined. However that might be, the fact remained that these strange, despised people, who glided among the stiff and haughty Germans with the humble look of a child in their eyes and the plaintive melodies of their country on their lips, revered Lilly as their redeemer and patron saint.

She liked to busy herself with the gentle, good-natured folk. She visited the sick, and cared for the destitute. The girls seemed to her like poor sisters, who needed watching over; and as for the boys, why, they were a charge that God Himself had put into her keeping.

Miss von Schwertfeger looked askance at these kindly attentions. "The people belonging to the place," she said, "are beginning to complain that you prefer the immigrants to them. You would do well to take your walks in another direction."

Lilly remonstrated. Henceforth Miss von Schwertfeger kept close watch, and did not leave her side when the barn dwellings happened to be in seductive proximity.

Miss von Schwertfeger even converted Lilly to Protestantism.

Not in her soul. Heaven forefend!

"Love your Holy Virgin and your St. Joseph as much as you want to," she said, "but just remove that font and those little images from your bedside. As for going to church, you may drive to Krammen to attend mass on Sunday; of course you may; the colonel would not think of forbidding you to. But take my advice, dearest, and sit next to us in our pew. Do it for my sake, you won't regret it."

Lilly did not offer much resistance, and by way of reward received a small altar to keep in her room. When locked, it looked like a dainty jewel casket, but inside was the infant Jesus in the arms of the Madonna and—oh joy!—there was St. Joseph on the left leaf of the folding door, and St. Anne on the right leaf.

Lilly wept with delight.

Nevertheless she could not love the donor with all her heart and all her soul. No matter how often they sat together chatting confidentially, Lilly remained in solitude.

And in fear.

She did not dare even to eat her fill. As if to make up for Mrs. Asmussen's long-forgotten mush, Lilly had developed a ravenous appetite; but noticing Miss von Schwertfeger's apprehensive sidelooks at her heaped plate, she usually rose from table only half satisfied. To stay herself until the next meal she drew upon the treasures of the storeroom.

Old Maggie the cook, in whom she possessed a sworn ally, kept watch to warn Lilly of Miss von Schwertfeger's approach. Once, however, the omnipotent housekeeper caught her there, and Lilly dished up the excuse that she wanted to learn housekeeping; which declaration was received with condescending merriment.

Had it not been for old Maggie, Lilly would never have learned a single detail of the management of the large household, Miss von Schwertfeger studiously keeping her from regular activity of any sort, whether out of vainglory or consideration Lilly could not determine.

If Lilly wanted to help with a piece of work, it was done already, or she mustn't spoil her hands, or she might injure herself.

Her passionate desire to learn horseback riding was also thwarted by Miss von Schwertfeger, who was always discovering signs of approaching motherhood, though they proved each time to be false.

Even playing on the piano was denied her. The yellow old instrument of torture, the keys of which resembled the decayed teeth of a smoker—just like the colonel's—was not to be replaced by a new piano until autumn, when they would go to Danzig to select one.

She thought of the times preceding her marriage, hardly more than half a year ago, as belonging to her long-vanished youth. She would have ridiculed one who had told her, youth still lay ahead of her nineteen years.

It was good that over there in the lodge a witness of her sweet, foolish past was living along in madcap thoughtlessness. This alone persuaded her that her maiden days had not been a mere dream, that she had not been a colonel's wife from the cradle upward.

In all this time she had met her merry friend only at Sunday dinners, when he played a comic rôle making his jerky reverences in his long frock coat.

Sometimes when standing on her balcony at twilight behind the foliage now closegrown, she saw him at his window in the lodge cutting capers with his wild little red fox of a dog. A feeling would then come over her that the only person who actually belonged to her in this alien world was yon light-haired good-for-nothing, who pursued all the maids on the demesne. Old Maggie told tales. At night he would ruin the toughest horses trying to get back from his secret excursions before dawn; and in his den behind closed shutters—

At this point Maggie lost her faculty of speech. The things that took place behind those closed shutters must have been dreadful.

CHAPTER XVII

One red August morning Lilly, sprinkled with dew from head to foot and clasping a bunch of dewy roses in both arms, entered the dining-room, where Anna von Schwertfeger, tall and thin in her greyish blue linen dress, was standing at the table smiling to herself.

It was not her manner, it was not her greeting; both were as usual. It was an intangible something which instantly caused Lilly to realize that an extraordinary event had occurred.

Katie, she noticed, who helped Ferdinand with the serving, had red eyelids and kept gnawing her lips while setting the table. Katie was of finer material than the average servant girl, her father having been a teacher, and was very pretty besides; owing to which qualities Miss von Schwertfeger had selected her as Lilly's special maid.

When Katie left the room, Lilly began to ask questions.

In reply Miss von Schwertfeger merely kissed her with redoubled tenderness, and observed:

"Why should you sully your pure young spirit with such ugly things? If certain people are bent upon breaking their necks, that's their business. We cannot help them."

"Breaking their necks—that must mean Walter von Prell," thought Lilly, and said aloud: "After all this is my home, and nothing that happens here in my future province"—she modestly said "future"—"ought to be kept from me."

Miss von Schwertfeger yielded to her arguments.

"It will be painful to you," she said, "because I know you like him."

"Him—whom?" queried Lilly, conscious of blushing.

"In fact all of us like him," continued Miss von Schwertfeger by way of mitigation, "the colonel most of all. So long as he confined himself to the rooms of the labourers' girls I winked my eyes, and begged the kitchen help not to annoy me with gossip about his adventures. But if he commits the outrage of breaking into the castle, it's time the matter ended."

"Why, what did he do?" asked Lilly, in fright.

"For some weeks past I noticed certain things which struck me as rather curious. In spots the vine on your balcony was withered—"

"On—my—" Seized with a wild suspicion Lilly stepped a pace nearer to Miss von Schwertfeger, and clutching her arm asked: "What has my balcony to do with Mr. von Prell, Miss Anna?"

Miss von Schwertfeger avoided Lilly's look.

"Calm yourself, my dear," she said, "calm yourself. Persons in my position have to keep their eyes wide open. That's what they are there for. I was simply acting for your protection, because anyone who does not know you as I do might come to the vile conclusion that if a man climbs up to your balcony—"

Lilly began to cry.

"It's so low, so low."

Miss von Schwertfeger drew her to the sofa and stroked her brow.

"I have gone through much worse things, dear child. At any rate, I wanted to get at the bottom of the affair, and although, I need not say, I hadn't the least suspicion of you"—she turned her eyes away again—"nevertheless I spent a few nights outside your door."

Lilly started. While she had been sleeping in innocent unconsciousness, someone had lurked in hiding close by—so fast was she held captive!

"And about one o'clock this morning I caught him in the act. Fancy! The dare-devil had the temerity to lean one of Haberland's ladders against your balcony—that was the cause of the broken, withered vines—and enter your sitting room through the glass door—glass doors, dearie, ought never be left open. He passed your bedroom, and went to the corridor without seeing me, of course. Since Katie is the only person who sleeps on that side I charged her with it early this morning. She made no denials. I always act in such matters with the utmost mildness and reserve, and I told her she might give notice and leave on the first. But what shall we do about the young man? I know this is the one place where he can be brought to turn over a new leaf. Should the colonel dismiss him, all's over with him. And I have no right to conceal his conduct from the colonel. An affair that so nearly compromises his wife's honour—"

"What has my honour to do with Mr. von Prell if he runs after servant girls?" Lilly ventured to interject, hoping to improve his prospects a bit by playing the innocent.

Miss von Schwertfeger had just time enough to enlighten her innocence concerning all the evil results of Mr. von Prell's mad conduct, when the table began to quiver from the colonel's tread as he came tramping down the corridor.

"Don't say anything—not yet!" begged Lilly, and with that was hanging on the colonel's neck to hide her confusion.

The colonel noticed nothing amiss.

His suspicions, ever alert, had gone to sleep now that he knew his young wife secure under the Argus eyes of his old and tried housekeeper.

He was no longer that greedy lover, simulating youthfulness, who had spied upon her every look and emotion, jealous of his mastery. The humourous condescension with which he watched the doings of the lovely gentle child gave him a natural semblance of fatherliness, which became him well.

His visits to the club house in the garrison town nearby, at first only occasional, had begun to grow more frequent. Sometimes he even departed from his custom of leaving after supper, and took the afternoon train. But whatever time he left, he never returned before two o'clock in the morning, since there was no train to bring him back earlier.

During breakfast he good-humouredly explained to the ladies that he would have to go to town that day to unload the barley crop on the Jews.

An idea occurred to Lilly which filled her soul with sacred joy. The colonel's absence must be employed for rescuing Von Prell. How, she did not yet know, but save him she must. She was the only one to do it. If she did not concern herself in his behalf, who else was there in the wide world to tow his drifting vessel to security?

After the colonel had left the room, she plucked up the courage to put in a plea with Miss von Schwertfeger, who, however, refused to relent.

"On the next occasion he will do even worse things," she said. "Then the shame both for him and for us will be still greater."

"No, he won't do anything worse," Lilly averred. "He will get better. You need only take him to task."

"I'm old enough to," replied Miss von Schwertfeger, with a bitter-sweet smile, "and I possess the authority. But, to be quite frank, the subject is rather a delicate one, and I should like nevermore to have a thing to do with such sordid affairs."

The extinct eyes, over which the lids lay like heavy blankets, fell into a fixed stare, which Lilly had frequently noticed. It seemed to bring to the top an old, dark, bitter hatred which had long lain buried. Then Miss von Schwertfeger herself returned to the subject.

"All I can agree to," she said, "is, that if he comes to me of his own will and begs my pardon, maybe I will yield. That's all I can do without incurring the blame of being underhanded."

"Why, he doesn't even suspect he's been discovered."

"I should like to wager," rejoined Miss von Schwertfeger, "that Katie will use her first free moment to run over to him."

"And if she doesn't?" cried Lilly, scarcely mastering her anxiety.

Miss von Schwertfeger took her head between her hands.

"If I did not know, dearie, what a sweet, harmless young creature you are, I should say your interest in the little rake is most curious. Now, you needn't blush. I know there's nothing back of it. At all events, I will wait until to-morrow, because you plead for him, my love."

Thus the conversation ended. Nothing more was to be expected of Miss von Schwertfeger.

"If I don't save him, he will be driven away, and if he's driven away, he'll go to rack and ruin, and if he goes to rack and ruin, I shall be to blame."

In this fashion Lilly's thoughts kept revolving dizzily in her brain.

The simplest thing would be to come to an understanding with Katie, but that was unbefitting Lilly's station. Besides, it had not occurred to the poor girl, who crept about apathetically, to run over to see Von Prell. Later in the day, in fact, she got an attack of cramps and had to be put to bed.

At four o'clock the colonel drove off to the station. He had stuck a package of blue banknotes into his bill-folder; which was an unfailing sign that he would not return before early morning.

Evening came. The lowing of the cattle and the cracking of whips proclaimed the end of the day's work.

Lilly crouched behind the vine on her balcony, and listened to what was going on at the lodge. Finally the scapegrace appeared at his dormer window dragging his little dog by a chain. He was wearing the sort of greenish grey jacket with innumerable pockets that managers of estates

affect; and each pocket was stuffed full, giving his figure a warty appearance. Nevertheless he was a dear, bright little fellow, well worth the saving.

If she were to signal to him and throw down a piece of paper, would it be possible for him to pick it up later without being seen?

She went into her room and scrawled a few lines in pencil.

"Everything has been discovered. Miss von Schwertfeger promises to keep silent provided you—"

She stopped short. Should the note fall into strange hands the stupidest mortal would construe them into a confession of guilt.

"I will speak to him," she decided.

The supper bell rang.

How strangely Miss von Schwertfeger regarded her, as if she had gotten a glimpse into the depths of Lilly's soul and discovered her bold design. But she did not refer to the malefactor again.

On rising from the table she put her arm through Lilly's, after her wont when she intended to bar the way to Lilly's Polish friends.

"She won't let go the whole evening," thought Lilly, raging inwardly.

In a short while, however, word was brought that Katie had grown sicker, and it might be necessary to send for the physician.

"I'll be back directly," said Miss von Schwertfeger, as she left the room giving Lilly a look expressive of stubborn resistance.

In an instant Lilly had slipped out of the door and was running down the terrace steps leading to the park.

Profound silence reigned. The only sound was of a splashing which came from behind a cypress tree where old Haberland, still occupied with watering the roses, was filling his cans.

Lilly made straight for the lodge considering ways of making him look from his window and see her.

She was saved from committing this indiscretion.

He was lying at full length on the green bench outside the house, smoking a cigarette with evident gusto, the dog's chain wrapped about his left wrist, and the dog himself asleep at his feet. None of the other men were about.

Her heart's throbbing almost deprived her of breath.

"Mr. von Prell!"

He jumped to his feet, the dog along with him.

"Mr. von Prell, I should like to speak with you."

He put his hand to his head to remove his cap, but no cap was there.

"I am at my lady's service."

"Will you accompany me a little way?"

"At my lady's service."

He threw away the stump of his cigarette, glanced about hastily for his vanished cap, then walked at her side bare-headed, stiff as a puppet in his extravagant respect.

Lilly led the way into the interior of the park, where the clusters of trees and the open grassy spaces melted into purple-edged darkness. She had gotten back her calm. The desire to save him gave her strength of which she had not deemed herself capable.

"You must not misunderstand my coming to you," she began.

"Certainly not, my lady," he replied, bowing obsequiously. "The evening is so lovely, and old acquaintances like to chat with each other once in a while."

"If I had wanted anything like that," said Lilly, making no effort to conceal her sense of insult, "I should have invited you to the castle. If I come to you instead, you can readily imagine the matter is more important."

"What can be more important to me than strolling here at my lady's side?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Oh, Mr. von Prell, if you knew the difficulty you were in, you would take care not to indulge in such talk."

Lilly had never thought herself capable of so much haughtiness.

"What difficulty can I be in, my lady?" he rejoined, raising his brows and wrinkling his forehead. "My soul has worn half-mourning ever since I was condemned to live in a certain close distance from, or, rather, a certain distant proximity to—my gracious lady. Whether Tommy and myself possess the character for enduring this trial—come, come Tommy, don't be a goose. Our lady benefactress will have no objections to your not treading on her train."

Tommy obstinately planted his forelegs and had to be dragged along like a lifeless toy.

"You'll strangle the poor little beast," said Lilly, happy to have found a way of avoiding his personalities.

"He will simply be sharing the sensations of his master," said Von Prell, illustrating his reply by clutching at his throat and emitting a horrible gurgle.

Such behaviour must no longer be permitted. Lilly owed it to herself and her position to resent it.

"Mr. von Prell," she said very condescendingly, "do you realize that by the same time to-morrow you will probably have been dismissed?"

He was touched at last. He frowned and bit the ends of his moustache; but then he said:

"What gives me some satisfaction in the fact is that my lady seems to take no slight interest in the matter."

Now she became angry in earnest.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. von Prell," she cried. "I wear myself out and take great risks trying to help you, and you show your gratitude by making silly remarks all the time."

"Courage, Tommy," he said, taking the dog in his arms. "First they flay us, then they kick us out. Our one comfort is, we are innocent sufferers. Poor, poor Tommy."

"Don't try to whitewash yourself," Lilly reprimanded. "Miss von Schwertfeger discovered everything—your relations—you understand—your nightly trips to my balcony and through my room—everything. Do you think I take pleasure in having to treat you like a criminal when I've always thought so much of you? Don't you think I'd much rather be proud of you, than stand here and see you driven away like a stray dog? Or can you say anything in justification of yourself? Can you? Tell me."

She talked herself into such warmth that she forgot the unseemliness of her being there with him. She was now that which she wanted to be—the benevolent chatelaine, who turns everything to good account; and her breast swelled with the consciousness of her lofty ethical undertaking.

They had stepped from under the dark arches of the linden walk. A few sharply defined streaks of red still coloured the west, and cast a deep glow over his narrow, freckled face.

He looked completely crushed and penitent, and Lilly regretted having dealt with him so harshly.

"I realise," he began after a short pause, his voice quivering as with suppressed excitement, "I realise I must not let so grave a charge go without justifying myself. And I can justify myself, I most undoubtedly can. But in doing so, I am compelled to disclose a secret, which—I really do not know if I ought to initiate you into the horrible mysteries that threaten to ruin my life."

"What are they?" queried Lilly, in terrified curiosity.

"Well, then, from my boyhood up I have been pursued by an awful fate, which comes upon me when I am utterly defenceless and imposes upon me responsibility for misdeeds of which I am absolutely innocent, and places me in breakneck situations, which—I will be outspoken—I am—well, I am a somnambulist."

The merry little devils frolicked between his silvery lids, and Lilly, in spite of herself, burst out laughing. He joined in with his dear, mute tehee, which shook him like a storm; and they stood there laughing till they wearied. Lilly no longer thought of her chatelaine's dignity, or her ethical mission.

As if by mutual agreement they turned into the deserted depths of the park, which bordered on a bosky beech grove with neither fence nor hedge between.

It grew darker at each step.

Tommy resigning himself to his fate trotted behind his master obediently.

"Well," said Von Prell, after they had recovered from their laugh, "why should I try to throw dust in your eyes? I am a poor pickerel floundering here on dry land. Have you the faintest notion of what it means to keep company with three plebeians and lead a useful vegetable existence, and from morning till evening steadfastly practise dutifulness and uprightness? It's more than a fellow can stomach. I tell you, it's enough to drive him to a dose of castor oil. Tommy self-denyingly helps me tide over the worst moments, but every now and then he, too, is a disappointment to me. Will my lady permit me to use this occasion for asking her an extremely important question?"

Pleased at his having grown serious, Lilly assented.

"Can you—can you wag your ears?"

She succumbed to another paroxysm of laughter as to a spell of sickness, leaning against a tree and panting for breath, while he continued with profound affliction in his voice:

"I am master of the modest art and have been proud to exercise my skill ever since I was at high school, where it was considered the acme of human accomplishments. I made up my mind to train Tommy to do the same trick, and I spent many an hour over him in difficult intellectual effort, but without result. One day, however, I discovered he could wag his ears much better than I can, and, I assume, always had been able to. Only he did it when he wanted to, not when I wanted him to. Isn't that distressing? Doesn't it reflect the general aimlessness of human endeavour? O dearest baronissima, I am afraid I shall soon become a great philosopher out of sheer boredom."

Lilly could now see only the outline of his figure, behind which the dog's eyes glowed like two beacon lights. Since her school days she had not abandoned herself so completely to a spirit of pure fun, and she had to wait until a pause came in her laughing before she could tell him it was high time to be returning.

He obediently turned on his heels, transferring Tommy's chain from one hand to the other.

The catastrophe that menaced him seemed to have passed from his mind. Lilly, therefore, since time pressed and something had to be done for him, took the bit between her teeth, and reported what Miss von Schwertfeger intended to do, and what she demanded from him as the price of her silence.

Lilly was helping him, but not with that beautiful, dignified air of superiority with which she had wanted to hold out her rescuing hand. She felt she was like a playmate of his, and every few moments a half-suppressed giggle interrupted her speech.

"The worthy dame has an unconquerable desire to stand about on people's toes," said Von Prell. "But since we've gotten ourselves into a scrape, my dear little Tommy, we'll have to juggle to get ourselves out of it. Thank you very much, my lady. In accordance with your instructions I will go to her and ask her to forgive me—before going I'll oil my speaking apparatus. I will be more than repentant, I will even be roguish. That works on respectable old maids like Spanish fly. And I will use the opportunity to the best advantage for our future intercourse with each other—provided of course, my young queen agrees."

Oh, she agreed fully!

"But how will you do it?" she asked fearfully.

"Leave the matter to me," he replied. "Your duenna is a knowing old beast. But I am even more knowing. I shouldn't be surprised if to-morrow I didn't earn an occasional supper in the castle, at which I shall have the opportunity of looking into the eyes of my exalted mistress without being observed by the two High Mightinesses."

There were several things in his speech that grated on Lilly. He might make merry as much as he pleased at Miss von Schwertfeger's expense, but the colonel stood on too high a plane to be the butt of his ridicule. And now that Von Prell was out of danger, it occurred to Lilly for the first time how detestable his conduct had been, and how lacking in character she was to be sauntering about with him in the dark, laughing at his sallies.

"One moment, Mr. von Prell," she said. "I warned you of the danger you were in, because I thought I owed it to our former friendship. But now that I have told you, we have nothing more to do with each other. My time is up. Good evening, Mr. von Prell."

With that she hurried on ahead along the obscure wood path, and gave no look around. Suddenly she felt something soft and warm and living slip between her feet. She screamed and turned about for Von Prell's help. At the same instant a chain wound itself about her ankle, and held her fast.

Since she and Von Prell had turned back, the dog in his eagerness to get home, had been straining on the chain with all his might, and had taken her hastening off as a signal to break away, thus entangling himself in her dress. The more he tugged the more painfully the chain cut into her flesh.

That made an end of Lilly's ire.

Von Prell had to kneel and hold down the unruly little animal, while he unwound the chain from her ankle.

"Tommy, Tommy, what have we done? We have grievously hurt our noble mistress. We can't be blamed for pulling at our chains, but if in doing so we get under people's skirts, we give great offence. Shame on you, you rascal."

He planted a kiss on the dog's pointed little snout.

"Doesn't he ever bite?" asked Lilly with interest.

"He has had the benefit of a rigorous military training, as a result of which he has grown accustomed to kisses."

Another burst of gaiety. Von Prell held the struggling little ball of wool up to Lilly, and asked whether she would like to try a kiss, too.

Laughing she declined, and, laughing, she went home with him.

Characterless as she was.

Still laughing aloud, she entered the lighted hall of the castle, where Miss von Schwertfeger met her with great reproachful eyes.

"Where have you been, my dear?" she asked, evidently prepared to meet the grave situation in a mild spirit, while subjecting Lilly, none the less, to a keen cross-examination.

"He's so funny!" Lilly sang out, hiding her face red with laughter on Miss von Schwertfeger's shoulder.

"Did you—"

"Of course I did. Do you suppose I'd leave such a delightful, jolly old friend of mine in the lurch?"

Miss von Schwertfeger's face became rigid.

Lilly gave herself a little shake and uttered a joyous gurgle. Then she ran off to her room, undressed, and burying her head in the pillows laughed herself to sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII

In laughter it began, and in laughter continued.

When Lilly awoke the next morning she saw that everything about her, the chandelier, the washstand, and the pretty, sentimental gleaner on the wall, had assumed a new aspect, and the sun was shining twice as brightly.

She stepped to the mirror in her nightgown, and forthwith had to laugh again at the reflection she saw there, a veritable street Arab's face with sly, darting eyes and saucy nose.

At breakfast she fairly sparkled with playful conceits, chased the stiff-legged colonel about the table, and felt a warm sense of gratitude toward Miss von Schwertfeger rise within her.

As for Miss von Schwertfeger, she smiled to herself significantly; and when the colonel left the room, caught Lilly by her ears, kissed her on her forehead, and said:

"You baby, you."

She made no reference to the confession Lilly had let slip that she and Von Prell were old friends. In fact, to judge by her manner, you might suppose she had not heard it.

Lilly ran up to her balcony, pushed aside the creepers, and sent a summoning nod to Von Prell, who was walking up and down uncertainly between the castle and the lodge.

He understood, bowed, and disappeared in the direction of the terrace steps.

What took place between him and Miss von Schwertfeger remained a secret; and there was no finding out whether or no she had questioned him in regard to his former relations with the colonel's wife. But whatever the doubts on that score, the success of his interview was indisputable. So far from having to slink away from the place, he appeared at the supper table that very same day, ushered in by the colonel himself. In his striped coat, white waistcoat and high collar, in which his face lay almost buried, and wearing his most respectful expression, he was the very embodiment of correctness.

"I heard," said the colonel, leading him to Lilly, "that Mr. von Prell doesn't feel entirely happy over there in the lodge. If you have no objections he will come to meals oftener after this."

Lilly hadn't the slightest objections. The thought, however, that Katie would appear in the doorway the next instant almost choked her. But another maid took Katie's place in handing old Ferdinand the dishes. Lilly gave Miss von Schwertfeger a questioning look, which she answered in a whisper, so as not to be overheard by the gentlemen:

"The poor girl got very sick, and asked for a long leave of absence. Most likely she will never come back again."

In her gratification Lilly impetuously pressed Miss von Schwertfeger's hand under the table. She had a dim idea that Katie had been dismissed in order to spare her the repugnance of witnessing something impure.

The gentlemen without delay plunged deep into a discussion of the cavalry, richly interlarding their talk with proper names.

Mr. von Prell sat inclined toward the colonel to take in the instructions of his old commander, and kept blinking his lids in respectful attention. The colonel dominated like a wrathful god. He spoke

gruffly and noisily and shot out his dagger glances as if to mow down rank after rank of the enemy's army. But this was nothing else than a craftsman's vain joy in his work.

Lilly listened, and would gladly have taken part in the conversation, but the men had forgotten her presence, and a jealous gloom clouded her spirit, for which she did not know whether to blame the colonel or Von Prell.

When Von Prell rose to take leave the colonel laying his hand on the young man's shoulder said:

"See here, why haven't we done this before?" The glance he sent Lilly seemed to signify: "Such an amount of caution was really unnecessary."

When the first cool days in September brought on the colonel's gout again, and his visits to town had to be postponed indefinitely, Von Prell's invitations to supper grew more frequent.

The colonel groaned and cursed each time he mounted a horse, though he refused to listen to Lilly when she pled with him to give up his morning gallop.

"Too bad all of you are always so dreadfully concerned about me," she observed, "because sometimes I might take your place in riding about the country."

The colonel and his housekeeper exchanged looks.

"After all, it's a shame she can't ride horseback. Any decent sort of a riding master might take her in hand. My morning excursion is more than enough for me. What do you think, Anna, can we entrust her to that humbug Von Prell?"

Lilly's face lighted up with joy. Miss von Schwertfeger let her eyes rest on her glowing cheeks and said very slowly, as if to chew the cud of every word:

"You know Von Prell is reckless. What if he should bring our darling back to us some day with broken bones? At all events, it seems to me, before deciding, we had better consider the matter carefully."

Though Lilly took good care not to utter a syllable expressive of desire or opposition, she was not successful, apparently, in concealing her secret wishes; for the next time they were alone together, Miss von Schwertfeger suddenly took Lilly's face between her hands and said:

"Get rid of the idea, darling. Do. Believe me, it's better so."

About this time Lilly made a remarkable and somewhat suspicious find. She enjoyed going on expeditions of discovery through the spacious castle, only part of which was inhabited; and on one occasion while rummaging about in one of the third-story guest rooms, now seldom used, she extracted from a chiffonier a light gauze shirt, covered with silver spangles and shot with silver thread, resembling the shirt she had often had to wear during the Dresden stay before going to bed. Her own shirt these days hung undisturbed in her closet, from which it had not been removed even for Miss von Schwertfeger's inspection, because Lilly was a little ashamed of it.

Her curiosity was piqued by the vestment she had found, and folding it carefully she went down to question her friend about it.

Miss von Schwertfeger was sitting over her account books, and scarcely looked up when Lilly entered. But suddenly the gleam of the tinsel in the sunlight attracted her attention. A quiver ran through her body. Her eyes widened, her figure stiffened, as if she were looking at a ghost.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" laughed Lilly.

"I thought I had cleared up thoroughly," she said, shaking herself.

She snatched the garment from Lilly's hand, wrapped it up in a piece of paper, and carried it to the kitchen, followed by Lilly, who saw a whirl of smoke carry bits of silver thread up the hearth chimney.

Old Maggie stood by looking in bewilderment from one to the other. She seemed to know what the discovery involved, but later, when Lilly tried to extract information from her, she had lost her faculty of speech.

"I didn't always use to be just where the colonel was," she stuttered. "Ask Miss von Schwertfeger. She knows. She'll tell you."

But Miss von Schwertfeger would not tell. She went about with compressed lips, gave short answers when spoken to, and kept her extinct eyes fastened upon empty space.

One evening at supper, her demeanour, apparently from no external cause, underwent a sudden change. She laughed, chatted, was tender to Lilly, and attentive to her master, pitying him on account of his pain, suggesting new remedies, and obtaining his promise to give up his morning ride.

"By the way," she went on, "as to Lilly's taking riding lessons, I've thought it over carefully, and have come to the conclusion that if we are present—at first, at least—we may entrust her to the young man."

Lilly fetched a deep sigh of joy; but the two pairs of eyes could not have detected the trace of a

smile on her face, the faintest glimmer of delight, so well had she learned to keep herself under control.

The next morning the riding lessons began, with the colonel and Miss von Schwertfeger, of course, in attendance.

Walter von Prell appeared in riding boots and a jockey's cap. The forward inclination of the upper part of his body seemed to signify, "I am awaiting orders," and his respectfulness and obsequiousness kept him shifting from one foot to the other.

For the first essay they had chosen a lamblike grey mare, narrow-chested and somewhat overtrained in the fore-hand, yet a smart, well-fed animal.

Mr. von Prell proceeded very methodically to explain the construction of the saddle and bridle, showed Lilly how the girths are buckled, how the snaffle and curb rein have to lie, and how to keep the curb chain from choking the horse.

Next came learning how to mount. When Lilly for the first time put her foot on his interlaced fingers she felt a warm thrill to the very back of her neck, as if this contact with him were a sign of secret understanding between them.

"One, two, three," he counted, and there she was in the saddle.

The colonel clapped his hands in approval, and Walter von Prell blushed with pride to the roots of his blond hair.

From now on he had the game in his hands.

"Who'd have thought that blusterer has such a lot of pedantry in his make-up?" said the colonel turning to Miss von Schwertfeger, who nodded silently and took a deep breath, as if something were oppressing her.

By the time Lilly was ready to dismount, she had learned how to draw in the reins and slacken them and to turn to the right or the left; and she had even ventured a trot about the yard. In short, as the colonel good-humouredly remarked, "She was on the road to becoming the most dashing horsewoman in the army."

The lessons followed in quick succession. Either Miss von Schwertfeger or the colonel was always present, and there was no opportunity for private conversation between Lilly and Von Prell.

Von Prell maintained his stiff, abject obsequiousness, while Lilly burned with the desire to see his waggery flash up in a look or word intelligible to her alone.

One day, it chanced, both guards were absent.

The colonel was busied with the construction of a riding-ring, in which his gout might defy the inclemencies of the weather, and Miss von Schwertfeger was nowhere to be found.

Lilly's heart beat violently when she met her friend, and the smile with which she held out her hand to him, expressed uneasy triumph.

He responded with a sly thrust of his tongue in the direction of the terrace, where her honour was wont to stand.

"She couldn't be found anywhere," whispered Lilly.

"*What* will we do?" he moaned, wringing his hands. "Why, without the worthy dame's protection we shan't even be able to mount."

Deep blue heavens arched above. A cool breeze, heavy with the smell of freshly turned soil, blew across the courtyard.

He pointed with a wily look to the open gate.

She laughed and nodded assent.

The next minute she was galloping at his side along the grassy wood path, where no Argus eyes could follow her, in utter abandon, inwardly exulting and eagerly expectant of mad pranks to be played.

Von Prell, for his part, seemed indisposed to avail himself of his unhoped for liberty. He held his eyes fixed on the road in front, every now and then caught at her reins, regulated the length of the stirrup, and made her sit better in the saddle. He was the riding master, nothing else.

"How's Tommy?" she asked at length, bored.

"Tommy sends his regards," he replied, without removing his gaze from the road, "and says we'd better pay attention to nothing but the horses to-day, because if something should happen we'd never be allowed to go out again."

"And I send my regards to Tommy, and tell him he's a goose."

"I will without fail," he rejoined, and nodded his riding crop.

They now entered a grove of birch trees, where the ground was somewhat boggy and demanded

added attention.

But Lilly had eyes for nothing but the silvery gleam of the trunks and the golden webs which quivered in the wind and floated down on her cheeks.

"Oh, see how beautiful!" she said with a blissful sigh.

"Walk your horse, please."

A demon took possession of Lilly. Touching her horse with her crop she went off in a mad gallop that was contrary to all the rules and regulations of horseback riding.

The next instant, however, Von Prell was at her side gripping her reins and pulling up both horses.

They looked at each other with flashing eyes.

Lilly felt she had to throw herself over toward him just to be nearer to him.

"Say, Lilly, what do you mean by that?" he hissed.

She started and showed her white teeth.

"Say, Walter, what do you mean by that?" she retorted.

They turned the horses' heads and rode back home slowly, in silence, without looking at each other.

CHAPTER XIX

The threshing machine had been singing its autumn song for many a day. Its monotonous whirr could be heard far beyond the castle court. It carried no message of golden blessings or glowing crystallised sunlight. From morning till late at night it moaned and howled like an æolian harp in stormbeaten branches; and sometimes soft, long-drawn cries burst from its entrails, as if the sheaves it was torturing and tearing had been endowed with speech.

So much dreamy bliss dwelt again in Lilly's soul that she got nothing but allurement and yearning from this music, which entirely obsessed her in her morning slumber and kept her lying in bed a long time in a drowsy half-sleep the better to listen to its even, unvarying singsong.

All the while she thought of him.

A comrade, a playmate, that was what she had needed all along, some one in whose company to make merry and complain, some one who would confess all his follies, his most secret sins, and then receive laughing absolution. For whatever his crime, he was not the guilty one; his youth was the sinner, the same sweet, mischievous youth which filled her soul with melancholy and her body with shuddering, which dominated them both like a beneficent yet tormenting divinity, who favoured the one and ruined the other.

He had to be saved—saved from his own frivolity, from that fatal condition of his soul which threatened to entangle and choke him in a net of vulgar escapades. Rumours of the low life he was leading kept cropping up not to be silenced, and she needed but to step inside the servants' hall for a stream of gossip to come gushing over her like a jet of dirty water.

Her first intervention was to be only the beginning of the great mission she had to perform in his life. She would be his good genius, walking before him and holding up her hands against every evil temptation, until he had become as pure, as undesirous as herself.

Thus she dreamed to the accompaniment of the threshing machine.

The first ride beyond the castle gates, though taken without permission, had been approved, even commended; and others were to follow. But Lilly hesitated. She wanted to learn a decent canter, she said, before venturing upon new roads. As a matter of fact, she was burning with eagerness for another such hour in Von Prell's company, and merely lacked the courage to bring it about.

The morning after that first ride he was the same cringing riding master as before, outdoing himself in respectfulness and over-polite while rigorous in imparting instruction. Lilly had fully expected he would whisper a familiar word hinting at the day before, a soft "Lilly." There was plenty of opportunity, but nothing of the sort took place.

The next few lessons went in the same fashion. Neither Lilly nor Von Prell thought of leaving the courtyard. But one day the decree went forth from the colonel himself.

"Enough of this hopping about on the gravel. Get out of here and air yourselves in the wind of the fields."

"At your command, Colonel," said Von Prell, touching his cap. He rode his horse up to Lilly's and gently steered both of them out of the gate.

Her heart stood still. She forgot to say good-by to the colonel, she was so preoccupied with

anticipation of the pleasure in store for her.

They went the same road that had brought her the great experience of the week before.

The willows dripped with dew and at the slightest touch showered down a rain of drops. Lilly laughed and shook herself. Instead of joining in, he guided his horse to the edge of the road, leaving the middle to her.

"But I *want* to get wet," she said.

"As my lady says," he replied, stiff as a poker in his stupid, artificial respect.

Then they rode on in silence.

When they reached the spot where the great event had occurred which gave the lie to his present behaviour, she ventured to send him a furtive sidelong glance. But he did not respond, seeming not to have noticed her look. His jockey cap pulled close over his head down to the back of his neck, his thin, tightly-drawn face, sprinkled with dewdrops, his boyish body, all muscle and bone, he sat on his saddle as if he and his horse were one.

"How I love him, in spite of everything, the dear little fellow," she thought, and pictured to herself how horribly abandoned she would feel if ever he were to leave the place. And it became clear as day to her that the gay excitement in her soul, the sense of abundance in her life here where she dwelt, had arisen from nothing else than his always, always being near by.

They rode along at an even gait. The brown ridges bordering the opposite bank of the stream drew nearer and nearer. Von Prell seemed to be making for them, but this did not serve her purpose, because the hour for a frank talk had struck.

To-day or never!

She made a great effort to go over in her mind what she would say to him. But her thoughts were incoherent. She had to keep her attention fixed on the horse; and so long as she remained in the saddle she felt herself too much under Von Prell's control.

Summoning all her courage she asked:

"Can't we dismount?"

He paused to consider, but she had jumped from her horse already, and he had just time enough to grasp the mare's snaffle. He reprimanded her, though in the end he had to yield.

They walked side by side, Von Prell leading both horses.

The path led through a stone pit sparsely grown with oak trees and alders. Golden marigold buttons dotted the marshy spots, and the bur-reed stretched out its bristly fruit on crinkled arms. Reddish dock raised its aging stalk and the floating grass was drawing in its blades in expectation of approaching autumn.

A mountain-ash, felled by a storm, stretched diagonally from the side of the road across the ditch. Its purplish red clusters of berries glowed like flames which by right should have been extinguished long ago, but which a mysterious life-force kept feeding.

"I'd like to sit here," said Lilly

He bowed.

"If you please."

"But you must sit down, too."

"I must hold the horses, my lady."

"You can tie them to a tree."

He considered a while.

"I can," he said, and tied the reins about the stump of the fallen tree.

When he was about to sit down next to her, she moved nearer to the middle of the trunk to make room for him, and she sat with her feet dangling over the ditch water.

He shoved himself after her, swinging his upper body between his arms, which held him like props.

"No further," she said. She did not want him too close to her.

"At my lady's service," he answered, and kicked his heels.

The grotesque stiffness of his speech annoyed her.

"Don't you know a better way of addressing me when we are alone?" she asked, looking him full in the face.

"I do, but I mustn't"

"And last time—how about then?"

"It happened to be my birthday," he replied, "and I wanted a pretty gift, so I presented that to myself."

"And to-day's my birthday," she laughed. "What will you present me with?"

"Whatever my lady wishes."

"Call me comrade."

"Once or always?"

"Always."

"Just *say* comrade, or be comrade, too?"

"Be, be, be," she cried. "The being is the chief thing."

"Agreed!" he said, cautiously sliding his right hand along the swaying trunk.

"Agreed!" she said, and they shook hands on it.

"There's something else to be passed upon in connection with this," he observed, and cleared his throat.

"What's that?"

"Is this comradeship to be accompanied or not to be accompanied by the use of the first name?"

"Not," rejoined Lilly, thinking she had made a great sacrifice.

He took the prohibition at its face value and said obediently:

"As my comrade wishes."

Now her time had come. Lilly drew in a deep breath and said:

"I have something very serious to say to you, Mr. Von Prell."

He seemed to suspect evil.

"Ouch," he said, and bit his gloved thumb.

Lilly began. She would say absolutely nothing about that affair with Katie, even though it was very dreadful, because what is to be forgiven must also be forgotten. But if he thought the life he had been leading ever since he had come to Lischnitz had remained a secret, he was greatly mistaken. Even the scrubbing women laughed at him behind his back. But he couldn't expect anything else, if he—and she recounted the list of his sins, which, in spite of herself, had reached her ears from the servants' hall.

Lilly was ashamed of what she said. She had meant to speak of entirely different things—of the loftiness of human existence, of the greatness of self-abnegation, of keeping oneself pure for the sake of genuine feelings, of the mysterious spiritual union of the elect on earth, and much more in the same strain. But when she saw him, as he sat there with his back curved and his feet turned inward, causing bulbs to appear and disappear on the soft leather of his riding boots where they covered his big toes, nothing better occurred to her.

He did not interrupt her.

When she had concluded he maintained silence and occupied himself with following the movements of an insect which was wriggling in the dark, slimy water of the ditch.

"Have you nothing to say," she asked, "after I have reproached you with such disgraceful behaviour?"

"What should I have to say?" he asked in turn. "My one claim to celebrity is my being a man utterly devoid of moral fibre. Should I lose that one claim, too?"

"If you have nothing within yourself to hold you up, lean on me," she cried, glowing with eagerness. "Let me be your friend, your adviser, your—"

"Foster-father," he suggested, and swished about the slime with his crop.

She realised that everything she said was lost on him; that he even seized whatever opportunity offered to make merry at her expense.

"Please get up and let me by," she said. "Why should I cast what is best in me before one who is unworthy?"

He made no movement to leave his seat.

"Look, comrade," he said, pointing to the dark, mirror-like surface of the water. "A water spider is gliding about there all the time with its legs up and its head down. If you were to ask it why, it would say it doesn't know how to glide differently. That's its nature. What's to be done?"

"A man can restrain himself," she cried, flaring up and casting indignant glances at him. "A man

can look up to heights, to an ideal. He can listen to the advice of a friend who means well by him—that's what he can do."

"And what does his friend advise?" he asked flatteringly, while swinging himself nearer.

But this time she did not answer. She covered her face with her hands and cried, cried so that her body shook with sobs.

"For God's sake, sit still," he exclaimed, stretching his arms about her in a wide circle, for she was in danger of losing her balance on the slim, swaying trunk of the mountain-ash. "Do sit still, Lilly, else you'll fall into the water."

She shuddered. She heard nothing of what he said except that sweet, secret, criminal "Lilly," for which she had been longing the whole week.

Then he promised her everything she wanted of him. He wouldn't run after any more servant girls, he wouldn't spend nights boozing with the inspector and the bookkeeper, he wouldn't—oh, what wouldn't he do, if only she stopped crying.

"Your word of honour?" she said, raising her wet, reddened eyes.

"My word of honour," he replied without an instant's hesitation.

She smiled at him, happy and grateful.

"You won't regret it," she said. "I'll be close at hand, I'll be your friend, I will do whatever I can."

"And whatever the two High Mightinesses permit," he added.

This time the epithet "High Mightinesses" did not annoy her. She shrugged her shoulders and said: "Oh, they—yes, of course."

Then they both laughed till they came near falling into the ditch after all.

CHAPTER XX

Delightful times followed. A game of hide-and-seek with herself, a long-drawn draught from an unfailing fount of expectancy, anticipation, delicious aftertaste and joyous recollections. Each day brought new pleasures and untold wealth.

Sometimes when Lilly threw open the shutters in the morning and the fresh red September air flowed in over her she felt as if God had spread a mantle of sunny gold over the heavens to wrap both of them in, so snug and close that the whole world disappeared, leaving no one but themselves behind, pressed against each other in laughter and drunk with all that light.

She felt she was growing more beautiful from day to day and emanated a sort of radiance which caused all who met her to look up with a smile of astonishment and satisfaction, mingled, however, with a touch of melancholy, such as always comes over us when we see a human being or a flower developing too happily, too proudly for its glory to endure.

The two High Mightinesses did not keep their eyes closed, either.

The colonel found no formula for such symptoms in his store of experiences. Had Lilly gone about downcast, staring dreamily into space, had she crept about him timidly, had she wavered between ardour and estrangement, his suspicions would have grown lively. He would have begun to sound and spy on her. But it was not in his power to discern aught else than increased spiritual well-being in her pliable, blissful tenderness.

So he smirked complacently at the harmless gaiety his young wife radiated, and with paternal calm accepted the lavish caresses, which served as an outlet for her overwrought ecstasy.

Anna von Schwertfeger shared no less benevolently in Lilly's happiness. She seemed to harbour as little suspicion as the colonel that a third person was playing a part in her life. Otherwise she would scarcely have viewed the growing frequency with which the two young people met with such unbegrudging kindliness.

Often after supper she drew Lilly into the room on the ground floor, where she dwelt amid her account books. A genuine old maid's home, with canary birds, flower pots, faded family photographs, and all sorts of gilt and china knick-knacks, remnants of past glory such as are handed down from generation to generation in families of decayed gentlefolk.

At other times she came gliding into Lilly's bedroom at an incredibly late hour, seated herself on the edge of the bed, and did not stir until she heard the sound of the colonel's carriage coming from the station.

The two women would plunge into profound conversations concerning life and death, solitary old age and overflowing youth, the measure God has set for each mortal, and the misfortune of trying to exceed that measure. Anna von Schwertfeger no longer pried or warned, yet her fashion of hopping from subject to subject, of heedlessly expressing an opinion the very reverse of one she

had uttered a moment before, seemed sufficient reason for supposing that her mind was occupied with very, very different things.

Often while her speech flowed on monotonously Lilly would be astonished to look up and find her eyes resting on her intently, almost apprehensively. Then again Lilly would feel herself stroked and kissed with such pitying inwardliness that she herself was touched, and later, when left alone, she began to feel afraid of the dark, as if a menacing fate were crouching at the bottom of her bed ready to pounce on her and choke her.

But from where was misfortune to drop on her? Wasn't she more securely stowed away than ever before in her life? Whom did she deceive? Wherein did she sin? Even if the few little secrets binding her to Walter should be discovered, how would she be punished? She would simply get a fine sermon like a naughty child, nothing worse.

Thus she comforted herself before the aftertaste of Miss von Schwertfeger's late visits was dispelled by new dreams of happiness.

September neared its end.

Lilly went horseback riding with Von Prell almost every day, or she met him at twilight, as if by chance, in deserted parts of the park. They would spy each other strolling about some one of the various places they had fixed upon once for all. Then there was the pea-shooter to fall back upon in case different arrangements had to be made.

Von Prell had brought the convenient instrument from the city, and it reposed innocently in a corner of Lilly's balcony, to all appearances nothing more than a superfluous curtain-rod. It enabled her to blow whatever message she wanted through the foliage on the balcony directly into his open window.

Sometimes it was only "Good morning, comrade," sometimes the hour of meeting, or sometimes a harmless jest, the outgrowth of a moment's exuberance.

On the evenings the colonel remained at home Von Prell was usually invited to supper. Though he then assumed his according-to-rules-and-regulations stiffness, the opportunity for a little byplay was now always afforded.

Neither Lilly nor Von Prell moved a muscle and the two High Mightinesses sat there unsuspecting.

But Lilly had a rival whom she feared and detested, because that rival had the power to draw her "comrade's" attention from her for hours at a time. The mere mention of the rival's name sufficed to reduce Lilly to the position of nothing but a lay figure. The rival was—the regiment.

The time of the autumn manœuvres had come, and both gentlemen read the papers with feverish interest to see what part was being taken by their former regiment.

One evening they sent off a picture postal with congratulations to the regiment. Two days later the reply came, also on a postal, all scribbled over with names which it required a vast effort to decipher.

Three remained illegible, or, rather, inexplicable, until all of a sudden Walter lit upon the solution: Von Holten, Dehnicke, Von Berg, summer lieutenants, who had been called into service for the manœuvres and had signed their names along with the other officers.

All but one of the names fell upon Lilly's ear unheeded. "Dehnicke" struck her as a little odd, because its bourgeois simplicity did not seem to chime in well with the ringing charm of the old patrician names.

The greeting from out of his past had no benign influence on the colonel's mood. He grew taciturn, then surly; and Lilly caught a sidelong glance of his fixed on her, which caused her to start in terror, it was so wildly, fiercely reproachful.

Thereafter his visits to the neighbouring garrison town grew more frequent, and despite his painful gout he never refused an invitation to join a hunt.

It was the first Sunday in October.

The colonel had left at dawn to go to a neighbour with the intention of not returning until late at night.

A soft grey mist shot with violet suggestions of the sun lay over the ground when Lilly, bored and writhing internally, came out of church on Miss von Schwertfeger's arm.

The sunflowers in the tenants' gardens were already sinking their singed heads and the asters showed signs of having suffered from the murderous blows of Jack Frost.

But the air was as sweet and spicy as in spring, and from the fields came a singing as of meadow larks.

"Such a day, such a day!" thought Lilly, and stretched herself in a vague yearning for secret

conversation and glad pranks.

She must have thought a little too loud, for Miss von Schwertfeger asked:

"What's the matter with to-day?"

"I don't know," replied Lilly, blushing. "I feel as if it were some festival."

Miss von Schwertfeger looked at her askance and said, emphasising each word:

"I should like to make a festival of it for myself and visit a friend of mine in the city. But the colonel is away and I don't know—"

Lilly started so violently that she lost her breath for an instant. But she mastered herself cleverly and began to persuade Miss von Schwertfeger, first speaking coolly, then more warmly and urgently. She needed a little outing; she hadn't left the place all summer; she lived like a prisoner, and ought to grant herself at least one hour of freedom.

Miss von Schwertfeger nodded meditatively, and that glassy stare came into her eyes which always discomfited Lilly.

At the midday meal, which the two took in each other's company, she was still undecided; but as soon as they rose from table she ordered the carriage to be brought around and drove off without saying good-by.

Lilly, who watched her departure, ran for the pea-shooter. The foliage of the creepers still hedged in her little domain so perfectly that Von Prell could not see her. But she could see him as he sat at the open window brooding over a book with a deep fold between his brows.

"My good influence," thought Lilly triumphantly, and it almost made her feel sorry to tear him away from so salutary an occupation.

The inspector and the bookkeeper were walking up and down near the lodge smoking their Sunday afternoon cigarettes.

So more than ordinary caution was necessary.

The pellet containing her missive hit Von Prell's forehead, rebounded, and fell on the grass outside the window.

Von Prell had himself so well in hand that he even refrained from looking up to show he understood. After a while, however, he let the book fall out of the window as if by accident, and then got up to fetch it with an indifferent air.

Half an hour later they met behind the carp pond.

He was wearing a new black and white checked fall suit, similar to the one the fateful stranger in the railroad train had worn.

"You're entirely too elegant," Lilly joked. "I'd rather not be in your company to-day."

"That would be a sin and a shame," he observed. "I had these trappings constructed extra for to-day."

"Why for to-day?"

"Because to-day's our festival."

"How did that occur to you?" she faltered, startled that their thoughts had taken the same course.

"Oh, a person gets notions," he replied, and smiled significantly.

Under the same impulse they took the path leading to the beech grove which they had wandered through on the first evening of their renewed friendship.

"How's Tommy?" Lilly asked, recollecting the third party to the alliance.

"He bit away the flooring in my room and dug a hole for himself, where he snarls like an eagle-owl. I shouldn't advise you to stick your wedding-ring finger into his hole. You might suddenly lose your ring and your finger, too."

"Why have you let him get so wild?" she asked reproachfully.

"Why have I let myself get so wild?" he retorted.

"Well, you're growing tame again," replied Lilly, caressing him with her eyes. His recent tameness was all her doing.

"Do you think so?" he asked, and drew his brows together masterfully, as in his lieutenant days.

"Haven't I your word of honour?" she exulted.

"Pshaw!"

Lilly basked in the superbness of her mission of salvation.

"No matter how much you disdain my influence," she replied, "everybody sees that a change has

taken place in you. Mr. Leichtweg says you're always the first to begin work now. You've borrowed that great book on agriculture from the colonel—it impressed him tremendously—and Miss von Schwertfeger said a little while ago you always look so appetizing now. Yes, Mr. von Prell, I take the credit for all this, and if things continue the same way we shall remain good friends."

"Apropos of appetizing," he said, "your neck beginning back of your ears is all covered with tiny, silky hairs. Do you know from what that comes?"

"Oh, nonsense," Lilly exclaimed, blushing. "Why? Do you know?"

"A wise man has theories. For instance, observe this plot of grass." He pointed to a clearing below them, through which a rill trickled, and which was closely grown with tender, juicy grass of a vivid green. "From the way it looks you'd suppose it was still spring. Until late in the summer that plot stood under water, and the spots that least often or never get dry grow the finest down —that's nature."

Lilly was on the point of taking his botany lesson in earnest when she chanced to notice the wicked grimace he was making. Then she understood the shameless allusion and had to laugh over it helplessly.

"Listen, baronissima, how about playing tag? We owe it to the circulation of your excellency's blood."

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when with a blithe shout she darted off down the slope, the bottom of which was lost in the purple darkness of autumn. But at the end of a short stretch she tripped over the Scotch plaid she had taken along and had refused to let Von Prell carry. She fell full length and he came just in time to help her to her feet.

This having spoiled Lilly's taste for tag they mounted the hill like well-behaved children.

Here their eyes could travel over a rippling lake of leaves far, far away. The beeches glowed a deep red, the maples danced in all the colours of the rainbow, the birches quivered with bright flames, the elm flaunted its flakes of gold, while the oak alone obstinately retained its green garb of summer.

Lilly stared into the violet-veiled distance.

The sun hid itself behind gold-rimmed clouds, from which fiery tracks descended to earth. A narrow band of scarlet edged the horizon.

"Shall we sit down here?" asked Von Prell.

"No, not here," said Lilly, seized with a vague dread. "I'll begin to cry here."

She ran ahead of him, back into the woods, and came again upon the path leading along the rill.

Here the darkness of evening prevailed, but the sun-charm in which they had been enveloped worked its magic here, too, and filled her heart with a happy devoutness.

Oh, how happy she was! How happy she was!

No fear and no danger so far as her thoughts could reach; and no danger from her own heart, for the man walking by her side was her friend and playmate, nothing more. He might not and could not be anything else. No secret wish, no distorted desire came from him or went to meet him.

Everything uniting him to her was clear and transparent as sunlight. Even if the others must not have a suspicion of their intercourse, there was no sin in it—only salvation for him and laughter for her and youth for both.

She felt a warm-hearted impulse to take his hand, but fearing to be misunderstood she checked herself.

Thus they walked at each other's side to the spot where the rill was caught up in a rotting wooden conduit, from which it spouted with a soft singsong.

Withered ferns covered the light green moss with their ragged red fronds and tired leaves came fluttering down out of the beech trees.

"Let us rest here," suggested Lilly.

"But it's damp."

"We'll spread the plaid," she said eagerly, taking the blanket from him—he had managed to snatch it away from her—and threw it over the fern stalks, which cracked under the weight.

She sat down on the right side of the plaid and invited him to make use of the left side, to keep his fine new suit clean.

"Do you hear the vesper bells?" he asked. "We ought to be eating supper now."

"We poor church mice, we have nothing," she laughed.

"Who told you so?" he asked, triumphantly producing a small paper package from his pocket, which contained a mashed, crumbly piece of cake. They laid it between them and ate the morsels

from their hollowed hands, laughing all the while. The cake tasted like sweet wine, and Lilly felicitously hit upon its correct name, punch-tart, of which she was especially fond.

"The English call it tipsy-cake," he explained. "It quite befuddles one."

"That amount of intoxication I'll risk," she laughed, and threw herself on her back, folding her hands behind her head.

She lay there a time without moving and looked up to the sky, of which jagged oval bits shimmered through the foliage. Rosy flakes swam in the opalescent ether, and way beyond appeared the vault of another heaven, which in some places burst through the nearer sky like a deep blue foreboding.

Lilly stretched her arms upward yearningly.

"Do you want to catch the larks?" he asked.

No, not that, but she would like to have one of the falling leaves.

They kept dropping, dropping from the boughs like birds with broken wings, and fluttered over the ground in little spirals, as if undecided where to rest.

"We'll see to which of us the first one comes," he said, and also stretched himself on his back.

"The one to whom a leaf comes first will be blessed with a great piece of good fortune," she added.

They lay still and waited.

At last one floated toward him and prepared to settle on his nose.

But he would not permit this—hers must be that great piece of good fortune—and he blew the leaf back to her.

She in turn was too proud to accept so munificent a gift and blew it back to him.

Thus laughing and tossing themselves about, they kept the leaf whirling between them, and suddenly in the heat of the struggle their lips touched—touched and would not separate.

The next instant they held each other in close embrace, and the instant after she was his.

The rill purled, the leaves fell as before. But a fiery mist lay upon the earth, and all over small suns winked rainbow coloured eyes.

Why had it happened?

She fell back without thinking and noticed that the heavens above were also clothed in fire.

Her comrade sat beside her with his back curved like a berated schoolboy and rubbed his nails against one another.

"Oh, let's go home," said Lilly, downheartedly.

"As my lady commands," he replied, grotesquely respectful again.

She laughed a weary, mirthless laugh.

Apparently he was concerned with getting rid of what had happened as speedily as possible.

"Oh, now it's all the same," she sighed; "now we can quite calmly call each other by our first names."

CHAPTER XXI

First came dread, the same senseless dread that had dominated Lilly's being before her engagement. It stiffened her limbs, bound her arms to her body, crippled her knees, beat against the walls of the veins in her neck and created a black void in her brain.

But after she had gone through the first meeting with Von Prell and nothing fateful occurred, her fear died down and what remained was a searching attentiveness, a readiness to jump aside at the least sign of danger, a tense anticipation of ticklish questions to be answered properly and pitfalls to be avoided with a crafty assumption of innocence.

The colonel noticed nothing—he, the most suspicious of married men, with the keenest scent, who harboured the least illusions concerning the opposite sex, he noticed nothing. He even believed the headache myth and lavished mocking yet tender pity upon her, while he sat at her bedside laughing and helping her change the compresses that Miss von Schwertfeger had solicitously prepared.

It was more difficult for Lilly to endure the woman's caresses. Behind them lurked a squinting pair of eyes, shy, heedful, and endeavouring to look harmless, while, in spite of themselves, revealing a greedy desire to know.

The anxiety that so far as the colonel was concerned gradually lulled itself to sleep, grew sharper with regard to the self-sacrificing friend, who at any moment might become her enemy and betrayer.

Lilly did not dare to cry until night time, when she felt sure of being alone. She would jump out of bed to wash her eyes, go back to bed again and cry until sleep took her in its soothing arms.

It was not shame, nor regret, nor longing love. It was a feeling of infinite solitariness, it was a straying about in perplexity.

"What will happen now?"

For something must surely happen—confession, convent, flight together, suicide together, or one of all those events described in Mrs. Asmussen's books as following upon so atrocious a deed.

The week passed.

Lilly had arisen from her sick bed several days before, but she had not seen Von Prell. She could discover no signs of him, even when she locked all the entrances to her room and rushed to the window for a glimpse of him.

All the while the colonel kept recommending horseback riding. There was Von Prell to take her and the exercise would do her good.

At last, Saturday at dusk, she felt she had to yield—they would meet at dinner the next day at any rate.

The horses were pawing before the door.

The moment for the meeting before which she had recoiled had arrived with its threat of fresh dangers.

When she saw her friend ascend the terrace steps in his high, shiny riding boots, looking pale and thin, and moving as if by springs to display his counterfeit respect, something within her suddenly turned numb.

"Why, that young man there is an utter stranger," she felt. "He doesn't concern you in the least—you are looking upon him for the first time in your life."

They rode out of the gate.

The colonel had gone to the stables, but Miss von Schwertfeger stood on the terrace with her hands clasped and looked after them.

The road, muddy with recent rains, plashed under the horses' hoofs and a cold evening wind crinkled the winter wheat. A yellow sheen hiding the poverty-stricken sun glimmered behind the ragged birch boughs. Everything looked sad and weary. It even seemed a vain task to have sowed the winter wheat.

They trotted on side by side in silence—a long, long series of anxious moments.

"He must speak some time," thought Lilly, biting her tongue till it bled.

He kept his eyes fixed undeviatingly upon the road ahead, making only slight movements of his right hand from time to time to adjust his reins.

"He'll call me 'my lady' again," she thought, and felt ashamed in advance for both of them.

Finally she took heart and spoke to him.

"Do walk your horse," she said, almost crying.

"Of course, comrade," he replied, and reined in his chestnut.

"Comrade! Comrade!" she burst out, and passionately searched his eyes with hers.

He shrugged his shoulders, as always when he feared a scolding, and said nothing.

"Say something, won't you?" she screamed, quite beside herself.

"What should I say?" he queried, making a little gesture, as if to scratch his head. "It's a nasty business. We know it." And muttering to himself, he repeated, "Nasty business, nasty business!"

"Is that all you have to say to me?" she cried.

"My dear friend," he replied, "I am small, my heart is small. It's not a suitable spot for harbouring great anguish of the soul."

"Pshaw, who's speaking of anguish of the soul? But what's to become of us, that's what I should like to know."

"As soon as I come into possession of an unencumbered manorial estate," he replied with a

gesture of invitation, "a castle, stables, vehicles and other animate and inanimate things thereunto appertaining, I shall take the liberty of applying to your husband for your hand."

This completely robbed Lilly of her self-control.

"If you keep on making such jokes," she screamed, bursting into tears, "I'll ride to death, now, before your very eyes."

"A difficult thing to do with that well-behaved nag of yours."

Lilly was at her wits' end and simply let the tears course down her cheeks in silence.

At last he changed his tone.

"Well, well, child," he said, "be sensible for a change. All I want to do is tickle the superfluous tragedy out of your soul. And as soon as you make a glad face again I'll try to give the matter most serious consideration."

Lilly wiped her tears away with the flap of her riding gauntlet and smiled at him obediently.

"Fine," he praised her. "'Twas not idle in the poet to write '*O weine selten, weine schwer. Wer Tränen hat, hat auch Malheur.*' I'll tell you something. We two pretty orphans were exactly meant for each other and we've been brought together here in this enchanted castle. But we should have *had* to meet, no matter where, even if we hadn't been two hearts that beat as one long before. To be accurate, the colonel married us right at the beginning, and the only shame is that your marriage contract with him wasn't drawn up accordingly. But that's not to be altered, and we shall have to get around the matter in secret ways. See here, child, we both are headed in the same direction on the sea of life. We have the same to win and the same to lose. So cheer up! Go it! We're ragtag and bobtail both of us, at any rate."

"I'm not ragtag and bobtail!" cried Lilly, flaring up. "I have pride and a sense of honour, and even if I have sinned a thousandfold, I know how to die for my sins."

"It's not so easy to die. Usually the opportunity is lacking, and when the opportunity once presents itself we show it a clean pair of heels."

Lilly felt a hot desire to protect him against the self-degradation in which he indulged.

"You don't believe what you say," she cried. "You are the boldest, the most daring of men. I know you are. Without a moment's hesitation you would face death for the sake of your honour. If you would only summon all your strength the whole world would lie at your feet. I will always keep reminding you of that. I will work over you until you get back belief in yourself, until you feel you are on the upward road. I will share all your hardships, all your temptations, and I will protect you from all evil. For what should I be here if not for you?"

She felt she was so completely his that she could have thrown herself at his horse's hoofs; and when she recalled the first moments of their meeting that day she could scarcely realise why he had seemed so repulsive and alien.

"You're a touching creature," he replied. "It's really lucky the creepers on your balcony are so thoroughly knit together."

She started.

"What do you mean by that?" she faltered, oppressed by a foreboding of ill.

"And lucky the ladder was left there. It can be leaned against the balcony and the vines can break all they want to, even Miss von Schwertfeger wouldn't notice anything amiss. Well?"

He blinked his silvery lids at her enticingly.

She did not know where to turn to hide her face from his gaze, she felt so ashamed.

"I'll never belong to you again," she cried. "I swear I won't by all the saints! I should be a thing of loathing to myself. As for you, I should utterly despise you. Pah!"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Pity to lose the opportunity," he observed, and turned the horses' heads.

He appeared at dinner the next day, virtuous in his frock-coat and black necktie. He strutted and scraped and bowed, pursed his lips in extravagant respect, and scarcely dared to take the demitasse from her hand.

But Miss von Schwertfeger's eyes passed between the two, watching and questioning.

Late that Sunday night the following occurred:

The colonel had gone off to town, Miss von Schwertfeger had retired to her room, and Lilly sat on the edge of the bed in her nightgown brushing her hair.

Suddenly she heard a gentle tapping at the window, as if the autumn wind were blowing a twig

against the closed shutter. But the action of the wind is irregular, and this sound kept time—now a little louder, now a little softer—and recurred at even intervals.

It frightened her, and she wanted to run down to Miss von Schwertfeger; but she bethought herself in time. She hastily put on her dressing gown, cautiously raised the window, and opened the shutters the least bit.

At first she saw nothing.

There were no stars in the heavens and the whole of the lodge seemed buried in darkness. Then she thought she saw a staff waving up and down close to the shutter.

She opened the shutter an inch wider and recognised—the pea-shooter.

Now she knew what was up.

She jumped back and drew the bolt. Then threw herself back in bed, where she lay holding her fingers in her ears. But when she withdrew them she again heard that short, regular tapping, which now rose almost to a knocking.

The nightwatch, who made the rounds of the court and park once an hour, need only find the ladder leaning against the balcony and all was lost.

Her fright deprived her of her senses.

Trembling in every limb, she ran into her dressing room, where there was no light, and opened the balcony door about half an inch. Through the crack she whispered into the darkness:

"Go away, and never try such a thing again."

Then she listened with her ear to the opening.

Nothing to be seen or heard.

But when she wanted to close the door it would not go shut. She groped along the crack in search of the obstacle, and came upon a round, hollow, wooden something, which an invisible hand had shoved there.

The wretched pea-shooter!

She moaned and covered her face with her hands, and the next moment was hanging in his arms in a half swoon.

After that evening he had her completely in his power—defenceless, without a will of her own, at the mercy of his wishes and whims.

It was not happiness. She experienced scarcely a single transport of feeling. That came later, when she had conquered her horror of the monstrous deed, and her fear of discovery had weakened. Nothing occurred to disturb them, and Lilly expanded in a sense of defiant security.

Then it was a blissful sailing over awful abysms, a delirium of the senses, a nebulous ecstasy, a delightful writhing under lacerating blows, an ebb and flow of magnanimous scorn of self and blasphemous prayers.

Laughter came again. Not the old simple laughter that had dominated the play of her spirit until within a short time before. No, this laughter was sardonic exultation, the exultation of the hounded thief, who carries his booty off to security, behind the backs of his pursuers.

Lilly also found reasons for justifying herself.

"I am merely fulfilling my destiny. I am now getting back the possession which fate promised to me and which the old man so long kept from me."

In addition there was a redeeming element in all she did, consecrating the most arrant deception and endowing it with purity. This was the consciousness that he was being saved. Under the spell of a lofty love he would learn to scorn vulgar escapades and, borne on the wings of a woman's expiating favour, he would rise to the heights on which men and heroes dwell.

With these thoughts she drugged her conscience each time; and when he lay in her arms she gave them whispered expression—the doors were not heavy and all sounds must be muffled.

He laughed and kissed the words from her mouth. If she grew uneasy and demanded pledges, he vowed the stars out of the heaven.

Miss von Schwertfeger now never stayed in Lilly's room later than eleven o'clock. This was the hour he might come, and by half past one he had to be gone.

Of course he had to confine his visits to the evenings when the colonel went to town. On account of the time the trains ran, the colonel could not possibly return before two. Besides the carriage could be heard at some distance.

Before Walter left he had to unlock the door to the colonel's room, and smoke a cigarette to rid the atmosphere of the stable and leather smell he brought with him from his own room. For it often happened that the colonel stuck his head in before going to bed; or, if the wine had loosened his tongue, he would even awaken Lilly, seat himself at her bedside, laugh, cast about

his dagger glances pick his yellow teeth, and tell the juiciest stories which had arrived fresh from the Berlin centres of obscenity and made the rounds of his club in town.

Lilly played the drowsy pussy, and purred and yawned She began to feel so secure that once she actually fell asleep right in the middle of a laugh.

Oh, if only there had been no Miss von Schwertfeger!

Not that Miss von Schwertfeger had noticed anything. The horrors of such a possibility were inconceivable. But her restless, hasty comings and goings, the almost anxious greed with which she pried about, gave sufficient cause for concern.

She looked very pale and worn, while the fleshy region about her mouth and her sharp, scenting nose glowed a still deeper red.

You might suppose she tippled in secret. But such thing would be bound to leak out, and at table scarce a drop passed her lips.

"Let her do whatever she wants to," thought Lilly, "if only she doesn't come spying on me as she did on Katie."

And sometimes it occurred to Lilly that she herself was no better than the poor maid Katie, whom they had chased from the castle.

CHAPTER XXII

It was shortly before midnight one evening late in November.

Miss von Schwertfeger had said good-night, and *he* was sitting at Lilly's pillow wet and frozen through. He had been standing in the chilly drizzle a long time before the signal agreed upon—two rattles of the shutter bolt—had summoned him to her room.

Now, everything was serene. The entire house was asleep; the watchman had made his rounds, and the ladder, which Von Prell drew up after him for greater security, reposed peacefully on the balcony.

The blue-shaded chandelier bathed the warm, perfumed room in the light of a summer evening. Drops of rain splashed softly against the shutters, and the November wind whined like a beggar.

Lilly lay comfortably under her blue silk quilt, holding his hand and dreaming up into his face, which, even in moments of self-abandon, retained its expression of abashed roguery. She saw the freckled bridge of his nose, the white-lashed, blinking eyes, the peaked chin covered with stubble and almost hidden by the green collar of his working jacket. He could no longer smarten himself for her sake. His housemates might notice the change.

They did not say much to each other. If only he was with her, he who belonged to her in life and death, who like herself had been cast astray in this strange world.

She drew his head down and stroked his forehead smooth from lack of a man's cares, and wiped away a few drops still clinging to his temples.

The clock on the wall struck twelve softly, the hanging lamp swung back and forth, casting long sliding shadows on the ceiling, like the shadow of a rocking cradle, or like great raven's wings flitting to and fro inaudibly.

Suddenly from the court came the rumble of carriage wheels, whether in arrival or departure they could not determine. Both started up and listened and looked at the clock.

Twelve—impossible! The horses were never harnessed before quarter to two. They would have to wait entirely too long at the station.

Perhaps it was the milkman who had been delayed at the railroad in getting his cans.

They calmed down.

A long, precious hour was still ahead of them, rich in care-free pleasures and oblivion.

To express his triumph Von Prell sucked in his cheeks and rounded his eyes.

With a luxurious smile Lilly put out her arms and drew herself up to him.

At that instant three short, sharp raps sounded on the door opening into the corridor, and Miss von Schwertfeger called:

"Open the door, Lilly! At once!"

Walter jumped to his feet.

When Lilly looked around he had already left the room.

She felt a ringing in her ears, a dull desire to let herself sink down; but renewed raps at the door

tore her out of bed and insisted upon her turning the key.

Before she could stow herself under the covers again to conceal her overwhelming shame, she noticed Miss von Schwertfeger look about the room hastily, make a dash for something round and grey unostentatiously lying in a corner—Lilly did not realise it was Walter's cap until later—shove back the bolt of the door to the colonel's room, and then in sudden transition to tranquillity seat herself alongside Lilly's pillow.

"Be careful not to cry," Lilly heard her say; and that instant the colonel's step resounded in the corridor.

"Well, well, so late! How time does fly when you talk!" cried Miss von Schwertfeger for the benefit of the colonel before he entered. Her voice expressed endless astonishment.

There he stood disagreeably surprised, it seemed, not to find his young wife alone.

"Where did you drop from all of a sudden, colonel? You didn't order a special train, did you? You couldn't have flown here either. At least I've never observed that you possess the art of flying, have you Lilly dear? Poor Lilly's lying there perfectly stiff with surprise."

Thus Miss von Schwertfeger talked against time, evidently trying to secure a few moments for Lilly in which she might pull herself together.

And the colonel willy-nilly had to render account. On the way to the station it had occurred to him that one of the neighbours—he mentioned the name—was celebrating his birthday that day. So he drove over to his place instead of going to town.

"Well," said Miss von Schwertfeger, "the greatest marvels have the simplest explanations. Good-night, dear, I hope you sleep well and get rid of that headache of yours."

The colonel pricked up his ears.

"If she has a headache, why didn't you let her go to sleep long ago?"

When once aroused, not the least inconsistency escaped his attention. But Miss von Schwertfeger was his match, and rejoined without an instant's hesitation:

"She wanted compresses again, but I thought it better simply to hold my hand to her forehead. She was just about to go to sleep; and we ought not to disturb her any more. Don't you agree with me, colonel? Good-night, colonel."

With that she extinguished the lights.

Lilly wanted to cry to her:

"Stay here, stay here, he'll choke me."

But Miss von Schwertfeger was already out in the corridor; and she had done such excellent preliminary work that the colonel after a brief "I hope you feel better," to Lilly, left the room without further question.

Had he remained, the game might have ended in a nervous breakdown.

Lilly lay in bed paralysed by a dull fright, listening now for sounds in the colonel's room, now to the wailing of the wind, interrupted for three or four seconds by a very, very soft rustle.

That was the ladder gliding over the rail as Walter let it down from the balcony. So long as he had seen the light in Lilly's room, he had wisely remained on the balcony. She could hear him remove the ladder and set it where it belonged. Now at length, now that she felt they were both secure, came a shuddering realisation of what had happened, accompanied by a desire to call out and cry aloud.

Anna von Schwertfeger! What had her conduct meant? What had impelled her to implicate herself in so sinful a deed? Wasn't she risking her name, her existence, the reward of many years' labour? How had Lilly, wretched sinner that she was, come to deserve so great a sacrifice? Her heart expanded in gratitude. She could no longer endure lying in bed. She would have to go down and thank Anna forthwith.

She dressed without making a sound, took the precaution to bolt the door between the two bedrooms, and slipped out into the dark corridor, where she peeped through the keyhole of the colonel's room, and saw him lying in bed already. The old oak steps cracked frightfully; but they had that habit even when no one was walking on them, and often kept up the sound of a tread all night.

Light was shining in Miss von Schwertfeger's room. Lilly heard her sharp, hard steps as she paced to and fro.

Finally she ventured to knock.

"Who's there?"

"I, Anna. I—Lilly."

"What do you want? Go back to bed."

"No, no, no. I must speak to you. I must."

The door opened.

"Well, then, come in."

Lilly wanted to throw her arms about Miss von Schwertfeger's neck, but she shook her off.

"I'm not in the mood for scenes," she said. Her trumpet-toned voice, which she muffled with difficulty, had lost all traces of sympathy. "And you needn't thank me, because I did not act from love of you."

Lilly seemed very small to herself and very much scolded. Since the days of her thrashings at the hands of Mrs. Asmussen no one had ever given her such a reception.

"First you help me," she faltered, "and then—"

"Since you are here, you might as well answer some questions I have to ask," said Miss von Schwertfeger. "Close your dress—it's cold here—and sit down." Lilly obeyed. "In the first place: did I in any way ever help to bring about a meeting between you and that man?"

"When could you have?"

"That's what I am asking."

"On the contrary. You weren't even willing for me to take the riding lessons."

"Then, later, did I ever leave you without supervision while you were taking your lessons?"

"Without supervision? Why, almost always you yourself were present."

"Was it I who proposed your going out riding alone with him?"

"You? Of course not. The first time we went without asking, and after that it was the colonel who wanted us to."

"Was I careful to see that everything in your room was in order?"

"I don't know. I think so. Why, even lately I've noticed you come to my room before you went to bed as if to say good-night."

"You've probably taken me to be your enemy, your spy."

"You wouldn't put yourself out for me very much, I thought."

Miss von Schwertfeger laughed a hard, dreary laugh.

"What you say is very valuable," she said. "It proves to me that I made no blunders in carrying out my plan, and need not reproach myself for anything."

"What plan?" asked Lilly, utterly bewildered.

Miss von Schwertfeger measured her with a glance of pitying scorn.

"My dear child, I knew everything. I saw it coming from the very first, the moment you met him. I calculated it on my fingers the way I calculate the cost of a meal. I simply let matters drift. I could do so without dishonouring myself. Besides there was no use interfering. You were bent upon your own ruin."

"What have I done to you," Lilly stammered, swallowing her tears, "to make you hate me so? I never wanted to oust you from your position. I subjected myself to you from the very first. I put myself completely into your hands, and now you do this to me."

"If I hated you, you wouldn't be sitting here. You would probably be straying along some country road. I had you in my grasp and could have crushed you at least a dozen times, but didn't. However, I'll tell you the truth. I *did* hate you, that is, before I knew you. I imagined you a sly, fresh little thing, who held off from the colonel in a pure spirit of calculation, until he adopted the extreme measure to which old libertines resort in such cases. But when I saw you, you dear child, without malice or guile, defenceless, and with the best intentions in the world to love the colonel and me, too, if possible, I had to back down—I and my hate. Then you became nothing else to me than a small, insignificant creature, which one uses so long as it is serviceable, and shoves aside after it has fulfilled its purpose. I am not concerned with you any more. You dropped out of the game long ago, and now the colonel and myself are playing it alone. I'll have to have it out with him, and then my work's done."

Lilly felt nothing but dull, impotent astonishment, as if doors were being opened and curtains drawn aside, and she were looking into men's hearts as into a fiery abyss.

"I thought you were so attached to him," she said. "I thought—"

Suddenly it occurred to her that her first suspicion had not been far from the truth. This hardened, commanding spinster, whose beauty was not yet entirely faded, had found favour in the eyes of her employer some ten or fifteen years before, had then been neglected, and was now taking revenge.

Miss von Schwertfeger divined her thoughts, and dismissed them with a shrug of her shoulders.

"Had it been that," she said, "I should have known how to acquiesce in my fate. And if I had still retained my place in the castle, I should have cherished it as my sanctuary. No, my dear, matters in this world are not so simple. There are even worse hells."

Lilly now heard a story which filled her soul with horror and pity—the story of the house she lived in, the story of which she was the concluding chapter.

The colonel, who had always been a man of violence and a mad voluptuary, had insisted upon taking in pupils in housekeeping under the pretext that when he came home on leave, he had to have youth and jollity about him. He reserved for himself the choice of the pupils. In this way only those came whom he had decided upon in advance. For a long time Miss von Schwertfeger noticed nothing amiss. But the servants began to tell her stories of secret orgies and mad chases on the upper floor, of how the colonel pursued girls clad in glittering raiment—the colonel had always liked transparent robes of silver. Miss von Schwertfeger's eyes were completely opened when some of the girls attempted suicide. She left. But she was poor and accustomed to command, and she could not endure subordinate positions. Dreadful distress was the result. The colonel had not lost her from sight; and when it seemed to him she had sunk low enough, he again offered her the position of housekeeper in his castle, promising she would have nothing to complain of. She crawled back to him like a starved dog. Soon he broke his word, and the indecent goings-on began again. But she no longer had the courage to resist. She learned to be blind and deaf when lewd glances were exchanged at table and screams and laughter penetrated to her room during the night. She even learned to keep curious servants at a distance, and throw a cover of concealment over the house's shame. Her relation to the girls became motherly.

"I shouldn't be surprised," she interposed, "if he hadn't made the same proposition to you, saying I would take care of you."

The fateful evening in which she had become the colonel's betrothed arose in Lilly's memory. While walking about her greedily, still in a state of indecision, he had spoken of a fine, aristocratic woman under whose protection she should live in his castle until she had grown into womanhood.

Miss von Schwertfeger went on with her recital. She described how rage at the disgraceful position she was in ate into her soul like a malignant cancer, how it finally took sole possession of her being to the exclusion of every feeling except the desire for reprisal. His marriage should furnish the weapons. She would be blind and deaf, just as she had been compelled to be before. Nothing else. She would simply let matters take their natural course.

Thus she had acted until that night.

And that night the sword must surely have fallen on Lilly and the colonel; but at the last decisive moment she realised her strength would not hold out. That young, good-natured, guiltless yet guilty wife, had become too dear to her. She could not sacrifice Lilly to her scheme of revenge.

"I thought you said you hadn't acted out of love for me," Lilly ventured to interject.

Miss von Schwertfeger fixed her eyes on Lilly's face in an aggrieved stare.

"My dear child, if you weren't a stupid thing, who has to sin in order to mature, you would have a better understanding of what goes on inside a person like myself. For the present be satisfied that you are out of danger."

In a gush of gratitude Lilly threw herself on Miss von Schwertfeger, and kissed her face and hands; and Miss von Schwertfeger no longer repulsed her. She stroked her hair, and spoke to her as to a child.

Kneeling at her feet Lilly confessed. She told how her relations with Walter had developed insensibly, how they had been old friends, and how he had really been the author of her happiness.

"Happiness?" Miss von Schwertfeger drawled, and drew in the air through the right corner of her mouth, causing a sound like a whistle.

Lilly started, looked at her, and understood.

The question burned in her brain: "Am I better than I should have been had I allowed the colonel to drag me here without marrying me?"

Eleven months had passed since that night when he courted her.

She put her arms about Miss von Schwertfeger, and cried, cried, cried. It was so good to know there was a sisterly, no, a motherly, person in whose dress she could bury her tearful face. She had not experienced such easement since the day a certain knife had been waved over her head.

The affair with Von Prell, of course, could not go on. He and Lilly must not meet even once again. Miss von Schwertfeger demanded it, and Lilly acquiesced without a word of protest.

If only she had not had her mission!

"What mission?" asked Miss von Schwertfeger.

Lilly told of the holy task she had to perform in his life; how her love had awakened him to the realisation of a loftier, purer life; how she had to answer with every drop of blood in her body for his rising to better things and entering upon a noble, beneficent field of activity.

It was Miss von Schwertfeger's turn to be astonished. She listened, and looked at Lilly with great, doubting eyes, then got up, and paced the room agitatedly, muttering:

"Incredible! Incredible!"

When Lilly asked her what was incredible, she kissed her on her forehead, and said:

"You poor thing!"

"Why?"

"Because you will suffer much in life."

Thereupon it was agreed that Miss von Schwertfeger should speak with him once again, and the price of her silence was to be the breaking off of all relations between him and Lilly. They must not take their rides together, either.

Lilly begged for only one thing, to be allowed to write him a farewell letter. She thought she owed this to him so that he should not harbour doubts of her and his future.

Then the two women parted.

Released, redeemed, born into a new life, Lilly walked upstairs, forgetting every precaution. But, thank goodness! the colonel was snoring.

The clock struck four, and the shuffling of the stablemen already resounded in the courtyard.

Before Lilly threw herself in bed, she cast a look of farewell at the lodge, and rejoiced that renunciation was so easy. She had not thought it possible.

CHAPTER XXIII

"Dear Beloved Mr. von Prell:—

From what has happened you can imagine that everything between us must come to an end. Yes, all's over. We shall never see each other except at meal times. If you ask me whether I am very sad, I will be brave and say, "no," hoping thereby to assuage the pain of parting for both of us.

But easy or difficult—that's not the question. The main thing is, our feelings should raise us to pure heights. True greatness of renunciation must illumine our lives. Yes, I expect you to show the greatness of renunciation. Our lives after this must be dedicated entirely to recollections of the past. Besides, can we hope ever again to find anything so beautiful as those unspeakably exquisite hours we passed together? I have given up thoughts of happiness, and you must do the same. From now on my one sacred interest will be my husband's welfare; and I ask you, with all the strength you possess, likewise to labour at the reconstruction of your life.

Life is earnest, solemn, holy. I feel it is. The conviction comes upon me with force, and has possessed me ever since I was led back to the right path by a friend of mine. You must feel it, too.

This letter is my last to you. Write to me once again. Oh, only once. And stick the answer in the pea-shooter, which still stands on the balcony. I shall have no peace until I know our souls are united by the same ideal. Farewell, and at table don't make any secret allusions to the past. You would merely hurt me and make me doubt your good faith.

Ever with feelings of sisterly friendship,

Your L. v. M."

"Dearest Friend:—

The profound emotions which have held me in their grip since my interview with our honoured friend, have, if possible, been deepened by your lovely letter. I feel a tremendous impulse to accomplish by deeds of atonement that which has never yet been. I am prepared to scorn the seven deadly sins. I will carry in mind all the paragons of virtue from the young Tobias to St. Helena, and will try to find that pure happiness in the great renunciation you demand of me, which alone, they say, is unalloyed with regret—an advantage which bears little weight with me, since I am acquainted with that evil institution only by hearsay.

Well, then, dearest, most charming of women, farewell. It was *very* delightful. I can swear to that without perjuring myself. Should you require pledges for the future, I can further swear that: 1, I will shun alcohol; 2, I will declare war upon the female sex; 3, I will devote myself to the encyclopedia of agriculture with inordinate, unalterable love. Ha, do you smell the rarified atmosphere?

Once more, farewell. After I have climbed the ladder of my hopes for the last time, I will lay it to repose under a wintry grave of pine branches. When the time comes, may it awaken to a new spring.

With a kiss on your slim, refreshingly large hand,

Your much improved,
Walter von Prell."

Lilly found this letter the second morning after the great event in the shape of a pellet stuck into the mouth of the pea-shooter, which leaned innocently against the jamb of the balcony door.

It did not provide her with unqualified satisfaction. There were turns of expression in it which raised doubts as to the sincerity of his conversion. Nevertheless, his asseverations were so plain and unmistakable she felt she might take the core to be sound. It was simply that he could not refrain from his wanton way of speaking, which the person who loved him would have to acquiesce in.

She kissed the letter and stuck it in her bosom, to lie there warm and secure awhile before she tore it up.

In the afternoon she took a walk about the grounds, and actually found under her balcony a long heap of pine branches from between which a few ladder rungs peeped at her familiarly.

Rejoiced at this token of his pain she ran off to the park, now soggy from the autumn rains, and sauntered about, marvelling from time to time that renunciation was so easy.

After all it was not so easy.

She discovered it was not in the course of the next few days, when life began to lose its content and intensity, when the hours jogged along in dreary autumnal greyness, and the evening came and the morning came without a reason why.

Moreover, she failed to find that support in Anna von Schwertfeger which she had expected to. Although her friend withdrew none of the promises she had made, yet a shadowy wall circumscribed her, which no insinuating love could penetrate. She seemed almost to fear that too great familiarity with Lilly would bring down upon her own head the sin of the adulteress.

Lilly had much to suffer from the colonel these days. She, like the rest, now fell a victim to his attacks of fury. And what was worse, in moments of quiet self-abandon, she would suddenly feel his dark, lowering look fastened upon her, betokening many a thought in his mind which boded her no good.

She began to fear he had gotten wind of her affair with Von Prell; but Anna pooh-poohed the idea.

"The symptoms would be rather different," she remarked. "Such a suspicion would not pass without leaving a few broken chairs or lamps behind. My opinion is, he feels bored at home. He's hankering for the regiment, and holds you responsible for the change in his life. I sincerely hope he doesn't come to hate you on that account. In that event only two courses would be open to you: separation or suicide."

Here was small comfort. And no less dispiriting was his hesitation to introduce her to the neighbours. Long before, Miss von Schwertfeger had declared Lilly's education complete. No colonel's wife or high-born dame could now find fault with her manners. But the colonel looked at her distrustfully, and deferred the visits from week to week.

Lilly kept up bravely in all her tribulations. Faith in herself and, still more, faith in him, gave her peace and strength.

She regulated her days strictly according to rule with a fixed occupation for each hour. She learned Goethe's poems by heart, studied Shakespeare in English, read histories of art, and lost herself in the mazes of the French Revolution.

She took special delight in a large geographical work, in which there were many pictures of southern ports, tropical forests, and bald, rocky mountain ranges.

There were also full illustrations of Italy—pious pilgrims on crusades, enigmatic churches, and slender-columned porticos, which filled her with an ardent longing to be there.

When she travelled great distances into strange countries and looked about timidly to find her way back again, whom did she see standing there all of a sudden, blond, freckled, in a black and white checked fall suit, making deep reverences? "As my lady commands."

The tears welled up in her eyes.

Her one diversion was to stand behind her balcony door—without his knowing she was there, of course—and look over to the lodge through the openings in the vine, the last leaves of which fluttered like little red flags.

Oh, she might be proud of him. When he sat at the window in his leisure hours he never let himself be seen without the encyclopedia of agriculture in his hands.

He closed his shutters early every evening. In his frivolous days he had hung heavy portières at the windows, which, with the help of the shutters, prevented the tiniest ray of light from penetrating to the outside.

Lilly doubted not in the least that his student's lamp burned until late at night, while he sat there over his book copying valuable extracts and soaring on the pinions of great creative ideas.

She soared with him. She knew he could not lose his footing now. She had his vow, and he held her honour in his keeping. That would serve as a talisman, a guide on the road leading upward to a new life.

A few weeks passed.

He begged to be excused from coming to Sunday dinners; for which she was grateful to him. Fortune had favoured her still further by having bestowed a cold upon her that fateful night, as a result of which the physician forbade horseback riding throughout the winter. In this Miss von Schwertfeger probably had a hand.

Once on a day early in December, the colonel, as if to spite his customary surliness, appeared at dinner in high feather. He chuckled to himself, his eyes danced and looked cunning, secret laughter, as it were, ran down his cheeks in rivulets.

Lilly ventured to ask what was amusing him.

At first he refused to speak.

"Oh, stuff and nonsense, mind your own affairs." But he could not contain himself, and finally began: "Well, guess what happened to me. One of the men at the club said to me I'd better look sharp to my Prell, because stories were afloat that he kept knocking about in vile joints night after night and had even gotten mixed up in a nasty brawl on account of a hussy of a barmaid."

Lilly felt an icy numbness creep slowly upward from her feet. Her limbs grew rigid. She smiled, and the smile cut into her cheeks like a sharp-edged stone.

"At first, of course, I merely laughed at him, because, you know, there's only the one train to take going and coming, and lately *I've* been on that train nearly every day. No horse can stand twenty miles each way night after night, and the pocket money I give him won't hire a special train. That's what I said to the major; but he insisted. The younger gentlemen had told him; and it would be a pity if after all Von Prell had to be deprived of his uniform. When I got to the station at one o'clock, the business was still buzzing about in my head. I had a few moments' time, so I looked through the whole train—fourth class and all. Of course, not a sign. I did the same thing three times in succession. Well, I thought, it's a lie. And now listen. Yesterday, when I was just about to get into the train at this end, I remembered I had left my umbrella in the carriage. I can't get used to that piece of furniture. So I went back. The platform was already empty, but the train was still standing there; and when I passed the baggage car—sliding doors open—I saw someone on the opposite side jump out to the tracks and scamper off. 'Stop!' I called. But he ran and ran, into the woods. I was going to tell the baggage master, who was on the platform next to the locomotive, but Prell flashed into my mind. I said to Henry: 'Drive as if the devil were after you,' and we reached here in five minutes. But then, I reflected, he must have heard the carriage wheels from the path. So I went up to my room to hurry and turn on the lights. I wanted him to think I was in my room already. Did I wake you up, Lilly?" The colonel started. "How you look, Lilly!"

"I?" she said, and smiled again.

"She hasn't been feeling very well all day," Miss von Schwertfeger interjected hastily. "Besides, your story's very exciting, colonel. I'm all keyed up, too."

"Hm," he muttered, twisting the end of his black dyed moustache, evidently little desirous of concluding his tale. But Lilly could not calm herself.

"I must know, I must know," she cried, clasping her hands. She was beside herself.

"Well, then," said the colonel, fixing his eyes on her, "down I go again in a jiffy—in ambush in front of the lodge—there he comes, stooping like a polecat—stands still—eyes my window—sees the light—aha, he thinks, all right. And just as he's about to stick the key in the lock, I tackle him by the collar."

Lilly burst out into a mad laugh.

"Isn't that funny, isn't that funny!" she cried. This time the colonel believed her.

"Something funnier's coming," he continued. "'If you confess everything,' I said, 'I'll pardon you. But only on that condition. Otherwise you're off to-morrow bright and early.' Well, what do you think the rascal was up to? The good-for-nothing has a lady love—barmaid in the Golden Apple—where the sergeants and clerks resort. So, for the sake of bumming with her, he bribed a railroad official and actually went to town and came back as a piece of the king's baggage. Night after night rode in the same train as I did—each way. If *that* isn't rank impudence, what—Lilly!"

A pause ensued. Lilly experienced a sensation of swaying and reeling as if tossed on stormy seas, a buzzing and singing; at the same time she felt Miss von Schwertfeger press her hand under the table by way of warning.

The colonel rose, took Lilly's head between his hands, and pressing it until she thought her ears would split, said:

"It seems you *do* need rest."

With that he faced about, and left the room abruptly.

"Now gather your wits together," Lilly heard her friend's disturbed voice behind her, "because after this he'll be on the look-out."

Lilly wanted to throw herself on Miss von Schwertfeger's breast and be petted and comforted. But Miss von Schwertfeger, as if afraid somebody might catch her in too intimate a conversation with Lilly, held herself aloof, and said coolly, though in a friendly tone:

"Excuse me, dear, I have something I must attend to this minute."

With that, she, too, left the room.

What now?

Lilly stared into space. The remnants of the precipitate meal littered the table; the dark carved furniture cast black-edged rays from out of the room's wintry twilight; the brass chandeliers gleamed palely. All was as usual, and yet nothing was there, nothing but an awful, all-devouring void, an abyss which drew her into its bosom with the enticements of grappling hooks and huge tongs.

She stepped to the window and looked out apathetically.

The bare branches swayed in the wind, the ivy on the railing fluttered, even the arched stalks of the rose bushes, the heads of which the gardener had secured under heaps of earth, trembled and quivered this way and that. The world was writhing in the clutch of winter. The only still things were the leaves lying on the thin coating of snow which covered the ground; but the leaves were dead already.

What now?

If *that* could happen, then the very earth beneath her feet gave way; then there was no hope, no rising to loftier heights, no strength, and no fidelity; then you might as well throw yourself down beside the leaves out there and die.

But before that—what?

Dishes rattled behind her. No one had rung for the maid, but she had come of her own accord and was helping Ferdinand clear the table.

Lilly thought of Katie and that other creature in whose arms he had made mock of her and her faith in him.

She dragged her torpid legs up the steps to the rooms where she felt at home. In passing the colonel's door, she caught the sound of his tread as he fairly ran to and fro.

She experienced not the faintest fear of him.

"Let him run, if he wants to," she thought.

When in her own room, she heard him give orders to have the carriage brought around immediately.

"For all I care, he may stay here."

She stepped out on the balcony.

The iciness benumbing her neck crept into her arms and spread down to her very finger tips.

There sat Walter, as always in his free time after dinner, completely absorbed in the great encyclopedia of agriculture, so full of zeal for study that every now and then he would pass his hand through his hair in a preoccupied way and without looking up—he hadn't so much time to spare, Heavens! no!—he would flick the ashes from his cigarette into a flower pot.

In the face of this infamous game, which he played for the sole purpose of deceiving her, Lilly was seized by a wild, infuriated desire to denounce him, which completely robbed her of her senses. A stinging and pricking lifted her paralysed arms. The iciness gave way to a painful fever, which throbbed in her temples, and hung a red curtain before her eyes.

She saw nothing, heard nothing.

She rushed down the staircase, tore open the garden door, leapt down the stone steps, and ran at full speed straight across the lawn to the lodge.

Whether someone spied her or not she did not care.

The door to his room banged against the wall.

She had not stopped to knock.

A rank, pungent smell, as in a menagerie, assailed her nostrils.

There he was, sitting at the window. He jumped to his feet. The grey daylight glided over his head.

"He's had his hair cut brush fashion again," thought Lilly. "The dissolute life he's living demands it; the elegance of the dives demands it."

"Good Lord!" he said, crumbling his burning cigarette between his fingers, "a pretty howdy-do!"

"Why—? Why did you—?" she screamed at him. "You're a blackguard! Your word's not to be trusted! You're a liar!"

"Confound it!" he said, and looked about helplessly. "*How* will my lady get out of this mess?"

"You broke your promise—the most sacred bond uniting us. You—you—threw it away on a barmaid—a barmaid, a creature who would hang herself on anybody's neck for a couple of pennies. You're a vulgar profligate! You're not worth a woman's having tried to save you—you don't *want* to be saved—you *want* to go to the bad—"

"All very good and fine," he said, "and probably very saddening and incontrovertible truths; but will my lady please explain how she expects to get out of here?"

"I don't know anything I am more indifferent about," she cried. "I came for you to give me an account of yourself. I am asking you to answer me—immediately—here—now—on the spot."

"Certainly, my lady, I will without fail. But first—damn it! hell! Get away from the window!"

He cast a sharp, all-embracing glance at the castle. Nothing suspicious to be detected at that moment, at least.

Alarmed by his snarling at her in that way, Lilly fled into the interior of the room, which was low, dark, and ill furnished. Here the vile animal smell was still stronger. From where it came was made clear to her the next instant. As she approached the rear wall, something suddenly snapped at her foot, and two little circular torches gleamed up at her wickedly.

"Down, Tommy!" called Von Prell, while Lilly recoiled with an exclamation of fright.

So that was Tommy, the other member of the triple alliance.

Lilly leaned against the arm of the old spindle-legged sofa. Its worn springs squeaked under her pressure and pricked her thumbs, and the thought flashed into her mind:

"What am I doing here? What is it all to me?"

Von Prell the while stepped from door to door listening.

"If that old Leichtweg had happened to be in the next room," he said, "we should be dying a dog's death. But if you go this instant, the front way, into the courtyard, they might suppose you had come to ask something, and perhaps we can patch it up still."

All Lilly perceived in his words was a sly attempt at evasion, and a fresh flood of indignation overwhelmed her.

"First justify yourself," she cried. "Until you do, I won't go this way, or that way, or the other way."

To enforce her resolve she dropped down on the screeching sofa, which was covered with a dirty grey horseblanket folded into several thicknesses for protection against the sharp points of the springs.

He was compelled to yield.

"Very well, then, look here—a fellow's a human being, isn't he? And if he's given the go-by in that common way—"

"Common way?" faltered Lilly. "What was common in my letter? Didn't I tear my heart out and throw it at your feet, and didn't Miss von Schwertfeger—?"

She could not continue. Wrath and despair choked her utterance.

In the meantime Von Prell, who at first had been at a complete loss, arrived at the proper policy to adopt.

"Yes, that's just it," he said, growing more aggrieved with each word. "Is a love like ours to be

concluded with a lukewarm homily? And that Schwertfeger—did I deserve being dismissed by you like an asthmatic old dog through the intermediation of a third person, a horrid, disgusting creature? Isn't it enough to make a man desperate after all he's done for you?"

"What—did you—do for me?" queried Lilly.

"Well—wasn't I a self-sacrificing comrade the whole time? Wasn't I disloyal even to my old colonel for your sake, that fine old gentleman, who saved my life, you might say? You see, all that's no small matter. Do you suppose it didn't cut me to the quick? Do you suppose I didn't get the blues? And then to be fooling round here alone night after night with that dung-beetle, that Tommy—the beast smells, I tell you. So why not try to dull one's feelings? Shouldn't I—how shall I say?—deaden the anguish of lost love? Not even deaden it? It's a perfect mystery to me how you can demand such a thing of me. We speak different languages, my dear child—there's a yawning chasm dividing our natures—and you're even willing to risk our two lives for such mummery. As a rule, I'm *not* an old aunt, but indeed, if only I had you out of this place."

Throughout this long speech he had walked about Lilly in a semicircle, with one hand thrust in the belt of his Norfolk jacket, making short, jerky steps, which forcefully expressed his righteous indignation.

Lilly sat on the sofa stiffly upright, mechanically turning her head after him now to the right, now to the left, and staring at him with great, uncomprehending eyes.

When he stopped speaking, he drew a cigarette from the case and energetically beat off the superfluous tobacco with the index finger of his left hand.

Lilly rose in all her height, leaving the sofa and the table next to the sofa far below her.

"Listen, Walter," she said, "from this moment everything between us is at an end."

"Why, wasn't it long ago?"

"I mean—inwardly, too."

"Oh, inwardly, too!" He made a little grimace. "With you that probably means if you have something in your stomach."

When Lilly saw her love so ridiculed and mutilated, she could no longer restrain herself. With an outcry she ran from the sofa, and hid her face—anywhere at all—on the wall next to the window.

"Get away from the window!" she heard him hiss.

Oh, what did she care!

In the extremity of his fright he took to pleading.

"Just come away from the window," he said. "It was all mere twaddle. I simply wanted to make you laugh again, nothing more. Please come away from the window."

She did not budge.

To crawl off somewhere! To crawl away and hide herself and all her shame.

She felt his hands seize her rudely.

That, too! To suffer violence, too!

She flung him off, wrestled with him, clawed at his neck—

And suddenly—

A whistling, a clash and clatter—shivers of glass flew over their heads, and a long, dark something, like the shaft of a lance, sped past them, knocked against something, rebounded, and fell at their feet.

The same instant Lilly felt a rush of cold air on her forehead, which aroused her from the stupefaction of surprise.

One of the two upper window panes had been broken.

No living creature was to be seen. But the balcony door yonder, which had been closed a moment before, now showed a dark opening, and was swinging shut.

"A narrow escape," murmured Walter, and stooped to pick up the mysterious thing from the floor, while the fragments of glass gritted beneath his feet.

"The pea-shooter," Lilly faltered.

"A mercy he didn't happen to have his fowling-piece at hand," said Walter, "else we'd be riddled into sieves."

With the back of his hand he wiped away the sweat of fright standing on his forehead in bright beads.

None the less he was a brave little chap, and knew on the instant what to do.

He sprang to the wardrobe under which Tommy had burrowed, fetched out his army revolver, and tested all its parts. Then he said:

"Now, please go into Leichtweg's room, and lock yourself in. The colonel's simply gone to load his gun. Then he'll be here."

But Lilly refused. Her wrath against him had completely evaporated.

"Let me stay with you, let me stay with you!" she begged, clasping his shoulders.

"Impossible, child," he replied, with the old masterful lift to his brows. "What's coming is men's business."

"Then I'll stand out in the hall, and receive him at your door."

He bit his lips.

"Well," he said, "if you take it that way, I can't help myself. Sit down, please."

He removed the key from the outside of the door, stuck it in the lock on the inside and cautiously turned it several times.

"Between loading and shooting," he said then, "there's a great big difference—but the devil knows."

He took out his watch, and listened intently for sounds from the outside, while he counted, "a half—one—one and a half—two. Probably can't find his cartridges." Then commandingly: "Do sit down. You'll need your legs to-day."

Lilly sank in one corner of the sofa, and he seated himself in the other, placing the watch between them on the bumpy seat. Both counted now with their eyes fastened on the second hand. "Two and a half—three—three and a half—four—four and a half—five minutes."

Not a sound, save the wind howling in the bare branches.

Then it seemed to them they heard the trot of horses starting in the courtyard and dying away on the other side of the gates.

"Whom's he gone to fetch?" asked Walter. "We're not ready for seconds yet."

Red suns danced before Lilly's eyes. The ceiling began to rise and sink.

Walter kept on counting.

"Seven—eight—eight and a half."

Nothing.

"Nine—nine and a half—ten—" Suddenly he emitted a faint whistle, and grasped his revolver.

The front door grated on its hinges, steps resounded, but not the threatening, thundering steps of a vengeful husband. They were soft, hesitating, dragging steps.

Then for a while nothing again—no sound, except the breathing of two persons—and someone else—on the other side of the door, it seemed.

"Who's there?" called Walter.

Now came a knock.

Soft, broken, as if of trembling, failing fingers.

"Who's there, in the devil's name?" he called again.

"Anna von Schwertfeger."

He jumped up and opened the door.

There she stood, ashen-hued, red about the mouth, her lids quivering.

"The colonel has just driven off to Baron von Platow. He will return in three hours. He charged me to tell you, Lilly, that when he comes back he doesn't want to find you on his premises."

"And what did he charge you to tell me?" sneered Walter von Prell.

Miss von Schwertfeger, without regarding him, took Lilly's hand.

"Come. You haven't much time. We must pack."

"But—but where am I to go?" she asked, helplessly, suffering herself to be drawn to her feet.

When she got to the door of the lodge, she saw the carriage that was to convey her from the castle already rolling up the driveway.

PART II

CHAPTER I

She was Lilly Czepanek again.

In the divorce proceedings there had been no attempt at dissimulation or concealment, and the case moved along rapidly. Lilly alone was found guilty, and, upon the colonel's deposition, was deprived of the right to use her married name.

"There is nothing to be saved from the ruins," wrote Mr. Pieper, "except the jewels which I hope you diligently accumulated by following my advice and standing in front of fine shop-windows. The pearl necklace your ex-husband put about your neck on your wedding day—owing in part, I may now say, to my suggestion—which I will try to get back for you, is in itself sufficient to keep your head above water several years."

The result of this letter was that Lilly took the pearl necklace, which after her flight she had found in one of her trunks among the laces and evening gowns, carried it to a jeweller, had him pack it up, and addressed it to Miss von Schwertfeger.

She felt justified in considering the less valuable trinkets to be her personal property. She had already disposed of a considerable number of them, and what was left would scarcely suffice for more than half a year. Then poverty.

But her material condition gave her little concern.

Her regret for what she had lost was too profound, her consciousness of the shame she had undergone too lively, but that her future should not have been hidden from her perceptions behind a veil of tears.

Yes, tears, tears—oh, she learned to shed tears.

She learned to swallow tears like salt sea water; she sucked them into her mouth with her lower lip thrust out, she shook them from her cheeks like drops of rain. And they kept welling up again, finally without cause, even after the pain had subsided—awake or asleep, they just came.

She had gone away that grey, windy December day just before nightfall in a trembling state of stupefaction without complaint, without attempts at self-justification.

Gone away blindly—anywhere—simply gone away—in all haste.

She landed in Berlin, the haven of all the wrecked.

In that world where oblivion spreads its blessing hands alike over the righteous and unrighteous, where enticing possibilities flash and sparkle, illuminating the dark days of inertness and prostration, where regret over a lost past by and by becomes tense, desirous expectation of happiness, and where the god Chance reigns supreme—in that world of the unknown and forsaken, in which none but those who are both old and poor sink into nothingness, hopeless outlaws—into that world Lilly crept.

Many a dreary month she knocked about in lodging houses where divorcées with lost reputations huddle together, reminding one of little heaps of decaying apples; where the tone is given by Chilian attachés and agents of mysterious trades from Bucharest and Alexandria. In a friendly way she avoided the confidences of companions in misery, who lavished words of comfort, and with mute disregard repelled the advances—physical advances as well—of her enterprising, olive-complexioned neighbours.

After a while she began to look about for a position—something unique, something between a lady in waiting and a chaperon, which would not be incongruous with her former station and the quiet dignity of her bearing.

But positions of that sort seemed remarkably scarce.

And all she reaped of her endeavours were the tender attentions of a few old gentlemen who came to see her in the evening, and could not find their way out again until the door was held wide open for them.

Discouraged, she gave up going to employment bureaus and the useless ringing of front door bells. But her expectations had not yet sunk to the level of those of a shop-girl or model in a dressmaking establishment. And they never would sink so low, because "general's wife," as she was branded, no matter where she went, was written all over her.

In that seething sea of humanity she tossed about without so much as a straw to clutch at; except, indeed, Walter's letter, which Miss von Schwertfeger forwarded to her two months after her expulsion. The poor boy was now completely ruined. Nevertheless, his letter gave proof of a modest attempt to offer her some support.

"Dearest Friend:—

I'm done for. I've been shot. A mere trifle when it happens to others; but when it happens to oneself, the consequence is, it considerably lessens one's hopes of entering upon a glorious career as head waiter on the other side of the Atlantic.

Nevertheless I thank fate for having been gracious enough to lead across my path so good, so touching a lamb, one so filled with the desire to redeem, as my baronissima.

You will readily understand, O dearest, supergracious woman, that I in turn also feel a slight obligation to play the redeemer, if only to preserve our souls for each other.

But "the how" presents some difficulties, to be sure. If I were to recommend you to the care of my former friends, your future would be settled. For in blissful hours leaves and virtues still fall.

Therefore I descend a step to those regions in which a sturdy Philistinism creeps on its belly before our coronets, even when those coronets lie shattered on the ground.

In Alte Jakobstrasse in Berlin there dwells a respectable manufacturer of bronze ware, a comrade of the reserves, etc., by name Richard Dehnicke, who feels he is indebted to me because I pumped him for coin.

I am writing to him by this mail. Step boldly in among his lamps and vases. The former, I hope, will brighten your nights, the latter, daintily line your way in life, and he will not ask the price which it is the custom in our country to demand of beautiful women. Some queer fish there have to be in the world.

My address will be

Walter von Prell,
Street-lounger & Candidate for Fortune,
Chicago, First Stockyard to the Left.

P. S.—Tommy sends his regards. Before going I planted a ball in his forehead."

This letter, the last and only greeting from her friend, left Lilly untouched. Soon after, Miss von Schwertfeger wrote, he set sail for the United States with a crippled arm. Their love had deserved an honourable burial, even if its rapture had not been genuine, even if its lofty purpose had set in dirt and disgrace.

"If only to preserve our souls for each other," he had written, the dear little fellow.

The letter, however, offered a certain guarantee that in her hour of need, a helping hand would be stretched out to steady her. But the measure he recommended, she never, never thought of adopting. What she feared above all was that something which emanated from the eyes of men fixed upon her face in desire, that something which issued from men's lips persuasively, masterfully.

She wanted to keep her fate in her own hands and go her own way.

What that way was to be, she had not yet determined.

So irresolute had sorrow and anxiety made her that nothing but a faint breeze would have been required to head her life in a certain direction.

But no breeze blew upon her.

Months passed. Miss von Schwertfeger ceased to write. Lilly's money gave out. The little treasure of trinkets dwindled rapidly.

The lodging houses to which she moved grew ever more modest. Chilian attachés and Greek traffickers were replaced by bankrupt real estate agents and unemployed bank clerks, who wanted to solace her in her loneliness by spending the evenings with her. And the women who came in soiled kimonos to pay her neighbourly visits cast greedy glances at the few brooches, bracelets and rings she still had left.

So Lilly determined to make an end of this life.

CHAPTER II

One of the best of the "best rooms" in Berlin which are to be found in houses having once known those renowned better days and which are let out to decent young women for thirty marks, including service and breakfast, was to be had from the widow Clothilde Laue.

It contained red plush furniture, which embodied the acme of good taste at the time of the Franco-Prussian War. It contained a pier glass fantastically stuck from top to bottom with New Year's cards, cards of congratulation, and illustrated advertisements of soaps and powders. It contained photographs on the walls of actors once famous, whose fame in the meantime had

faded no less than the autographs they had written beneath their pictures. It contained a washstand, whose marble top was covered with a tidy embroidered with the sententious couplet:

> To keep your body clean, be sure
> To have your conscience just as pure.

It contained photograph albums, card-cases, a cigar clip in the shape of a windmill of olive wood, a green glass punch bowl, and a shaky pine bed modestly hidden behind blue woolen portières.

It contained, finally, hung over the sofa in a gilt-edged glass case, a mysterious round creation. The thing consisted of six strips of paper braided together and radiating from a common centre. It was covered with gauze, beneath which the outline of pressed flowers could dimly be distinguished.

It was in this best room on Neanderstrasse, four flights up, over a china shop, a piano-renting establishment, and a "repair studio," from the windows of which room an oblique view was to be obtained of the greenish grey waves of the Engelbecken, and into which a broad expanse of genuine Berlin smoky sky actually shone, that Lilly one day landed.

Mrs. Laue was a woman of fifty, worn out by overwork, with a face like a dried apple, and great staring, tearful eyes. She circled about Lilly in incredulous admiration, as if unable to comprehend that so much brilliance and beauty had strayed into her home.

The very day of her arrival Lilly was informed of her history. Her husband had been cashier and bookkeeper at one of the favorite variety theatres in Berlin, and twenty years before had departed this world, leaving her without home or protection. There was no rosy glamour to glorify tears wept in solitude, no comic songs to drown the cry of hunger.

Here that mysterious round creation, which on closer inspection proved to be a lamp shade, came to her rescue. It had been presented to her by an artistic friend, and it occurred to her to use it as a model for making others to sell.

After peddling her wares about for years, after long drudgery and disenchantments of all sorts, she at last conquered a market for her "pressed-flower lamp shades," and won for herself a name as specialist in her field.

In her back room with one window, which smelled of hay and paste, and where hundreds of dried flowers lay on a long white deal table—she herself did not gather them, of course, for lack of time—she had worked for nearly two decades tapping, daubing, pasting, drying, threading, and weaving sixteen hours a day, and had earned—thanks to her renown as a specialist!—so much that she was compelled to rent her best room, her treasure chamber, her sanctuary, to a stranger for thirty marks a month.

Lilly and Mrs. Laue, it is true, did not remain strangers.

Into the existence of this back-room being, in whose eyes a few betinseled ballet-dancers were paragons of beauty, the embodiment of unattainable splendour, Lilly descended from the world of genuine aristocracy as from heavenly heights. Her hostess idolised her, because she saw in her a messenger from that wholly improbable land which exists only in novels, and in which words like "lackey" and "drawing-room," and "pearl necklace"—Lilly soon told Mrs. Laue of hers—and other such things as one allows to melt on one's tongue with half-closed eyes, are taken as a matter of course.

Mrs. Laue immediately became Lilly's confidante and counsellor. She helped her overcome the shame consequent upon the divorce trial, she encouraged her when the feeling of being lost unnerved her, and she held before her eyes the prospect of a radiant future.

In great, powerful, wonder-working Berlin, nobody need succumb. Every day a dozen lucky chances might occur to help one to one's feet. There were lonely old ladies who were desperately seeking heiresses for their fortunes, there were noble young women who, disgusted with the artificiality of their surroundings, helplessly yearned to reach out the hand of companionship to a beautiful poor orphan; there were celebrated artists who sought to escape the snares of lewd women in the arms of a pure love; there were great poets with whom the position of muse had become vacant.

The whole city seemed to have been waiting for Lilly's coming to lift her jubilantly to the throne of mistress.

More months passed.

Regret for her squandered life gradually lost its edge. Her nights became calmer. She no longer started out of a drowse with a cry because some picture of her paradise lost stood before her with horrible vividness.

But one thing she did not learn: to consider the brief span during which she had wandered on the heights as a mere episode that had interrupted her true, modest life like a caprice, a dream. In her consciousness she was and remained a sort of enchanted princess in the guise of a beggar until it pleased Providence to reinstate her in her own.

She solicitously cherished everything reminding her of her vanished glory.

The gala robes the colonel had had made for her in Dresden hung in Mrs. Laue's wardrobe; her underwear embroidered with the seven-pointed coronet filled Mrs. Laue's empty drawers with their blossom-like delicacy, and in a long row in front of the tall mirror in Mrs. Laue's best room lay the superb toilet articles of ivory and gold which had once been the pride of her "boudoir." These, too, still bore the seven-pointed coronet. Lilly would have considered it an outrage upon her most sacred rights had she had to part with them.

And all the time she awaited the future. She still studied advertisements, and wrote letters applying for positions; but the advertisements were usually forgotten and the letters seldom mailed.

However, feeling the need of occupation and companionship, she got into the habit of sitting with Mrs. Laue in the back room and helping her with her work. Soon she, too, was tapping, pasting, daubing, threading, and weaving just like her teacher. Having inherited taste and talent for everything artistic she soon outstripped Mrs. Laue. After having sold the shades Mrs. Laue would relate without envy how the patterns she designed and set together were instantly recognised and preferred.

Lilly's ambition was aroused. She strove to create works of art. She could not toil enough.

"If you wouldn't fool such a time over every little spray," was Mrs. Laue's criticism, "you would make more money than I do." After each transaction Mrs. Laue honestly settled accounts with Lilly.

But Lilly was satisfied with the forty or fifty marks a month that her work brought in. Her newly aroused fancy flew toward higher goals.

The dried grasses, the "grass flowers," as Mrs. Laue called them, charmed her especially. Their slender, aspiring stalks, the delicate grace of their branchings, the weary mourning of their hanging sprays, caused them to resemble tiny trees, weeping willows at the edge of a brook, ash-trees inclining over marble urns, or palms longingly rooted on parched rocks.

Lilly dreamed of a new sort of art—paintings on transparent glass with foregrounds of dried grass; lamp shades and window shades, on which woods of flowering grass and ferns charmingly shaded pasteboard houses standing out in relief with their windows cut out to let light shine as if from within; fleecy clouds, glowing sunsets, ridges of hills in hazy outline, and dark blue rivers, across which the moon threw swaying bridges of light.

An endless succession of pictures suddenly took form in Lilly's mind, and new ones kept coming and coming. She did not know what to do with all that wealth of imagery.

Mrs. Laue, who for twenty years had unswervingly stuck to pasting her oiled paper and felt that every desire to abandon her modest work was heretical, warned Lilly with all her might.

But Lilly was possessed.

And one day she resorted to extreme measures. She took her arrow-shaped brooch set with six small emeralds to the jeweler, who gave her eighty marks. It was worth five times as much, of course. She used the money to buy polished cut-glass plates, which were held together in pairs by brass screws and could be hung at the window by dainty chains. She also purchased a box of paints, and while Mrs. Laue clasped her hands in dismay, she set to painting bravely.

But her skill, which consisted of nothing more than some recollections of water-color lessons at high school, failed her utterly. The colors ran together, and the woods in the foreground, which had significance and value only in conjunction with the painted landscape, remained nothing but fern leaves and grass blades, rooted in nothingness.

Lilly agonised a long time. Finally shedding hot tears she threw all the stuff into a corner, and ruefully returned to her lamp shades. She again took to pasting oiled paper wings and weaving six of them together with white silk ribbons.

Mrs. Laue, who during the weeks of Lilly's truancy had maintained glum silence, took again to depicting seductive futures. All the fancies that had been held fast in her poor brain for twenty long years were set free, now that she herself had nothing to hope for, and were laid in Lilly's outstretched hands.

As for Lilly, she continued to listen greedily; but a feeling began to oppress her soul that as her life went on—that which she called life—she was sinking slowly, almost imperceptibly, but deeper, deeper every day into this dark, sorry existence; and she was tormented by a horror of her landlady, of that limited human being in whose great, watery, red-rimmed eyes a hopeless desire for life's attractions still shone, although her lamp shades had brought her nearly to the edge of the grave.

This horror often came upon Lilly so powerfully that she had to run out of doors, no matter where—out into the world, into the arms of life.

Before an hour had elapsed she was back again. The streets frightened her. The painted prostitutes who brushed her shoulders, the young fellows hunting for game who trotted behind her, the unconcerned brazenness with which each and every one elbowed his way—all this filled her with apprehension and made a coward of her.

A dim feeling told her she would never again be equal to that lusty independence which takes pleasure in fight. She seemed to herself a helpless cripple, when she remembered the poor shop-girl who in cozy security performed her duties among Mrs. Asmussen's old volumes, and felt she was in the right even when she lied and deceived and was beaten and obviously was in the wrong.

Then the waiting—the waiting—the never-sleeping, ever-hungry waiting.

For what? She herself did not know.

But something *had* to come. Her life *could* not end here among those bits of oiled paper.

From time to time the thought of the rich bronze manufacturer to whom Walter had recommended her rose to the surface of her soul as a vague craving. But the fervor with which she clung to this shadow terrified her, and she instantly chased it from her mind.

A year had passed since Walter's letter had been written. It was much too late to seek help from him.

So she waited a few months more.

Sometimes when her glance fell on the mirror while she was undressing and she beheld the image of a human being consecrated by beauty, round, slim, with long-lashed, yearning eyes and a mouth ripened by kisses, glad astonishment seized her at the thought: "Is that myself?" And she was overcome by a transport compounded of consciousness of her youth and readiness for love.

The world was there just to press her to its heart. Then even that dingy work-a-day existence became a blessing, because it keyed up her energies to intoxication and flight.

And at twilight, when she stretched herself on the sofa in a brief moment of leisure, and saw the blue flash of the electric tram flit across the ceiling, dreams came gently gliding upon her, resolving that burning expectancy into soft, half-fulfilled desires; a feeling that she had been saved stole over her soul like a thanksgiving, and that which she usually bewailed as lost happiness became nothing more than a nightmare from which a benign destiny had freed her.

But such hours were rare. And they resembled the solacing mirage that arises before the eyes of the thirsty traveller, rather than the drink itself.

The winter passed in fog and rain.

Now came the mild March evenings when rosy clouds floated like blossoms over the house tops. Then came spring itself. The freshly trimmed little trees on the open places put forth brownish green buds, which by degrees turned into pale bunches of leaves.

Lilly saw as little of all that glad bourgeoning, that snowy florescence of cherry trees, that brilliant glow of the hawthorne as when she dusted the yellow powder from Mrs. Asmussen's bookcases.

Mrs. Laue did not like taking walks. To her the idea of passing a meadow without gathering flowers, or a garden without thrusting her hand between the rails, was inconceivable; and she feared being caught in the act, an experience she had often had.

Lilly for her part would not venture out alone, dreading the unrestrained crowd.

Then came those hot, hazy, oppressive Sunday afternoons when endless throngs stream from the city to the suburbs, when the streets lie stretched out dead in all their length, and when the overcast heavens fairly weigh upon those who have been left to pant between the walls of the houses.

On those afternoons Mrs. Laue would stick genuine rhinestone studs into her ears, would don a brown velvet dress with a black jet collar on the square-cut neck, and in this costume would pay Lilly a formal visit in the best room. The Dresden gowns would be taken from the wardrobe and carefully compared with the gorgeous dresses worn by the charming ladies of the proscenium box twenty-five years before. The faded pictures of long-forgotten stars would be fetched down from the walls and examined as to their charms. Exciting tales would be told of their own adventures, in which, amid blithe sinning, marital fidelity asserted its modest worth.

The afternoon would decline pale and perspiring as a fever patient. A hot breeze would blow in through the window. The varnish of the rosewood furniture would reek, the walls of the houses opposite would shine as if polished with wax, and Mrs. Laue, munching her cheese cake, would again repeat the tale of her stale virtues.

When at last she took leave Lilly would groan and sink on her bed, burying her face in the close-smelling pillows. From without she would hear the shouts of the merry-makers returning from the country.

The next morning the pasting of flowers would begin anew.

July came. She could no longer endure it.

One Monday, while she was lying in bed and early dawn found her still awake, still waiting, her pillow wet with tears, the desire for life suddenly gripped her heart so strongly that she jumped from bed with an outcry, a jubilant exclamation, and finally determined: "I will do it to-day. I will take the difficult step, and go on a begging pilgrimage to that strange man."

But no—mercy, no! Beg—she would not beg. Oh, she had long before carefully arranged all that.

She would merely ask for a bit of advice, which an experienced connoisseur of arts and crafts could easily give without sacrificing more than five minutes of his business time. She would simply find out from him how and where she could learn transparency-painting.

Whatever his answer, the foundations of a new life would have been laid.

CHAPTER III

Was it a path of destiny?

The street wore its usual appearance. Truck waggons rattled along; women doing their marketing crowded in front of the provision shops; young men, hastening by with portfolios or books in their arms found time to turn and look after her. Lilly perceived this as always with a sense partly of satisfaction, partly of chagrin.

Was it a path of destiny?

The throbbing of her heart as she walked along said to her, "Yes."

She felt she was going to market to sell herself.

Herself—everything left of herself; her bit of pride, her bit of freedom, her faith that she was one of the elect, her faith in the miracle that some day was to be accomplished in her behalf.

The walk lasted nearly an hour.

She lost her way. She asked the policemen. She stood in front of shop windows to look at her reflection—she was afraid of not pleasing. And each time she saw the soft, slim contour of her tall figure with its air of pleasant self-sufficiency, she drew a breath of relief.

When she read the name of the street where he dwelt, she started in fright. She had secretly hoped she would not find it, and would have to return after all.

His house presented nothing remarkable. A grey, four-story structure with a broad, unadorned square carriage entrance, across the full width of which was a scaffolding

Liebert & Dehnicke
Manufacturers of Metal Wares

was inscribed in gold characters on an enormous iron plate stretching along half the front of the house.

From the opposite side of the street she scrutinised every detail, still oppressed by the question whether she had not better turn back.

The second story windows were closely hung with dainty écru lace curtains. On the sills were snowy white porcelain pots filled with geraniums and marigolds. That part of the house looked better kept and more prosperous than everything round about.

"That's probably where he lives," she thought, and felt a slight dread in the face of so much serene yet severe beauty.

Then she took heart, crossed the street, and made straight for the door with iron grill work, which was next to the carriage entrance and seemed to lead up to that awe-inspiring second story.

But the door was locked, and before ringing she peeped through the grating. She saw a dark staircase solemnly lined with cypress trees and laurel bushes. In the background at the head of the stairs was a window glowing blue and red and throwing rainbow colors on a white bust in front of it. Lilly recognized the bust, having seen it in the display windows of the art shops. It was Clytie, whom she had always loved because of her gentle melancholy.

As she looked upon all this her heart sank again. She seemed to herself totally unworthy to step into those formal, peaceful regions. So she descended the three door steps and entered the profaner carriage entrance, where several labourers in white overalls were busily engaged covering the bare brick walls with highly veined marble stucco.

Men were at work in the yard as well. The round cobble stones with which it had once been paved were lying in heaps, and the ground was being covered with an ornate mosaic, of a light grey broken by white swirls and circles, like the flooring in ancient churches.

At the back of the yard rose the bald brick side of the factory, which also was undergoing

changes in accordance with the general beautifying scheme. Up to about the second story the wall was being set with yellow and blue tiles. They looked gay and festive, and upon the completion of the repairs the old smoky court would have the appearance of a decorated salon.

"They're doing things here in great style," thought Lilly, growing even more timid.

To her left in a corner of the court she saw a building to which not a drop of the varnish being used on the other parts of the establishment had been applied. It stood there with bare, dun-colored plastered walls. Next to an extremely plain flight of iron steps was a metal plate inscribed "Office."

Lilly went up the iron steps and entered a badly lighted, dusty room divided in two by a wooden rail, on the farther side of which a half dozen young people were sitting at desks covered with spotted, threadbare felt. They all stared at her in astonishment. It did not occur to one of them to ask her what she wanted.

Evidently a person like herself had never before been seen in the place.

The group was turned to stone and did not regain animation until she drew her card from her gold brocade purse and silently laid it on the table. Then the six of them jumped up and tried to get possession of it. There came near being a row.

But one of them, a tall, straw-complexioned fellow, who seemed to have some authority, chased the others back to their seats with a few furtive nudges, and bowing and scraping, said to Lilly he would immediately go see whether Mr. Dehnicke—and with the card in his hand disappeared into a back room.

A few moments passed. Lilly could hear subdued voices through the half-open door.

"Czepanek? Don't know her. Ask her what she wants. What does she look like?"

The answer, which lasted several seconds, seemed to have been satisfactory, for the clerk came out and without further ado opened the gate in the wooden railing and ushered Lilly into the back room.

At last *he* stood before her.

Stocky, middle-sized—shorter than herself—with a tendency toward stoutness. A round, well-kept face, good, greyish blue eyes, which said little; an arched brow, light brown hair brushed back smooth from his temples, a short moustache turned up abruptly at each end, probably to proclaim the lieutenant. Remarkably small hands and ears. Everything about him breathed tidiness and scrupulousness, though it would not have mattered if he had been less well groomed.

He was taken aback at Lilly's entrance. His eyes grew round with polite astonishment.

The consciousness that she had not failed to make an impression emboldened her, and gave her a sense of security. It was not in vain that she had gone through Miss von Schwertfeger's schooling.

"I have come to you at the recommendation of a friend of both of us, who prepared you for this visit," she began, inwardly rejoiced to be able once again to play the *grande dame*.

A mirror hung opposite, and Lilly regarded with satisfaction the discreet wreath of violets about her lilac turban, and the violet-coloured tailor-made suit. Her image looking affably from the frame reminded her of a picture by some portrait painter of high life.

Mr. Dehnicke silently drew up a chair for her. An expectant distrust was to be detected in his eyes in place of the consternation of the first seconds. Evidently he did not dare to place her in the class in which, to judge from her appearance, she belonged.

His head was set a bit obliquely on his neck, inclining to the left, as if he had recently had an attack of lumbago. This posture increased Lilly's impression that he suspected her.

She looked down at her brocade purse, and acted as if she could scarcely suppress a smile.

He became still more confused.

"May I ask," he stammered, "who that friend—? I don't recall." In perplexity he turned over the visiting card his clerk had brought him.

Lilly rebelled at having to utter her former lover's name, and so expose her shame to the man who lived behind those respectable porcelain flower pots.

"Is it possible," she asked hesitatingly, "that you do not recall having received a letter from a comrade in your regiment, in which he asks you to interest yourself in a lady who—"

Mr. Dehnicke jumped to his feet and reddened to the roots of his hair. His eyes grew bright and round between his stretched lids and threatened to pop from their sockets.

"I beg pardon," he faltered. "You probably refer to a letter which I received nearly a year and a half ago from Lieutenant von Prell?"

"I do."

"My lady," he cried, completely upset. "If I had suspected that my lady—"

So much simple respect was depicted on his face that Lilly's consciousness of aristocracy was heightened quite a bit.

But so it could not remain.

"I call myself Lilly—Czepanek," she whispered, blushing in her turn, though delighting in the expression "call myself," which permitted the assumption that she had voluntarily chosen to use her maiden name.

Fright at the indelicacy of which he thought himself guilty was plainly to be read in his features.

"I beg pardon," he said, "I should have remembered that you must have gone through many difficulties." Then as if shot from a pistol: "Why didn't you come sooner? I waited and waited—a month—several months—then I took to looking for you—in vain. I even thought of going to a detective bureau, but I feared overstepping the bounds of reserve—"

Lilly nodded with a smile of appreciation.

"Unfortunately I did not dream of another name. So I gave up the hope of ever having the great pleasure—"

In the exuberance of his delight he seemed prepared to clasp her hand. However, he proved himself sufficiently well bred to desist when he saw she did not respond.

Lilly now had the reins of the situation in her hands. She felt she was so saturated with the romance of suffering, so enveloped by the delicate aroma of aristocratic aloofness, that she might just have stepped out of one of Mrs. Asmussen's novels.

"I am grateful to you for your reproaches. I see I did not knock at your door in vain."

"I assure you," he replied, inclining his head still more to the left by way of emphasis, "I place myself at your service with all my powers, with everything I am and—" He paused. The word "have," which should naturally have followed, was more than he, the scrupulous business man, would allow to pass his lips so lightly.

"I will not make great demands on you, of course," Lilly replied airily, to put a little damper on his ardour. "I simply do not want to be without someone to advise me as to a way of earning my livelihood, and since—Mr. von Prell"—at last the name came out—"said I might place perfect confidence in you—"

"You may rely upon me as upon Mr. von Prell himself."

"That's not saying a great deal," flashed through her head, but she kept from revealing her thought by so much as a smile.

"By the way, what do you hear from him?" he asked.

Lilly blushed. If she admitted his silence, she laid herself bare, irremediably. So, not to appear forsaken and cast aside, she said:

"On parting we agreed not to write to each other for the time being. We thought in the struggle ahead of us that eternal waiting for news and that eternal fear for each other would not leave us with the strength necessary for meeting the demands of life. But you probably have gotten a letter from him lately?"

He started, and reflected an instant.

"Yes—that is, no. Not lately. Sometime ago he wrote—he was getting along. He said he was about to make a career for himself. And he asked most urgently as to your whereabouts; in regard to which, of course, to my great distress, I could not enlighten him."

This did not sound very likely. A moment before he himself had been asking for news of Walter, and now when she inquired for Walter's address, he had to acknowledge, stammering, that the letter had not contained an address and for that reason—

It was quite clear he had fabricated.

Probably he hoped to acquire greater importance in her eyes by representing his relations with her lover as still continuing. But since similar motives had led her to trifle with the truth, she had no cause for feeling angry with him.

She now told him the purpose of her visit; described the delicate craft she had learned a few months before, the desire she had to perfect herself in it, and her helplessness when it came to practical matters. Might she ask Mr. Dehnicke to recommend some artist who could instruct her? That was all she had come to him for.

He listened to her with professional interest, and acted as if he took her plans ever so seriously. But behind the mute thoughtfulness of his features lay something that did not please her. It was not pity, most certainly not. It was rather a holding back and seeking, then an increasing satisfaction, as if he felt he was gaining ground in the measure in which the helplessness of her situation became apparent.

"A very easy matter," he replied, his manner less constrained than before. "There are several real painters among the artists who furnish the models for my business. One of them"—he turned the pages of a book—"Kellermann—the very man—and then—. However, we'll drop that for the present. There are other things to be considered in connection with your practising your profession which, it strikes me, are more important. So please don't consider me impolite if I put some questions to you."

Lilly nodded assent.

"What artistic training have you had?"

"Well, you see, that's just it," Lilly replied, getting the better of her embarrassment. "Just because I never had any I should like—"

He did not move a muscle.

"What are your means of support?"

She was silent. She felt as if her clothes were being drawn from her body piece by piece.

"I need not tell you," he added, "it's not my intention to pry into matters that do not concern me. But since you honoured me by asking my advice—"

"I still have some jewels," she said, looking at him severely and haughtily. "When they go, I'll have nothing."

He nodded slightly, as if to say, "I thought so."

"One more question: in what sort of a place are you living now?"

"In the sort of place befitting my condition. Four flights up, with a poor woman, the one from whom I learned pasting pressed flowers."

As she said this, her glance fell upon the mirror and showed her the image of the beautiful aristocratic society dame, who had condescended to bestow a visit upon Mr. Dehnicke, "comrade of the reserves," in his dark hole of an office.

He rose, and for a few moments paced up and down between the desk and the door. He was so spruce and his clothes fitted him so snugly that everything about him cracked and creaked. In his polished rotundity he looked as if he had just stepped out of a bandbox. He had a little bald spot, too. But the expression of his face remained serious, almost uneasy, as if he were weighed down by heavy thoughts.

He came to a halt before her and his voice quivered a little as he spoke.

"What I am going to say has its roots in the many years of genuine friendship that unite me to Mr. von Prell—"

The mocking, condescending words with which Walter had recommended him to her, occurred to Lilly.

"I passed so many delightful hours in his company. I owe him so much inspiration and—" He stopped. He owed him so much he could not remember it all on the instant. "I will remain in debt to him the rest of my life."

"Who feels he is indebted to me because I pumped him for coin," was what Walter had written. Then there really did exist such touching creatures in the world.

"But I am most grateful to him for the confidence he showed in me by bequeathing his betrothed to me, so to speak."

"Betrothed!" The word had been uttered. She had not deceived herself. It frightened her, but she did not repudiate it. Until that day she had not even dreamed of considering Walter and herself bound to each other, neither herself, nor the poor little fellow who did not know how to care for himself, much less for a wife and child. But then—in the eyes of this man with his middle-class morals, that was the only justification for her bungled, ill-regulated existence. And not only in his eyes—in the eyes of the whole world—and, if she cared, in her own eyes, too. If she clung to the man who was practically dead to her, fastening upon him all her wishes and feelings, she would have a support for her entire being. She could ask for absolution and justification even before God.

All this flashed through her mind with lightning rapidity while Mr. Dehnicke continued to asseverate his friendship for Walter, and look at her with his round eyes in undesirous adoration. Finally he came to the point.

"In his place and for his sake I advise you most urgently to quit surroundings that do not suit you, and create an environment in keeping with your past. If you ever wish to realise your plans you will have to."

"What has my environment to do with my art?" queried Lilly, shrugging her shoulders.

"Well, in the first place you must have a studio where you can receive your customers—where you can show them who you are and the extent of your artistic demands, and what the real

nature of your artistic intentions are. That is the only way of preventing your customers from treating and paying you like an ordinary worker."

"But the customers don't come to me," she interjected.

"They should come to you," he exclaimed, talking himself into a degree of eagerness. "An artist with self-respect doesn't take one step outside his studio to offer his wares for sale. You must treat yourself the same way."

She mentally calculated the value of the rest of her brooches, rings, and bracelets, and rejoined with a smile:

"Easily said."

Mr. Dehnicke made a bold sally.

"My sincere friendship for Walter"—now he called him by his first name—"gives me the right—how shall I say? to make provision, to—"

Lilly saw what was coming and shut off further discussion.

"I feel content where I am," she declared, "and until I have created with my own efforts the suitable environment that you so kindly wish for me, I do not feel I am entitled to make a change."

He bowed. His friendly zeal cooled off markedly. But he asked for her address, so that he might know where he should send her the desired information.

Lilly hesitatingly gave it to him, and added the request that in no circumstances should he come to see her.

He bowed again, and his coolness became rigidity.

But Lilly rejoiced that she had known so well how to keep him at a distance. Nobody in the wide world should call her a beggar.

She therefore took leave all the more graciously, for she had not come to him in order to frighten him away forever.

He was quick to profit by her warmer tone, and became ardent again.

If there was anything else he could do for her—if she felt lonely—and required company.

Lilly looked at his right hand, saw no wedding ring there, and smiled "no."

He understood look and smile, for he said, hemming and hawing in an endeavour to conquer fresh confusion:

"I live alone with my mother, but unfortunately I cannot take you to see her because she is sickly and since my father's death has withdrawn entirely from society. But I would be most careful as to the company to which I should introduce you."

"I took that for granted," Lilly replied with amiable condescension. "In spite of that—thank, you, really—in the peculiar position I am in it is better for me not to mingle with people."

She gave him a regal bow, held out her hand, and left.

He followed her respectfully, and the six young gentlemen stood up in a row and curved their backs like their employer.

With flushed face Lilly passed the partially completed decorations in the yard, and walked along the imitation marble entrance to the street, thinking, in mingled triumph and disenchantment:

"No, that was *not* a path of destiny."

But she had suddenly acquired a betrothed. That was something, at any rate.

CHAPTER IV

Mr. August Kellermann, though unsuccessful in selling his pictures, enjoyed a fair reputation as a painter. He was a knowing fellow of about thirty-five, seven times washed in the life of the metropolis, who got great amusement from his own astuteness. He had a sandy Rubens beard and small bleared eyes with an eternal yawn in them from the night before.

He lived in an abandoned photographer's studio of enormous dimensions, like a huge glass case. To keep out the glare and the heat he had hung oriental rugs under the skylight, propping them up on long poles, and their fringed ends hung down as in a Beduin's tent.

When Lilly stepped from the dim anteroom into the glare of the diffused light from above—it was so high it seemed a very part of the heaven—she found him in a puce-coloured sack coat and worn green unheeled slippers, over which hung his red-checked stockings. He was squatting on

the floor next to an oriental coffee tray poking at a narghile that had gone out.

"Lordy!" he exclaimed without responding to her greeting and without rising. "It's worth receiving such a visit."

Lilly prepared to withdraw. Then he shot to his feet like an arrow, hoisted his trousers with a shrug of his shoulders, and wiped the dust from a bamboo chair with his sleeves.

"Sit down, child. I have given up painting for the present, and have gone in for pottery, and I should not be able to make use of fair Helen herself, but I won't let anything like you escape me, not I."

Lilly handed him her benefactor's letter, which she had received the day before, and enlightened him as to the mistake he had made.

"Now his manner will change," she thought.

Nothing of the sort took place.

"Botheration!" he said, scratching his head. "Noblest of women, why are you so beautiful? Quondam general's wife"—here she was "general's wife" again—"I had imagined spectacles and pimples, and now something like this comes along."

"Then you probably know what my motive is in visiting you?" asked Lilly, who was too faint-hearted to express resentment at his tone.

He clapped his fleshy hand to his forehead.

"One moment, one moment. Mr. Dehnicke, my dry bread-giver—dry referring to bread as well as to giver—*did* say something to me day before yesterday, but I suffer from congenital defect of my faculties of apprehension, and I hope you will be good enough to—"

When Lilly explained the nature of her desires, he broke out into unrestrained laughter.

"That you shall have, my aristocratic friend. You shall certainly enjoy the benefit of my instruction. Even if you hadn't been foam-born! Such a treat doesn't happen every day. I will charm so many sunsets out of the heavens and set them on glass in hues so roseate you will never be able to look a rose in the face again."

Lilly was by no means ignorant that in her capacity of aristocratic lady, the part she wished to play, she should have left the studio long before. But she was too eager to avail herself of his readiness to instruct; she could not throw away the opportunity so painfully won.

"What would Anna von Schwertfeger do in such a situation?" she asked herself. Then, tossing her head, she said: "But there are certain matters to be settled before we proceed further. In the first place, I should like to know what your charges are, so that I may decide if I can afford to pay for such valuable services—"

He looked somewhat disconcerted, and remarked that Mr. Dehnicke would probably look out for that.

"Mr. Dehnicke has nothing at all to do with my money matters," she replied. "If there should be any misunderstanding as to that—" she grasped her parasol—she had kept her gloves on.

"Tut, tut, don't be so hasty," said Mr. Kellermann. He reflected a few moments, and then mentioned a reasonable charge, five marks a morning.

"The ruby ring," thought Lilly, and nodded.

"I'm curious as to the second condition," he said.

"It is more important to me than the first. It is—I should like to be treated like a lady."

"Oh," he said, "I'm not fine enough for you? We'll fix that. I can be fine as silk, I tell *you*, I can. In fact I possess six degrees of fineness, and all you need do is choose the one you like best: superfine, extrafine, fine, semifine, impolite, and downright vulgar. Now select."

This joke and a few more similar in quality pleased Lilly so well that for the present she gave up her demand to be respected as a *grande dame*, and was content if in associating with her he did not pay her court and took her as a "good fellow."

However, her admonition had not failed of effect. The next day when she came he was wearing boots.

He proved to be an intelligent, discreet teacher, who did not essay wild flights with his pupil and manifested kindly, considerate interest in her childish plan.

He devised something of gelatine especially for her purpose, by which colours on a transparency gained in brilliancy. He was untiring in planning new effects.

"I will make six bloody sunsets for you," he said, "with which you will deal a blow to all your competitors in a body, especially that extremely conscienceless lady who perpetrates the most impertinent pranks. I mean, of course, Dame Nature."

While Lilly daubed on a window pane, he stood smoking Turkish tobacco or chewing ginger

before one of the modelling stands that took up the centre of the room and "pottered" at his work.

The artistic creations that he "fetched out of the depths of his soul" were usually human figures half or third life size: knights in armour bearing banners, maidens in old German costumes aimlessly stretching out their hands, allegoric women's figures doing the same, heralds blowing trumpets, and now and then secession shapes, long, slim, swirly limbs which trailed off like a nixy's body into a fish's tail into ash trays, finger bowls, or other such pleasing and useful objects.

And all the while that he was turning out factory models, dusty, half-completed paintings and sketches hung on the walls, or stood on the floor leaning against the walls. They showed a bold inventiveness, a riotous joy in colour. Each seemed to bear the mark of a reckless conception and a laughing ability to execute.

One was a picture of a half-ruined church in a tropical forest with a pack of monkeys chasing over the altar; another, a group of stupid camels in a depressing desert scene snuffling at the corpse of a dead lion. The best was a painting of a naked woman weighed down by heavy chains, which bound her blooming, lustrous body to a parched rock, while a flock of black, red-eyed vultures hovered about her head.

There was much else which testified to force and originality, but the woman in chains remained Lilly's favourite.

One day she ventured to ask her teacher why he permitted all these paintings to go to ruin instead of finishing them and placing them on exhibit.

"Because I have to produce pot-boilers, you innocent angel, you," he replied, and splashed a clod of clay against the leg of the allegoric lady he was working on. "Because the world requires lamps and vases, but not an eternal beauty with mother-wit inside her lovely body. Because there are 'manufacturers of imitation bronze ware,' who keep you from dropping by the roadside. And because I'm a fellow with sound teeth who must have a few morsels of life to crunch, and, after starving for twenty years, would like to join the great band of Dionysus worshippers. Do you understand, you afternoon-tea-soul, you?"

"But the woman with the chains, why don't you finish her at least?"

He burst into mocking laughter at himself, and threw himself full length on the fur-covered couch which stood in the darkest corner of the large glass-walled room. Then he jumped up, and offered Lilly some of the ginger from the pot he always kept on hand.

She declined, and pressed him for an answer.

"Good Lord," he said, "don't you realise how heavily one's own chains weigh one down? Fire would have to descend from heaven and melt my manacles. Or else the goddess herself would have to come down, lay her corset and stockings on that chair there, and say: 'Here I am, sir. Here is the foam-born body. Begin—look and paint to your heart's content.'"

Still chewing ginger he took his stand in front of Lilly and raised his clasped hands up to her.

"You look at me so oddly," she said, "what have *I* to do with all that!"

"I'm not saying anything," he exclaimed. "I have too much contemptible respect to—. But when my chain-laden beauty shall have cried for freedom long enough—she cries day and night, sometimes she cries so I can't sleep—then, perhaps, the miracle will happen, and a certain lady, who is now blushing even unto her eyeballs, will come and—"

"I think we'd better get to work," said Lilly.

After that day Lilly took good care not to speak of the picture, nor even give it a sidelong glance if she thought Mr. Kellermann might see her. Nevertheless he made many beseeching allusions to his presumptuous desire, which he seemed unable to dismiss from his mind. Finally Lilly had to forbid his ever referring to it.

Her zeal for learning increased daily. The hours in the studio did not suffice. She practiced at home as well. And when she tried her skill on the glass plates she had bought, the result, in her and Mrs. Laue's opinion, was highly commendable.

In the background the sun set in the prescribed manner in a sea of blood over hilltops of a robin's egg blue. In the foreground stood woods, dark and silent, of grass and ferns, belonging anywhere between the Jurassic and Carboniferous ages, shading huts festively lighted from within, constructed by a race of men who must have acquired culture at an extremely early period in the world's history.

Lilly lacked the courage to show her creations to her master. He had declared, as a matter of principle he would have nothing to do with those pasted abominations. But it would have been a great pleasure to let Mr. Dehnicke see what she had learned and achieved since she had visited him.

Unfortunately, after receiving that one letter, she did not hear from him again, and she was abashed at having been set aside so lightly.

But one day Mr. Kellermann said:

"What the devil—the bronze manufacturing business seems to be booming all of a sudden. Our Mr. Dehnicke can't give me enough orders. He's up here every day to see how things are progressing."

Something in Mr. Kellermann's manner of blinking at her made Lilly blush, and disquieted her, though at the same time it filled her with a degree of satisfaction.

At length, when the seven pairs of plates had been painted, and she could no longer endure her excess of eager pride, she took heart, and wrote him a letter on her beautiful ivory paper with the golden, seven-pointed coronet—she had about twenty sheets of it left. Since he had taken such kindly interest in her, she wrote, she would ask him to come next Sunday afternoon, and so on.

His reply arrived without delay.

Her kind letter gratified his dearest wish; he had greatly desired to visit her but had remained away so long merely out of respect for her wishes.

And then, on the appointed Sunday afternoon, he came.

Lilly had placed a gladiolus plant in the punch bowl and stuck pink carnations back of the box containing the lamp shade. Suspended at the windows by silk ribbons hung the sunsets glowing like a conflagration and throwing a magic light on the motley frippery that Mrs. Laue had saved along with her own self from better times. In her white lace blouse, which she herself had washed and ironed, Lilly looked gay and festive, and when she held out her hand to Mr. Dehnicke who appeared in the doorway clad in patent leather shoes and a chimney-pot, bowing and scraping, she was once again the affable, unapproachable society lady, who three weeks before had entered his office, and given rather than gotten.

Her benefactor seemed all the more embarrassed.

He sniffed the poor-people's smell that penetrated Mrs. Laue's best room from the rest of the house, looked up and down the walls uneasily, and in general acted as if he were trespassing on forbidden territory.

How happy he was, he said, that she had at last granted him permission—he hadn't wished to appear intrusive—he would have waited even longer had not her note removed all his doubts. He repeated everything he had said in his letter with nervous precipitation, which did not harmonise with his elegant appearance or his usual frosty manner.

Lilly thanked him amiably for all he had done for her, regretted having caused him the inconvenience of coming to see her, and all the while felt that with each word she was falling back more and more into the rôle of the "general's wife"—partly against her will—who does the honours in her drawing-room with courteous condescension.

Gradually she turned the conversation in "by-the-ways" to her art. She said she was sorry she was so incompetent, and pointed to the transparencies at the windows.

Mr. Dehnicke jumped up. He was silent for a while, then burst into exclamations of enthusiasm, for each of which he had to take a fresh start, as it were, reiterating his praises with a certain business-like monotony of tone, and smiling in an embarrassed way.

Lilly was far too delighted to suspect the tone of his criticism.

"Have you shown them to Mr. Kellermann?" asked Mr. Dehnicke.

Lilly confessed to her lack of courage. "Besides," she added, "I felt I ought to show them to you first."

He looked at her gratefully and worshipfully, and said:

"If you haven't done so yet, I advise you to refrain from ever showing them to him. Despite his apparent willingness, the man is obsessed by inordinate professional conceit, and it might be—"

Mr. Dehnicke seemed to fear to say more.

Lilly plucked up her courage, and asked, as if it were a matter of only slight importance, whether he thought anyone would buy her work.

Mr. Dehnicke became silent again, and with his index finger scratched at the left side of his upper lip under his moustache. Then he inclined his smooth, round head still more to the left, and said weighing each word:

"It would be best if you were to entrust the sale of your transparencies to me. I have certain connections and I know the character of the buyers. If I set the glass in bronze frames, or something of the sort, I might even dispose of them as goods of my own."

Lilly flushed with gratitude.

"Oh, will you?" she cried, grasping his hand. "At least until I have found customers for myself?"

The pressure of her hand caused him to redden to the roots of his hair.

"In order to do that," he said, looking away from her with an abashed expression, "you must move away from here at once and establish a home worthy of yourself."

"I will gladly," she answered gaily, "as soon as I have earned the wherewithal."

"That may mean years."

"I will wait years."

"May I be permitted," he stammered, "to remind you once more that being an old and intimate friend of your betrothed, I am justified—"

Lilly drew herself up.

"If my betrothed," she said, "ever should or could take care of me, I might not have to refuse. But as it is, I may not allow anybody in the world, not even his dearest friend, to make offers which at best would merely humiliate me."

She turned her face aside to hide her tears, which arose from a sense of insult.

Mr. Dehnicke contritely begged her pardon, but something like a bit of fluttered triumph sat in his eyes.

When it had been agreed that one of his waggons was to come the following day to fetch the transparencies, and all "business" had been settled, Mr. Dehnicke modestly begged to be allowed to remain a few moments longer. He would like to speak a little more about the absent friend. It was his only opportunity—

"A great pleasure for me, too, I am sure," replied Lilly and invited him to be seated. "I am happy to have found somebody with whom I can speak about my betrothed."

"Betrothed," now fell quite naturally from her lips. She felt somewhat stirred when she uttered it.

The chance that Mr. Dehnicke might prolong his visit had been foreseen and provided for. Lilly needed only to ring and Mrs. Laue appeared in the famous brown velvet dress with one of Lilly's white fichus modestly tucked in the square-cut neck, and carrying a tea tray with two very dainty coffee cups. On being presented to Mr. Dehnicke she made a courtesy, than which none more aristocratic was to be seen at the balls of Prince Orloffski. After saying a few suitable words about the great actors of the past and the photographs to which they had affixed their signatures especially for her, she took leave, as was proper.

Lilly displayed style as a hostess; and like the aroma of the coffee, the spirit of "better days" hovered over all.

About four days later the mail brought Mrs. Lilly Czepanek a money-order for 210 marks. Sender, Richard Dehnicke, of Liebert & Dehnicke, Mfrs. of Metal Wares. And on the left side was the remark: "Seven transparency-paintings with pressed flowers, sold at 30 mks. a piece."

The foundations of a livelihood had been laid.

CHAPTER V

Now followed happy times.

With part of the sum she had earned Lilly bought new material, and soon more sunsets glowed beyond woods of dried grass.

When she lay on her bed during the hot summer nights, sleepless from overwork, she would give herself up to wild dreams of what she would do when her art had conquered the world.

She would start a workshop, like Mr. Dehnicke's, employ about a dozen women with Mrs. Laue, of course, as forelady. Then hunt up her father, and transfer her poor crazy mother to a fine private insane asylum. What else? Oh yes, provide for Walter, certainly. Now that she felt she was his fiancée, and her future was his, this was her bounden duty. To be sure he must first let himself be heard from. But some day, Lilly knew, when he was at a loss where to turn, he would get word to her in some way or other. Then she would send him money—in abundance—in overflowing measure—everything her craft threw into her lap.

No, not everything. One task, the greatest, the holiest, merely to think of which was presumption, dominated her life.

Whether or not her father returned, his work, his immortal work, must never be allowed to sink into oblivion. Awaiting its summons to life the score of the Song of Songs still lay asleep in Lilly's locked trunk. But its sleep was no longer so sound, so dreamless as in the years just gone by. It began to stir and moan. It gave out a humming and ringing which echoed through the day's work and crooned in Lilly's sleep, causing chords and melodies to sound when she least expected them.

From the blue hills beyond which the sun set in flames came a soft strain as if blown by evening winds: "How beautiful are thy feet in sandals, O prince's daughter!" And out of the dark depths of

the fabulous woods fluttered fragments of songs of the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valley.

It was almost as if invisible little beings were singing who led a pleasant existence inside those bright-windowed pasteboard huts.

Like Lilly herself the whole world would some day have a share in the treasure whose guardian fate had destined her to be.

Wherever she went or stood, whatever she did or thought, from all corners hopes came dancing forth, beckoning and smiling. A new, larger, purer existence was now to begin. The ends of that golden thread which her insane mother had cut in two with the bread knife, had been tied together again, and drew her upward, upward. She had divinations of something sacred which gave forth blessings, something to be prayed for and struggled for.

A few more months and it would all come to pass.

A piece of good fortune seldom comes unaccompanied by another; and so it happened that—miracle of miracles!—her betrothed gave a sign of life.

It was one of the first days in September between eleven and twelve o'clock in the morning when Mr. Dehnicke appeared at her door without having announced his coming. Lilly was not completely dressed, and refused at first to see him in. However, he was so insistent that the business on which he had come was extremely important, that she did not venture to dismiss him, and offering a thousand excuses she received him in her matinée.

He let a shy glance of admiration travel over her, and then drew a broad, strange-looking piece of paper from his pocket, which proved to be a check on the Lincoln and Ohio Bank for two thousand and some odd marks.

"What shall I do with it?" asked Lilly.

"Read the letter it came enclosed in," he replied unfolding a large sheet.

"Mr. Richard Dehnicke, Dear Sir," was informed that Mr. Walter von Prell had deposited five hundred dollars to be paid over to Baroness Lilly von Mertzbach.

Lilly was shaken by a storm of gratitude.

She ran up and down the room pressing her handkerchief to her eyes.

She had wanted to provide for him, and now *he* was providing for *her*.

Suddenly she was fairly overwhelmed by a feeling of distrust.

She came to a standstill, and looked from the check to Mr. Dehnicke and back at the check again.

Both were wrapped in silence.

"Do explain," she cried, utterly perplexed.

"What is there for me to explain?" he rejoined. "I am merely the middleman, or, if you will, the agent in the affair, which really concerns no one but you and your affianced."

"If at least he had given his address," cried Lilly.

"It almost looks as if he wanted to eradicate all trace of himself," Mr. Dehnicke observed.

It was so romantic and so unlike Walter—how could she help being at a loss!

But there was "Baroness von Mertzbach." Walter was the only person not likely to know of her having had to renounce her married name. That, at least, was an indication of the genuineness of the remittance.

Mr. Dehnicke inclined his head to the left as usual, and regarded her with calm indifference—he was the innocent middleman, nothing more.

"After this unexpected turn of events," he finally said, "you will, of course, no longer refuse to take up the sort of life that accords with your social position and is so essential for the sale of your works."

She shook her head, biting her lips.

Hereupon he became insistent, more insistent than she had thought his modesty would permit him to be.

"You *must*. For his sake you must. I am responsible to him for that. If he should return and want to marry you, he must not find a déclassée. I am responsible to him for that."

Lilly asked for time to consider.

From now on her distant lover held sway over her life with a certain emphasis. What had been mere fancy became reality.

Not that she thought of him unqualifiedly as the real sender of those mysterious five hundred dollars. On the contrary, the voice would not be silenced that said to her: "You are being played with." But she was afraid to listen to it, or even draw inferences and come to conclusions. For if

she were to lose the single friend she had, then what?

In order to down all her doubts and scruples she worked diligently, and nearly once a week had batches of sunsets ready to be taken away. And in the meantime Mr. Kellermann had brought her new motifs: a Gothic cathedral perched on perpendicular rocks, a hunting lodge with many gleaming windows, and—*chef d'œuvre*—the moon rising over peaceful waters, whose silvery sheen was broken by fern fronds.

October came.

The first Sunday of the month Mr. Dehnicke called to take Lilly out walking. He had come for her twice before, and Lilly had accompanied him gladly. Had he offered to take her to the country, her happiness would have been complete.

The autumnal sun lay peacefully upon the tattered leaves of the bare little trees that edged the square fountain. Groups of people sauntered by aimlessly, looking bored and depressed. The winter was already laying its icy touch on men's spirits.

Mr. Dehnicke and Lilly went along many strange streets all filled with human beings; and Lilly was happily conscious of having a leader and protector at her side in all that bustle.

Mr. Dehnicke, who had been brooding over something a long time, finally began:

"Have you reached a decision yet as to your way of living in the future?"

Lilly did not reply. She was fully determined to reject every offer on this point. But it is heavenly to have someone begging of you; you feel you are of some value in the world.

"If I had the right to make a choice for you," he continued in his modest, prim way, "I think I could find a little corner that you would delight in."

"I'm not so sure of that," she rejoined, half in jest. "You seem to assume that our tastes are absolutely similar."

"Oh, no! I'm not so presumptuous. But recently I saw an apartment that I think would please you, unless I'm very much mistaken. It belongs to a lady customer of mine who left town."

"What a pity! I should like to have seen it, if for no other reason than to find out whether you have a correct estimate of me."

He reflected.

"I think it can be arranged. I think I can take you to see it. The maid, to be sure, won't be in, because it's Sunday, but the porter's wife knows me and will give me the key. So if you want to—"

Lilly hesitated to force herself into the home of an absolute stranger, but Mr. Dehnicke overbore her objections, summoned a cab, and ordered that they be driven to the western section of the city, where the houses are statelier and the people look more aristocratic and a row of glorious chestnut trees planted in velvety grass hang over the blue waters of a canal.

"Oh, what a joy it must be to live here!" she cried.

The cab drew up at a corner house on the "Königin-Augusta-Ufer."

Dehnicke went to the porter's lodge and spoke a few words through the window. A key was handed to him, and he led Lilly up the carpeted stairs of carved oak. How easy to ascend them, and how different from the bare flagging at home, which hurt one's feet.

He stopped at a door on the second floor, and politely rang in case the maid should be in after all. But no one answered the ring, so he unlocked the door with the key.

In the meanwhile Lilly tried to read the name posted alongside the door on a porcelain plate, but unsuccessfully, owing to the dim lighting in the halls.

They entered a narrow, dark anteroom smelling of fresh paint, and passed through it to a room with one window. Here tall closets with glass doors curtained with green silk were ranged against the walls. The furniture consisted of nothing but two armchairs, a few small gilt chairs, and a large, dark, highly polished dining-table.

"This is really a dining-room," said Mr. Dehnicke. "But it wouldn't be bad for a sample room and private studio for you."

Lilly, who would have enjoyed contradicting him, was compelled to agree.

Adjoining the dining-room on the right was the bedroom with strawberry-colored cretonne drapery, old rose enamelled furniture, and a broad, canopied bed with a puffy silk counterpane and curtains held together by a dull gold seven-pointed coronet.

"Does your customer belong to the nobility?" asked Lilly, seized by a vague feeling of envy.

"Not that I know of. Her husband isn't a nobleman. But maybe she herself is of noble extraction."

Lilly heaved a little sigh, recalling her ivory toilet articles and her underwear embroidered with a coronet lying in Mrs. Laue's musty drawers. How well they would suit a place like this! She rapturously breathed in the delicate lilac perfume which penetrated the entire room like the

aroma of an aristocratic spring, and shuddered as she compared it with the poor-people's odour that was invading her Dresden treasures with deadly certainty, no matter how persistently she aired them.

"Happy creature!" she said softly.

It struck Lilly as peculiar that no traces were to be seen of the life and activity of the mistress of the place, not a silk ribbon, no matinée, or nightgown, not a bit of underwear.

"She probably locked everything away, or took everything with her," said Mr. Dehnicke.

They returned to the dining-room, and through the other door on the left entered a small drawing-room at the corner of the house. It was flooded with sunlight.

Lilly clasped her hands rapturously.

She looked at the delicate old rose carpet with a pattern of vaguely outlined vines, at the dear little crystal chandelier, whose prisms radiated all the colours of the rainbow, at the dark reddish mahogany furniture with bronze statuettes on the dainty tables—a woman about to dive into water with outstretched arms, a reaper folding his hands in prayer at the sound of the Angelus, and similar subjects. There was a little bookcase, a lady's secrétaire, paintings on the walls, and even an upright piano.

"A piano!" sighed Lilly closing her eyes in mournful bliss.

There were animate objects, too. In front of one of the three windows stood an aquarium with a broad-leaved palm rising over it, and the sunlight gleaming on the water and the gold fish. A canary bird chirped at them from another window.

Lilly recalled her light blue realm. In comparison how plain and compact all this was—like a bird's nest—yet how inconceivably charming when contrasted with the horror she now dwelt in.

"Why, it's a veritable paradise!" she said gaily, though tears were rising in her eyes.

"Here is one more room," said Mr. Dehnicke, opening a door which Lilly had failed to notice. "It has a separate entrance from the hall of the house. The lady probably uses it as a guest room, or something like that. If you were living here, it would do admirably for a place for your assistants to work in."

Lilly looked in. The room was more simply furnished than the others, though not without care. In the middle of the floor stood a wide table with greenish grey upholstered chairs standing about it, and in a corner was a comfortable iron bed.

"If you had it, of course, the bed would have to be removed," explained Mr. Dehnicke.

It was really remarkable how well the apartment suited her purposes.

They returned to the drawing-room. Lilly was struck by something she had not observed before. A long picture in an ornate carved frame hung over the sofa, forming, as it were, the centre about which all the rest of the furnishings were grouped. But the picture itself was concealed beneath a curtain of lavender crape.

"What's that?" Lilly asked.

Mr. Dehnicke shrugged his shoulders and pointed to the top of the secrétaire, where a photograph, the only ornament there, had the same mysterious veil.

Seized with curiosity Lilly tried slightly to raise the lower end of the covering over the large picture.

"I wonder whether I may," she queried timidly, as if about to commit a theft.

"If you have the courage," he replied, apparently breathing a little more heavily than usual.

She tugged—tugged more violently—the crape fell off—and before her hung her friend and betrothed, Walter von Prell! There he stood in the uniform of his former regiment, boldly and carelessly dashed off in crayon.

Lilly's knees trembled. Cold shivers ran through her body. She refused to believe, to understand. Then she felt Mr. Dehnicke take her hand and draw her to the outside hall.

He lit a match.

On the porcelain plate she now read what she had previously been unable to decipher:

Lilly Czepanek
Pressed Flower Studio

She uttered a cry, rushed back into the drawing-room, threw herself in the corner of the sofa, and wept the hot, blissful tears of desire and yearning that had so long been repressed.

When she ventured to look up again, she saw Mr. Dehnicke waiting before her, modest and correct, with his sober, serious face.

She was ashamed of herself for being so happy; and full of qualms she held her hand out to him gratefully.

"May I hope that in my capacity of Walter's representative I have chanced in a measure to satisfy your taste?"

There was no more thought of refusing.

CHAPTER VI

The mottled golden tops of the chestnuts grew paler, the gaps ever wider that the autumn ate into the foliage. Where a soothing green had cut off the view, now glittered the bright wavelets of the canal. Long barges, laboriously pushed by poles, trailed along in their cumbersome fashion, and the shaggy watchdogs barked up at the aristocratic windows.

Grey, rainy days came stealing upon the city like an enemy, and loneliness laid its octopus clutch on Lilly's breast.

But her work! Yes, she had her work. So long as the first infatuation had lasted and Lilly felt she might hope for some realisation of her plans, she had clung to her work day and night.

But the hoped-for turn of events never came. The announcements she had had printed remained unheeded. Mr. Dehnicke, sole purchaser of her goods, begged her—with a hesitating, embarrassed manner, to be sure, yet explicitly enough—not to be hasty, since the general state of the market was dull.

By degrees her zest in her profession began to languish. She gave up going to Mr. Kellermann for lessons, especially since his insistence upon setting free his "chained beauty" grew steadily more annoying. She locked the half-filled sample closets and completed none but the pieces Mr. Dehnicke ordered.

Oh, those dark, pitiless days, which no laughter brightened, no waiting shortened, and no purpose bound together.

The kitchen was ruled by a young maid, ever silent, whose eyes were greedy and too knowing. Each morning, while the little canary peeped, the fish were given fresh water.

It was somewhat better in the evening when the lights were lit and the crystal chandelier radiated a brilliant white light. Lilly would then wander from room to room changing the position of this or that ornament and constantly reassuring herself how beautifully she lived and how happy she was.

But of what avail was the old rose carpet with its vague vine pattern, the wine-coloured furniture, and the bronze bodies looking as if a golden breath had blown over them? Those bronze bodies whose innermost being after all was nothing more than a zinc alloy, having originated in the factory of Liebert & Dehnicke. Of what avail the charming secrétaire and the writing paper with the golden coronet stamped on it, of which Mr. Dehnicke had immediately ordered five hundred sheets? There was nobody to rejoice with her, nobody whom her longing brought to her side.

She would often seat herself at the piano and let her fingers stray over the keys. But she did not get the pleasure out of playing that she had anticipated. Her father's discipline had long lost its effects. She had forgotten the pieces she had once known by heart, and she lacked the calm and patience to learn all over again.

Yes, it was strange what disquiet would seize her the instant she touched the keys, a feeling of dread, an anticipation of impending danger, a consciousness of her own unworthiness.

She could not keep on; she had to shut down the lid and take to wandering again from room to room until her legs wearied and ten o'clock summoned her to bed.

In those joyless, unoccupied days, a piercing, stinging desire for man awoke in her, causing her nerves to tingle and a sweet, tormenting shudder to thrill her body.

The whole of the two long years her senses had been mute. Tears of regret had drowned that which the colonel's senile depravity had enkindled, and the weeks of love with Walter von Prell had fanned into lively flames. Drowned it forever, it seemed. But there it stood again, transporting and shaming and refusing to be silenced by prayers or reproach.

Often she felt she would have to run out on the street just to catch the glance of any stranger—as in the Dresden days—and see desire flare up in eyes veiled with yearning.

But the people she might encounter on the street were rough and common. The mere thought of them made her tremble.

The only time she went out was to visit her former landlady.

The walk lasted a full hour, and before she had reached her former home, many a naïve admirer, many a keen *boulevardier*, had bobbed up beside her and tried to enter into a pleasant conversation. She always ran to the other side of the street, shaking herself. Sometimes, yes,

sometimes, she would have liked to reply.

When she lay in bed with closed eyes, she dreamed of strong-willed, sharply cut men's faces, to which she looked up in yielding happiness.

She often dreamed, too, of Mr. Dehnicke, good, sound, loyal Mr. Dehnicke.

If he were to come to her some day and falter in that guilty way of his which she liked so well: "I love you inordinately, and want you to marry me," what would she say to him?

Each time she thought this a furtive sense of comfort stole over her.

As for the man who by full right stood closest to her, she never dreamed of him. Sometimes, it is true, when her longings did not know where to strike root, those anxious yet blissful November nights would recur to her. But the part of hero might have been played by any other man as well as Walter.

Walter himself had grown to be a sort of tyrannical conscience with her.

She loved him—of course! How could she help loving him? He was her "betrothed," and he was working for her. But sometimes, when she stood in front of the sofa and felt his cold, blue eyes resting upon her haughtily and masterfully, and she recalled the sorry, inconstant little fellow he actually had been, she felt a desire to shake off everything that came from him and held her under a spell, as one tries to rid oneself of a preposterous nightmare.

If only Mr. Dehnicke had not kept alluding to him with so much devotion and respect, treating himself as the modest agent, who would have to render account to his dear friend, when that dear friend would return in honour and glory.

Mr. Dehnicke came punctually twice a week to inquire after her health and drink tea. He would leave in time to reach his office before it was closed for the day. These scant hours were always a festival for her.

What wonder? She had no one beside him. He was the only person who bound her to the rest of the world and brought incident and interest into her life.

She spent hours in fixing up the tea table, in trying different ways of lighting the room, in arranging the flowers, and standing before the mirror—for him.

When he came at last and sat opposite her, they conversed long and seriously about the cares that oppressed him, the plans he was revolving in his mind, his disgust at the artists who considered it a disgrace to work for the trade, and did so only if the pistol was held to their heads, and then disdainfully, clenching their teeth; his trashy competitors, who built palaces in order to throw dust in the eyes of the buyers, and who thereby had forced him to transform his good old business place in accordance with modern ideas of decoration.

Most distressing of all was his clientele. The artistic ideals of the metropolis in a measure made a moral demand upon him to go over to the secession and place on the market long-necked, narrow-hipped bodies in distorted attitudes. The real public, however, the well-intentioned public with purchasing power, would have nothing to do with all that rubbish. It clung to knights and high-born dames, to maidens plucking flowers or carrying water, to fighting stags and swinging monkeys. So he stood between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand was the danger that people would ridicule him as old-fashioned, on the other hand, the danger of losing most of his old hereditary customers. So he had to steer carefully along a middle course, and that was extremely difficult.

He also spoke frequently of the factory, with its hundreds of industrious hands, who laboured day after day for the prosperity of the house; and of the alterations being made in his yard and sample room, which, to judge by the architect's plans and the sum he calculated they would cost, would produce something worth seeing.

But what doesn't competition force a man to do?

Lilly listened with shining eyes.

She shared in all his activities. She wanted to see everything and experience it with him, not only the renovation of the sample room, but also the doings in the factory with its machines, its clatter of wheels, its hissing of flames, and screeching of files. She never wearied of questioning. She had to know how the workmen looked and behaved, their wages, their lot in life, and what became of them. She felt that there in his factory was real existence, while her life was nothing but a dull, idle waking dream.

"Oh, how happy you must be," she often cried out admiringly, "to have so many souls in your keeping!"

"If the whole bunch of them didn't keep you in a stew all the time," he rejoined.

But she would not admit the qualification.

He was certainly a beneficent god to them all, she said, even if he did not feel it himself. He must be, because of his power and his good heart.

Mr. Dehnicke gladly listened to such expressions. While she was speaking he would jump up

abruptly, as if seized by a mighty, revolutionary idea, pace up and down the room excitedly, then stop in front of her and stare down at her with a dark solicitous look in his eyes, apparently unable to reach some great decision against which he was struggling.

Lilly pretended not to notice his behaviour, though she knew exactly what was fermenting in his soul.

"Let him alone, don't help him," she thought. "He must do whatever he wants to do of his own impulse. Otherwise he will bear me a grudge."

If only there hadn't been that hateful sense of duty toward Walter, which, like herself, Mr. Dehnicke probably felt only in part, and shammed as a matter of decorum.

There was something else that gave her qualms. Although he had promised to, he had never fulfilled the wish she had expressed to see his factory.

However, he spoke openly of his mother, and did not shrink from confessing how greatly she had influenced him, though Lilly could read into his words that he wished for more freedom to develop his powers. When his father had died twelve years before, he had been a minor, and had had to yield to his mother's guidance. The old lady continued to maintain her authority. Dehnicke discussed each undertaking with her, and if she approved, it was executed, even if he did not concur.

Lilly felt a dull terror arise within her of that old lady who sat commandingly in her arm-chair behind those respectable porcelain flower pots, and directed the conduct of so powerful a man as Lilly's benefactor.

Her heart would contract when she imagined her first meeting with the old lady.

Before Christmas Lilly had more work to do. Two dozen transparencies had been ordered and had to be completed before the holidays. 24x30=720. Well, she could see ahead again.

For the first time in four years she forgot to send her mother a Christmas gift. To compensate, she made a particularly "poetic" lamp shade and had it delivered anonymously to Mr. Dehnicke's mother the day before Christmas. She herself did not know why she did this. Perhaps it was a sort of propitiatory offering, such as timid souls were wont to sacrifice to unknown gods as an expiation for unknown sins.

Counting upon her friend's coming, though by no means certain he would, she had made a little heap of her gifts for him, and at the fall of dusk with throbbing heart began to listen for the ring of the door bell.

Her fears were idle. At half past five he appeared loaded with parcels. He had displayed tact in his choice of the simple presents—things she still needed in the apartment, a few embroidered collars, a boa, because she had to be careful of her sables, and a few little pieces from his factory to adorn the empty top of her secrétaire. At each of her exclamations of delight he protested mildly. The things really came from Walter, as she knew.

"And what comes from you?" she asked.

"Nothing," he replied, turning his palms upward.

"I know of something you could give me that Walter has nothing to do with."

"What's that?"

"Show me your factory."

This time he did not evade her request. A date was immediately set—the first workday after New Year, when everything would be in running order again.

Then Mr. Dehnicke added with an embarrassed air:

"But please wear something dark and simple."

"Why?" asked Lilly, frightened. "Do I usually dress conspicuously?" She felt as if some one had boxed her ears.

"Oh, not that. But your good clothes might be soiled."

On January the second at about noon Lilly stood in front of the house in Alte Jakobstrasse, which she had not seen since she had paid Mr. Dehnicke that memorable first visit in his office.

"It has almost turned out to be a path of destiny after all," she thought, and looked up furtively at the porcelain flower pots in the second story windows. She started. It seemed to her a white head had moved behind the lace curtains.

"That smacks of a guilty conscience," she thought, and with awed, sidelong glances walked past

the door that opened upon the broad, laurel-lined staircase which her unworthy feet might never tread until she had been received into the circle of bourgeois virtue.

But the carriage gate stood hospitably open. The scaffolding had been removed, and the imitation marble of walls and columns shone challengingly in their variegated colours. The magnificence of the courtyard beyond oppressed her heart again.

The office building had also undergone changes. The dun-coloured plaster had given place to a broad sandstone façade adorned by the busts of eminent artists; and gilded railings gleamed where once the sorry-looking iron staircase had been.

There was her friend hurrying down the steps to meet her.

Despite the stinging cold he wore no hat. In holding out his hand to her he cast a furtive look of scrutiny at all the windows. It seemed he, too, had a guilty conscience.

He first led her to the sample room. Its brand-new magnificence exceeded her boldest expectations. Columned halls with coffered ceilings stretched out in a long vista as in a museum. There were endless rows of tables and cases, on which, gleaming with gold and silver lights, sparkling with crystal prisms, glowing with the hot red of copper, or shading off softly into the light green of the patina, stood thousands of works of German art and industry, "imitation bronzes," destined to fill the show windows of shops and carry the semblance of display-loving prosperity into the huts of the poor.

There were corpulent begging friars, dancing gypsy girls clad in boleros, ogling dandies, postillions blowing horns, pecking chickens, dogs fetching game, calenders set in horse-shoe frames, cigar clips in the shape of little champagne bottles; tall pelicans holding lamps in their bills; figurines of men and women stretching up their arms, just as in Mr. Kellermann's studio, though here not aimlessly, since they bore aloft vases, candelabra and bowls. There were arbours screening love couples, with red electric bulbs hidden in the foliage; brownies beside shining mushrooms, sea shells to serve as ash trays, snakes writhing about the chalices of flowers, or about porcelain eggs, or copper dice. The whole pitifulness of a vulgar sense of art seemed to have crept into this glittering conglomeration and been concentrated there ready to scatter to all quarters of the globe.

When Lilly gave her friend a questioning or astonished look because of some monstrosity, he shrugged his shoulders and observed:

"That's what the people want."

Despite some dissatisfaction with what she saw Lilly could have walked up and down for hours amid all that sparkle. She felt she belonged there by right. Had she been asked for her opinion she would have said without a moment's reflection: "Throw this away, and this, and this." But nobody appealed to her judgment, and everything went its way without her.

Mr. Dehnicke then took her to the factory.

Unfortunately the foundry, in which the basic part of all the work is done, happened just then to be closed. Through an open window Lilly saw the black gaping depths of the hearths, about which dirty troughs were standing, and over all, over chimney-hoods and vessels, a thick layer of ashes.

They descended a flight of dirty steps and passed through damp rooms smelling of all sorts of poisons, where rows of mighty vats stood filled with vile fluids, and elderly men bustled about, who looked like sombre scholars, whereas they were nothing more than mere labourers. At Lilly's entrance they cast a look of surprise at her then concerned themselves about her no further. And they did not greet their employer.

"This is the galvanising room," explained Mr. Dehnicke, and continued as they walked past the vats, "The nickle bath, steel bath, silver bath, and so on."

Up in a loft surrounded by an iron netting, the wheels of a machine whirled, and vari-coloured electric bulbs glittered among them.

"That's where the electric current is generated which goes through the different baths."

Lilly did not understand, but she enjoyed the inconceivable rapidity with which the wheels span around and the buzzing sound they made.

In the room where the chasing was done many men stood at long tables industriously at work smoothing down the unevennesses of the cast metal, and preparing the separate parts of an ornament for joining. The joining was done in the next room, where the flames of the blowpipes darted and hissed and little clouds of metallic vapour shot sparks into the air. At each workman's place lay small heaps of burnished limbs, which made one feel sorry for the truncated body from which they seemed to have been severed.

In the next room the thinner parts were beaten into shape in iron dies. It was here that the flowers and foliage were made, the ribbons and vines and arabesques, everything that curled and dangled daintily. The workingmen looked all the coarser and unwieldier by contrast. They scarcely glanced up when Lilly and Mr. Dehnicke entered, and continued to hammer as if stupefied into dealing those blows.

Lilly had a keener eye for the appearance and bearing of the men than for the work they turned out. She made comparisons, decided who was well off and who in distress, who took pleasure in his work and who went through the day's toil doggedly, because driven to it by need. Each shop had its peculiar physiognomy. In one the majority looked fresh and agile, in another galled and weary.

And now, as often before when Mr. Dehnicke had spoken to her of his employés, a senseless desire arose in Lilly to watch over the fate of all these people, help where help was necessary, bring sunshine to the gloomy, and relief to the suffering. But she took good care not to acquaint Mr. Dehnicke with her absurd ideas.

"Now we will see the most delicate of all the operations," said Mr. Dehnicke. "It is putting on the patina, which gives the pieces their real style."

He opened the door to the next shop, and the smell of a thousand poisons again assailed Lilly's nostrils.

Here there were women at work also, side by side with the men. They applied varnish and acids and brushed and rubbed. They looked sallow and jaded. At Lilly's entrance they were so taken aback that they dropped their brushes and cloths and stared at her in utter astonishment.

"One would have to begin with these to win the confidence of all," Lilly thought, and gave them a cordial nod.

But they seemed to take her greeting as mockery or blame, and turned back to their work with a grimace well-nigh scornful.

In the packing room, where women and children were employed exclusively, Lilly's appearance produced a happier impression. The girls laughed and whispered, and nudged one another with their elbows.

The only one who paid no attention to her was a pregnant woman, who seemed to find it difficult to keep from sinking to the floor. She held her drooping lips tightly compressed and a vivid red spotted her cheeks. Nevertheless her arms moved in feverish haste wrapping one paper wisp after the other about the limbs of the figure standing on the table in front of her, and inclining now to the right, now to the left under her manipulations.

Lilly led Mr. Dehnicke aside and asked:

"May I give her something?"

"She's being provided for," he replied, unpleasantly affected, it seemed. He quickly opened another door.

"This leads to the store room, where the pieces are kept until sold, with the exception, of course, of those which are made to order."

Lilly looked down a dimly lighted corridor, from which the cold air blew upon her. On the shelves and stands stood endless rows of phantom beings, shapeless in their grey paper envelopes.

"Oh, how queer," said Lilly, shivering a little, and preparing to walk along the narrow passageway. The very same instant, however, she noticed her friend start as in fright, and cast a helpless look about him. Then he stepped in front of her and blocked the way.

"What's the matter?" asked Lilly, surprised.

He turned colour and said:

"We had better not go in there. We'll go somewhere else. Besides, there's nothing to look at there, not a thing. You yourself see there isn't."

He planted himself squarely in front of her, so that she could not possibly look down the long line of shelves.

This, of course, merely heightened her curiosity.

"But I would like to," she said, and assumed the over-bearing, haughty expression with which she was wont to get her way with him.

"No, no," he burst out hastily. "It's a business secret. I mayn't betray it to a soul. Even the employés are not allowed to come here. Really I can't permit it."

"Then you shouldn't have brought me here at all," said Lilly, feeling insulted; and she turned back.

He poured forth excuses, grew hoarse with excitement, and coughed and choked. Then he led her back over the resplendent mosaic of the yard to the gateway with its imitation marble columns, through which a chilly draught was blowing.

"You will catch a cold," said Lilly to hasten her departure.

His face lighted up with a brilliant idea.

"Besides, you know," he said, "the store room wasn't heated."

"You should have thought of that sooner," rejoined Lilly, holding out her hand with a smile of partial reconciliation. She was really sorry for him in his helpless solicitude.

Nevertheless she continued to feel hurt. And a bit disturbed. The day she had been looking forward to so happily for months had ended in a discord.

And no matter how much she pressed him later, Mr. Dehnicke refused to tell her what mystery lay concealed in his store room.

CHAPTER VII

Lilly began to ail. She suffered from headaches, heart-burn, lassitude, insomnia and occasional attacks of vertigo.

The physician, called in at Mr. Dehnicke's insistence, was one of those extremely busy men who make the rounds of numberless houses a day. First he took a good look at the apartment—a setting he seemed to know—then, upon a cursory examination, prescribed social distractions, walks, and iron, much iron.

Social distractions had to be dispensed with; there was no opportunity for them. Taking walks was not so easy either. Lilly did not care to stroll about alone, and Mr. Dehnicke, the only person to accompany her, preferred not to be seen on the street with her too frequently. In order, he said, not to compromise her, though in all likelihood the truth was, he feared becoming conspicuous by appearing in public with that exotic, flowerlike beauty.

For no matter what happened, no matter that trouble, want and all sorts of humiliations swept over her, no matter that boredom and displeasure with herself crushed her spirits, Lilly's appearance never lost thereby.

On the contrary, the delicate milky whiteness of her cheeks, which before had been a golden brown, lent her a new, soft charm. The great, narrow, long-lashed eyes with the heavily drooping lids—those improbable Lilly eyes—now had a weary, languishing brilliance, as if they veiled all the painful riddles of the universe. Moreover, the last year had given back to her the slim, regal figure of her maiden days and taken away the womanly peacefulness it had acquired at Lischnitz. No wonder that many a head turned after her and many an appreciative, envious glance was sent askance at her companion, who was considerably shorter than she.

Mr. Dehnicke was aware of all this, and being a staid, respectable business man, and not wishing to be the object of gossip, he preferred to stay indoors with her.

About the middle of February she received an invitation by mail from Mr. Kellermann, whom she had not seen for several months.

GREAT CARNIVAL
KELLERMANN STUDIO
Magic Lantern Show, Flirtation, Opportunity for Crimes
Passionels, Cream Kisses, and other Attractions

That seemed like distraction enough, and Mr. Dehnicke, who, it happened, had also been invited, was so energetic in his persuasions that he finally conquered her timidity and induced her to go.

But when the day for the carnival came Lilly was seized by a great dread of it, and at the last moment felt like withdrawing from her engagement.

She saw herself running the gauntlet of a gaping crowd of sardonic sneerers, who whispered the story of her rise and fall behind her back. She saw herself neglected and avoided, the object of derisive side glances. She passed through all the tortures of the déclassées, who must drag through life with the mark of the sinner caught in the act branded on their brows.

She chose the most beautiful of her Dresden dresses, which in the two years had grown to be the very height of fashion. It was a white Empire gown embroidered with gold vines. She arranged a narrow bracelet in her hair like a diadem, and loosely laid over her head an oriental veil shot with threads of gold. In case of need it would serve to conceal the bareness of her bosom. When she had completed her toilet, she seemed to herself so repulsive and conspicuous that this alone was sufficient ground for not showing herself.

She did not venture to cherish a faint hope until her friend came to fetch her. He saw her, and held on to the door knob, uttering a slight cry of astonishment.

"Am I all right?" she asked with a diffident laugh, which entreated encouragement.

Instead of replying he ran up and down the room breathing heavily and choking over inarticulate words—a mute language which Lilly immediately understood.

While sitting beside him in the coupé, she succumbed to another attack of dread.

"You will stay right next to me, won't you?" she implored. "You won't leave me, and you won't let

a stranger speak to me, will you?"

He promised all she wanted.

Four flights up—a way she well knew.

The landing outside Mr. Kellermann's door was filled with clothes-racks, on which awe-inspiring furs and humiliating lace mantles hung.

She clung to his arm.

Now to her ruin!

The large anteroom, into which not a single ray of light penetrated in the daytime, and which Mr. Kellermann used as a kitchen, bedroom and dining-room, had been converted into a sort of fairy forest. Vari-coloured Chinese lanterns swung on the branches of pine trees, and in their dim red glow several couples sat smiling and whispering on narrow bamboo benches. They were so absorbed in themselves that they paid little heed to the new arrivals.

All the more animated was Lilly's reception in the studio, which was filled with a bright, glittering mass of humanity. A general "ah," then absolute silence. A passageway naturally formed itself, down which the couple seemed to be expected to pass. Lilly made a gesture, as if to hide behind her friend. But he reached only up to her nose.

At the same instant Mr. Kellermann came hurrying up to them. He wore a brown velvet costume consisting of a jacket, knee-length breeches, and a Phrygian cap. Everybody, in fact, wore what seemed to him original and becoming.

"Welcome, goddess, queen!" he cried in a voice for the entire company to hear; and since nothing better occurred to him, he pressed kisses on her gloved arm from wrist to elbow.

Then he begged to be allowed to show her the incomparable arrangements of his new court of love. She followed him, whispering to her friend to be sure to remain at her side.

Electric lights had been hung in the open air directly over the skylight, converting it into a many-coloured, starry heaven. On looking up one really thought a thousand little suns were shining down from out of the night.

Rugs and ivy vines divided the left side, where the gable roof sloped downward, into a number of small arbours, the entrance of each of which was hung with gaily coloured bead portières. And over each hung a great printed placard bearing a highly suggestive inscription.

The first was called "Arbour of Lax Morality." Lilly turned a startled look upon her guide, who observed with a smile:

"That's only the beginning, meant for bread-and-butter-misses and little afternoon-tea-souls like you." And added:

> "This is but an intimation
> Of more wicked adjuration,"

while he pointed to the second entrance, the inscription over which read: "Arbour of Wicked Vows."

"Oh, dreadful!" she cried in righteous dismay. Kellermann rolled with laughter.

She could not help reading the next two signs, "Arbour of the Right to Motherhood" and "Arbour of the Cry for Man," but she said nothing more.

There were two more divisions, a "Powder Room" and an "Arbour of Perversity." This she did not understand.

"Now we'll go to the Criminal Side," said Mr. Kellermann, and led her diagonally across the room, making way for her among the people, who at her approach began to nod and hum and buzz, but with no trace of malice or contempt. The very reverse. It was an ovation, a suppressed demonstration of her triumph.

Her breast expanded. A faint, humble sensation of happiness stole over her body like hot wine. She threw back her scarf. She no longer needed to feel ashamed of her bare throat and shoulders. In the looks turned upon her she read that no one would scoff at her.

She did not succeed in reaching the Criminal Side. So many gentlemen wanted to be presented to her that Mr. Kellermann had all he could do telling off their names.

From now on the carnival became something absolutely unreal, a dream land, a fairy meadow, on which strange, large-eyed flowers were blooming and sweet scents set heads a-reeling, and a haze sparkled with red suns; where people laughed and jested and whispered, where bold, unheard-of compliments floated in the air, and everything existed for Lilly to caress and admire and love.

Yes, she loved them all, the men and the women, as soon as she met them. They were all good, noble souls, scintillating with delightful conceits and ready to perform friendly services. Each awakened a new hope, each brought a new joy.

She felt how her cheeks glowed, what blissful intoxication was burning in her eyes. And he at whom she looked with those eyes would quiver, and respond with a gleam from his own, which seemed to be the reflection of her happiness.

That was no longer another strange Lilly, who laughed and returned jest with jest and went from arm to arm with a faint pang of regret. That was she herself, doubly, triply herself.

Sometimes, when a gentleman became too bold in his talk, when an unlicenced *double entendre* seemed to lurk behind a joke, and Lilly became nervous and did not know what to say and involuntarily looked around for help, she always found her friend somewhere near at hand, glancing over at her as if by mere chance.

That gave her a delicious sense of peace, a consciousness of being cared for and hidden away, so that she could be even merrier than before, and need not take offence at audacities.

Once she overheard behind her:

"Who's the lucky dog who has her for his mistress?"

The answer was:

"A little polished Mr. Snooks. There he stands."

This made her stop and think a moment, though she could not know to whom it referred. But in the whirl of incidents it soon passed from her mind.

Oh, what people she met!

There were young blades in dress suits and white flowered waistcoats, who paid her mad court, and asked, as if casually, though their eagerness was visible under the nonchalance of their exterior: "What is your day at home?"

Alas, she had no day at home. She lived a very retired life.

There were sombre philosophers, who agonised over the world's pain, wore very long hair and monstrous neckties. They spoke to Lilly of "spiritual high pressure" and the "specific gravity of related individualities," themes which did Lilly's soul good. One of them kept addressing her as "Your Excellency." When she asked him why, he looked staggered and said he had heard she was —then he broke off and substituted the paltry joke that she so "excelled" all the women present he could find no more suitable title.

One of the men was an exuberant old high liver, whose name she had read with awe on many a beautiful picture. She would rather have kissed the hem of his garment than see him dance about her comically trying to be youthful.

There were many others who aroused her curiosity; but she could learn nothing of their rank or character.

The company even boasted a real prince, a pale, blond, very young man, who did not venture to ask to be introduced to Lilly, because his love was always in threatening proximity. So he kept making détours about her.

The women, of course, were more distant than the men, though those of them who came to make her acquaintance gave themselves up to her with effusive warmth.

One was a beautiful, voluptuous brunette with unsteady, glowing eyes and a smile betokening wild abandon.

"We must get to know each other," she said. "I will introduce you to my friend, and later we'll take supper together like a cosy little family."

Another was an extremely slim young woman with bright blue eyes, who towered above most of the men. She wandered through the throng serene and unconcerned in a long, white silk secession robe, looking like a phantom. She spoke without moving her head and smiled without drawing her lips. She had come from Denmark to study painting and at the same time "live life," as she expressed it.

"Who are you?" she asked Lilly. "You are different from the rest. The woman who comes here and does not want to be swept along in the current must have strong arms."

She boldly threw back the wide sleeves of her gown as far as her shoulders and exposed two lily-white, wonderfully curved arms, gleaming like marble pillars.

Thereupon she wandered further.

The third was an extremely light-haired, very elegant woman, no longer young. Her pretty, good-humoured face was tanned by the open air. With a merry flash of her eyes she held out her hand to Lilly, as if they were old acquaintances.

"Oh, how sweet and lovely you are!" she said softly. "We have all flown here and don't know how. But where do *you* come from? My name is ——" she mentioned the name of a great musician who in Kilian Czepanek's home had been revered as semi-divine.

"Yes, Welter's former wife—that's who I am," she added gaily, and turned to the gentleman on

whose arm she had walked up to Lilly.

"Another general's wife, like myself," thought Lilly, looking after her.

There were some married couples, too; for the most part extremely young and extravagantly clad, who at first kept together timidly and looked about with great, astonished eyes, and later frolicked about like monkeys set at liberty. One couple seemed to have been dragged to the carnival as a practical joke. The husband was a genuine complacent beery German, the wife, a good, corpulent, black-silk creature. The man, Lilly was told, was the landlord of the house, a well-to-do baker, who had been invited to the carnival as a reward for good-naturedly having permitted his fourth floor to be turned topsy-turvey. But the couple by no means felt nervous or out of place. They made coarse, clumsy jokes, and were always surrounded by a group of laughing auditors.

About ten o'clock—Lilly had just been entangled by one of the long-haired and linenless in a profound discussion of false human values—when all of a sudden a sort of cry of wrath was raised, issuing at first from only one or two throats, then swelling to a loud thunder. Lilly distinguished the words "hunger" and "fodder."

Mr. Kellermann's pacifying voice resounded to still the clamour. An accident, he said, had occurred to interrupt the spreading of the bread of which each guest would receive a piece—a poor devil of an artist couldn't afford a more abundant repast. He had hurriedly sent across the street for what was missing, and would the gentlemen please content themselves until it arrived? As for those who were *very* hungry and did not worry about the taking of human life, the hosts had provided arsenic sandwiches and strychnine tarts, which were to be found in the closet marked "Poisons."

The whole assemblage made a dash for the Criminal Side, where for the sake of the *crimes passionels* a whole arsenal of deadly instruments had been prepared. Gallows dangled from the ceiling, ladders led down to abysses, and a cannon was discharged. The company immediately snatched the poisonous sandwiches from the sideboard, and sometimes even absolute strangers offered one another "a bite," like school children.

Then came the regular supper.

A buffet had been set up among the pines in the anteroom, piled mountain high with all sorts of goodies, Yorkshire hams, cold game, lobster, sliced salmon, and heaven knows what else. So stormy was the onslaught on that buffet—which, providentially had been placed against a wall—that the forest of pines gave way. Twigs flew about, branches broke, and a mass of laughing, cursing creatures rolled among the overturned tree-boxes.

Somebody had a brilliant idea—chuck the whole forest down stairs. Forthwith the Chinese lanterns were extinguished, and despite the protestations of the landlord, who feared for the sleep of his other tenants, tree after tree went crashing down the steps and piled up at the bottom.

The ladies' light dresses were completely strewn with pine needles, pine needles settled in their hair and on their bosoms. The whole place smelled of Christmas.

One could hardly enjoy eating for all the laughing.

Besides, there were not enough chairs and tables for everybody. So, to be able at least to balance the plate on their laps, they sat crowded close up against one another on the stairs, where the company was fed from above downward each time fresh provisions were procured from the buffet and brought out into the hall.

Some enterprising pioneers even climbed up on the heap of pine trees and swayed on the springy branches like birds. Benevolent souls on the upper landing handed them their food on forks tied to walking sticks.

Lilly, fairly sick with laughter, sat on one of the steps quite surrounded by strange gentlemen, all of whom wanted to be fed by her. She was in such a state of beatitude that she wished her life might end with the carnival. If she had any care in the world, it was to see to it that the gentlemen about her got enough to eat.

The last of the refreshments were the cream kisses promised on the invitation. They swung on long strings from the ceiling, and each guest had to snap like a dog for his portion. If anyone used his hands he was rapped over the knuckles.

This sport, which at first created fresh storms of folly, soon had to be relinquished because the cream dropped on the ladies' dresses. Lilly's Empire gown was also stained, but the instant the cream fell on it one of the gentlemen kneeled and sucked the spot away.

When a trumpet blast summoned the company back to the studio, everybody was unhappy, Lilly in especial.

But when she saw her friend again, whom she had quite forgotten, she quickly took comfort. Pressing against his arm and beaming with delight she reported to him amid gurgles of laughter all she had experienced in the meantime.

Now, it seemed to her, she again saw the looks of those who passed her fastened on her face in

strange seriousness, betokening something like compassion. But she had too much to relate to give those strange looks much thought.

The speeches now began. Lilly begged her friend to stay at her side. She had romped enough, she said, and needed something "homey."

He pressed his arm against hers gratefully.

"Why are you trembling so?" she asked in surprise.

"Oh, nothing," he replied lightly.

The first of the speakers was one of the long-haired, linenless, sombre ones. Something weighty and solemn, like a hymn, was to usher in the numbers on the program.

He recited an ode entitled "Super-Smoke," in which such words as "sublime mist" rhymed with "amethyst," and "super-desire" with "passionate fire."

Lilly understood not a word, though the poem must have been very beautiful, because at the conclusion the gentlemen burst into wild applause. "Bravo! Bravo! Super-smoke! More Super-smoke!"

The sombre poet, who naturally interpreted these exclamations as a call for "*da capo*," bowed and felt flattered and started off again: "Super-Smoke, an Ode."

He found he was in for it. "Enough, enough," came from all sides, and it turned out that the gentlemen had merely wished to express their desire for something smokeable in the language of super-men.

The next to ascend the platform was a slim, very elegant gentleman with a dark brown Van Dyke beard and a gleaming monocle. He had been introduced to Lilly. Dr. Salmoni smiled sadly, and held his curved left hand close to his nose to scrutinise his long nails. His intention, he said was to draw up an intellectual inventory of the evening. For the purpose he would make a few remarks as a basis of his "so-to-speak destructive construction of this social heterogeneity."

With that, a hail-storm of audacities and personalities came rattling down on the heads of hosts and guests.

Though Lilly understood only a fraction of what he said, she felt she had to blush with shame for each person his ill-natured words hit. But, strange to say, nobody took offence. On the contrary, each one upon getting his raking tried to outdo the others in noisy applause.

"What a happy world," thought Lilly, "where people have become absolutely invulnerable and the most heinous sins simply add to their honour."

Her own misdeed, from which she had suffered so long as from a festering sore, suddenly appeared something like a child's amiable prank.

"Was it idiocy in me to grieve so?" she asked herself, and pushed her hips downward with her hands, as if to brush away all the old chains from her limbs.

The elegant doctor could deal in compliments also. Each of the lovely women received her little bon-bon rolled in pepper. And when he spoke of a lotos flower that had drifted there from fairyland and still seemed to dread the glory of the new sun shining upon it, Lilly again saw all glances turned upon her.

"But let her take courage," Dr. Salmoni continued. "Should she need some one to help her dreamily await the night, she may count, I feel certain, upon every one of us."

He was rewarded with the enthusiastic applause of all the gentlemen, and Lilly did not even feel ashamed.

Upon concluding, and after gathering in a harvest of praise from the auditors, who crowded up to him—those who had gotten the hottest "roast" were the most eager—he stepped to Lilly's side and said *sotto voce*:

"I beg your pardon most humbly for having mentioned you in the same breath as this set. People on our level ought to have a tacit code; they ought to understand each other without making bald declarations. But I was tired of just cracking a whip. Besides, I may assure you, I don't *always* play the fool."

He stuck his monocle in his waistcoat pocket and looked at Lilly with his sharp grey eyes as if to tear her heart to tatters.

"People on our level," he had said. Lilly felt flattered that so clever and prominent a man should rank her with him.

The next performer was a "minstrel," a mercurial, black young fellow, who accompanied himself on the mandolin. He struck up a highly sentimental ditty, like a troubadour's.

> The lady's name I will not cite,
> Far purer she than the moonlight.
> She is so chaste, she burns with shame

To hear the stork called by its name.
And if rash Eros bids you try
To steal a kiss, however shy,
Her face grows pale—Heaven forefend!—
And stammers she: "Now this must end!"

The second strophe, the temperature of which rose many degrees, ended with the line:

Quoth she: "Now cut it out! Now stop."

And the third strophe, whose outrageous explicitness Lilly scarcely ventured to understand, wound up with the French:

Tout ce que vous voulez, mais pas ça.

An endless round of clapping and shouting followed the song.

Lilly was astonished, but did not resent it. She resented nothing any more. Leaning back in her chair with half-closed eyes, she let the lights, the sounds, the vulgarities, the laughter and applause pass as in a dream.

From time to time she looked around at her friend.

He stood behind her, and smiled reassuringly, but said nothing. A mottled red burned on his forehead, and his eyes were bloodshot. Perhaps he had drunk too much champagne. As for herself, though she had taken only a sip, her head was spinning dizzily.

At two o'clock the speech-making ended. Now the final restraints were thrust aside. The company romped madly, danced, kissed, drank, quarrelled, and fought duels. Lovers stabbed themselves and were carried out dead. The cannon shot off crackers. A thin, droll youngster clad in a Greek gown, which an obliging model had lent him, stood in front of the "Arbour of the Right to Motherhood," and held forth in a singing falsetto. Science had shown, he said, by the results of artificial fish culture that man as a factor in reproduction would soon be unnecessary. At the entrance to the "Arbour of the Cry for Man" a small, wild person with curly black hair had climbed on a chair and kept screaming "A woman! A woman! A woman!" Into the "Arbour of Perversity" they had pushed the baker and his corpulent better half, and each time the two kissed on command a shout of laughter went up outside.

Lilly's head was a-whirl with the tumult. Everything turned in a circle, screeching, darting, hammering, like a series of painful flashes.

"We'd better be going," Mr. Dehnicke's voice behind her advised.

She arose and stretched her arms with a shiver.

That had been life! Life! Life!

Then she followed him.

Mr. Kellermann had noticed her leave, and furtively slipped up to her in the hall. His open collar hung over his jacket, his cheeks were puffed and shiny. He looked like a young Falstaff.

He exchanged glances with Dehnicke, who nodded slightly, as if to say, "It was all right," and went off in search of their wraps.

The instant Mr. Dehnicke was lost among the overcoats, Mr. Kellermann turned to Lilly and whispered:

"The chained beauty, have you forgotten her entirely?"

"Entirely," she replied with a languid smile.

"You'll never come?"

"Never."

"And I tell you"—he led her to one side next to the banisters—"I tell you, you *will* come. When your own chains have cut into your flesh, and you won't know—"

Mr. Dehnicke returned with the wraps, and Mr. Kellermann became silent.

Lilly was keyed up to too blissful a pitch to attach any significance to these strange words, which sounded like a joke in the mouth of the bacchic faun.

She laughed at him.

The lightning flashes that had darted through her brain died down. Leaning lightly against her friend's shoulder she walked airily down the steps singing and swaying her hips.

The whole world seemed to have passed into a soft, perfumed, chiming twilight. Snow had fallen, and the moon was shining.

Dehnicke's carriage was waiting.

"Let us drive to the Tiergarten," Lilly suggested. She could not draw in her fill of the invigorating, snowy air.

She threw herself against the cushioned back of the brougham, and sang and beat time with her feet.

He sat in his corner quite still, looking out into the night.

"Do say something," she cried.

"What shall I say?" he rejoined, and sedulously looked past her with his bleared eyes.

They rolled silently along under the trees, from which every now and then a little silver star was brushed into the carriage.

Lilly sank into a drowsy state.

"Oh," she whispered, seeking a prop for her head, "I could ride on this way forever."

Then, suddenly, it seemed to her that Walter's arm was clasping her waist, and her left cheek was nestling comfortably against Walter's neck, as once on blessed November nights.

But—where did Walter come from all of a sudden?

She started up and sank back, wide awake.

No, that was not Walter. Now she knew exactly who it was. But her great shame kept her from changing her position, and for a while she lay with her eyes wide open listening to his heart. It throbbed even in his upper arm.

"And he will not ask the price which it is the custom in our country to demand of beautiful women," was what Walter had written.

He was demanding it after all.

How contemptuously Walter would look down on her when she would turn on the lights in her drawing-room half an hour later—Walter, whom everybody, including the man into whose arms she had glided, considered to be her betrothed; Walter, to whom she must be true as long as there was salvation for her on earth.

To be sure, it was heavenly to be lying there that way. She felt she had a place in the universe. And how horrible that loneliness had been! But now it availed nothing.

Cautiously, as if fearing to hurt him, she withdrew from his arm and pressed against the other side of the brougham.

"Why didn't you stay?" he asked, stammering like a drunkard. "Weren't you comfortable?"

She shook her head.

He repeated the question several times. She maintained silence. She felt any word she might utter would entangle her still further.

Then he clasped her hand, which hung down limply.

"I mayn't," she whispered, extracting her hand from his. "And you mayn't, either."

"Why mayn't we?"

"You will reproach yourself dreadfully later when you recall you are responsible to him."

"Whom?" he asked.

"Whom? *Him.* Whom else? You always say you're nothing but his agent, and—"

A laugh, a hoarse, guilty laugh, interrupted her. He had folded his hands across his knees, and he laughed and drew a deep breath and laughed again, as one who has rid himself of a wearisome burden.

A horrid certainty faced her.

"Then all that wasn't true?" she faltered, staring at him.

"Nonsense, perfect nonsense," he cried. "He wrote me *once*, before he left for the United States. 'Look out for her. Don't let her go to the dogs. She's too good for them.' Nothing else and never again. There! Now you know it. Now I'm rid of it. I've had a hard enough time over it. But what could I do? I had begun so I had to go on. There was no use—"

He jerked up the window and leaned against it panting.

Lilly wanted to ask, "Why did you do it?" but was afraid to. She knew what was coming. One thing stood before her with horrible clearness: she was in his hands beyond rescue. She lived in his house, spent his money, saw the world with his eyes. She was what he had determined she should be: his courtesan, his creature.

The river!

She tore at the brougham door, and set her right foot on the step, but he pulled her back and shut the door again.

"Be sensible," he commanded. "Keep your wits about you."

She burst into a fit of weeping, piteous, harrowing, heartbreaking. She had not shed such tears since the days of her divorce. She saw nothing and heard nothing. Sometimes she seemed to catch the sound of his voice as from a great, great distance. But she did not understand what he said. Simply to cry, cry, cry, as if salvation lay in crying, as if fear and distress would flow away with her tears.

The brougham came to a stand. She felt herself being lifted out. He carried the key in his pocket.

Supported by him she stumbled up the steps and thought from time to time:

"Why, I was going to throw myself into the river."

He led her to the sofa and turned on the lights of the chandelier. Then he undid the buckle of her cloak and removed the veil from her hair.

She lay there languidly, looking apathetically at the tablecloth.

The bird awoke and peeped to her.

"It's late," she heard Mr. Dehnicke say, "and the carriage is waiting. But I can't leave you this way. I must vindicate myself. I want you to know how everything happened."

"It makes no difference," she said, shrugging her shoulders.

"To me it does," he rejoined. "I don't want you to think I'm a rascal."

"That makes no difference either," she thought.

"I loved you," he began, "long before I knew you, when you were still our colonel's wife."

She looked up at him in surprise.

As he stood there in his short, close-fitting dress suit, with a pale, joyless, pleading face, uneasily plucking at the tablecloth, he who was really master there, it seemed to her she was looking upon him for the first time.

"I had been called into service for the manœuvres that summer," he continued, "and the club was still full of you. Even the ladies of the regiment talked of nothing else. There were ever so many pictures of you, too, in circulation. Some of the men had snapped you on the sly. The instant I saw you I should have recognised you, because I remembered every feature. Yes, I may repeat with perfect truth, I loved you even then. What's more, after Prell's letter came and you were to step into my life, good Lord! what plans for winning you didn't I work out in those one and a half years! Then at last you appeared and exceeded my wildest fancies. But when I saw that in between you had become a *grande dame*, and how devoted you were to Walter—you kept talking of him—I lost my last hopes. Of course, I had never seriously counted upon winning you, because, though I lay some stock in myself, I'm not really self-assured—and besides—to have some one like you for a love—that's more happiness than anyone can dream of."

When he said "a love," passionate bitterness welled up within Lilly.

"To have me for a wife," she thought, "*that* is certainty more happiness than anyone can dream of."

She burst out laughing.

He took her laugh as a sign of modest deprecation of his compliment, and talked himself into greater enthusiasm. Did she think a single person in all that company to-night was worthy of unlacing her shoe-ties? Did she realise how immeasurably she was raised above everything bearing the name woman?

From out of her tear-stained eyes the question now candidly shone which pride and shame forbade her to utter.

He must have understood, because he paused suddenly, clapped his hand to his forehead, looked agitated, and paced up and down the room, suppressing sobs. She heard him murmur, "I can't—impossible—I can't."

"Oh—if he can't," she thought, and stared at him with her cheeks pressed between her hands.

He halted in front of her, and tried to talk. But he could only choke down half-articulated words, and he took to pacing the room again.

Lilly caught snatches of words—"mother"—"never persuade her"—"must give up the business." And again and again, "I can't—impossible—I can't."

"He's right," she thought. "A person like me—he really can't." And feeling her renunciation was final she drew a deep breath, and collapsed.

He hastened to her, frightened; leaned over her, and wanted to stroke her hands. But she shook him off. Since he could not find a word in justification of his weak evasion, he took up the thread where Lilly's tortured laugh had cut it off.

"Remember one thing, dearest, dearest friend. I don't want anything for myself—no reward—nothing. Long ago I gave up all wishes for myself, I swear to you. The only thing I wanted was to draw you out of the hole where you were being degraded into a proletarian. Oh, I know it from experience. It lasts a few years—no more. They either go on the street, or they grow more careworn and uglier and uglier. Soon you'd never suspect what they once were. To keep the same thing from happening to you, I thought of that device of the check, and wrote to my American agents. When I saw you were completely taken in, I didn't sleep for several nights out of pure joy, because then I knew I shouldn't have to stand by and see you go to your ruin."

"Why should I go to ruin?" Lilly interjected. "By the time your check came I had already earned a decent little sum. You yourself helped me, and you yourself said, if I continued the same way—"

She stopped short in fright at the thought that if she had to separate from him, this one avenue would be cut off, too. The idea was a nightmare.

No word of encouragement came from him. He kept plucking at the tablecloth in dogged reserve.

"Say something! Have you already forgotten everything you did for me?"

He raised his head.

"Well," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "if you insist. At any rate, it may be well to be perfectly frank this evening."

"Why, what else is there?" Lilly cried.

"Do you remember when you visited the factory, I wouldn't let you into the storeroom?"

"Certainly. But what—"

"And afterwards I said it was because the room wasn't heated?"

"Yes—but I can't see what that has to do with my work."

"If you had gone the least little bit further, you would have seen every one of your transparencies, fifty-six in all. The last were still unwrapped."

Lilly looked up at him as to her executioner. Then she fell down before the sofa. She had no more tears to shed, but the soft darkness of the cushions was soothing to her eyes. To see nothing more, to hear nothing more, to think nothing more. To die quickly, forthwith, before hunger came, and shame.

A long silence followed.

She thought he had already gone when she felt his hand stroking her shoulder and heard his voice with a mournful quiver in it pleading:

"My dear, dear friend, tell me, *tell* me, what could I do? Could I rob you of your one pleasure, your one assurance? Was I to say to you, 'It's amateurish, unsalable?' I saw your whole soul was wrapped up in it, and you lived from it spiritually, as it were. I thought: 'When her affairs are all smoothed out, I'll just let it die a natural death.' And you know it was in a fair way to die naturally. You hardly thought of it the last month. Dearest, dearest friend, do reflect, what wrong did I do? I helped you out of wretched surroundings, I gave you a few months of joy and freedom from care, and I didn't even ask for so much as a kiss. If you want, return to your Mrs. Laue tomorrow, and it will be as if nothing happened. Or remain here quite calmly until you have found a position. I won't thrust myself on you. You needn't see me. When I—leave here—now—"

He could not continue.

After a period of silence Lilly raised her head in fright and curiosity to see what had become of him. She found him in a chair inclined over the table, his head hidden in his arms, and his back shaken with mute sobs.

She stood next to him a while, and tears rolled down her cheeks.

She was so sorry for him—oh, how sorry she was for him!

Then she gently laid her hand on his hair.

"Take comfort, dear friend," she said. "It will be much worse for me than for you. I won't have anybody at all."

And she shuddered, thinking of her approaching loneliness.

He straightened himself up and silently reached for his hat. His eyes were even more bleared than before; his head inclined still further to the left.

Oh, how sorry she was for him!

"Good-by," he said, pressing her right hand. "And thank you."

"I will write to you," she said. "I should like to think it all over to-night. I shall probably move to-morrow, immediately."

"Whatever you wish," he said.

As he was drawing on his overcoat something long and cylindrical gleaming with gold and silver fell noiselessly from his pocket to the floor.

Lilly picked it up. It was a huge cracker.

Both had to smile.

"That lovely carnival had to have this sad ending," she said.

He sighed.

"Did you enjoy yourself? I hope for that at least."

"Oh, what's the difference so far as I'm concerned?" said Lilly, deprecatingly.

"A great difference. The whole affair was gotten up for you."

"How—for me?"

"Well, do you suppose Mr. Kellermann, who at the very best earns fifty to a hundred marks a week, can afford such an entertainment? The physician ordered diversion, and on account of the position you are in, I couldn't offer you any, so I hid behind him, and—"

She opened her eyes wide.

If he loved her to that extent!

"You dear, dear friend," she said, and for one instant lightly leaned her head against his shoulder.

He threw his arms about her quickly, greedily, as if she would be snatched from him the next instant. His whole body quivered, and she felt his warm tears on her forehead.

Since he did not venture to kiss her even yet, she offered him her lips.

"The third," she thought.

When she glanced up, she saw Walter's eyes on the wall looking down at her with a base, sneering smile. Just as she had feared in the carriage.

Terrified, she drew Mr. Dehnicke's attention to the portrait.

"We'd better have it sent right down to the basement to-morrow," he said.

And since they now had very much to say to each other, the carriage was immediately dismissed, because it was half past three, and the coachman and the horses needed a rest.

CHAPTER VIII

A new life began for Lilly once again.

An end to her loneliness!

Every afternoon Mr. Dehnicke came for his cup of tea, and now he was no longer Mr. Dehnicke; he was Richard, dear, beloved Richard, to whom one waved and nodded cheerily from the window, whom one received with outstretched arms in front of the apartment door, against whose knees one crouched on the floor, and from whose forehead one smoothed away the naughty frown of care with a tender "poor boy, poor boy."

Oh, how needless to have hoarded up such a wealth of love! She could lavish it in profusion, yet there was always a fresh supply.

Away with the *grande dame*, the haughty aristocrat! She stooped to him, played the little girl, wanted to be found fault with and scolded, looked terrified at the faintest shadow of displeasure on his face, and tried to read his every wish—wishes he himself was not aware of—from his eyes. She wanted to be grateful for his goodness, his tenderness, for everything he had done to save her from ruin.

No wonder, then, that by degrees he lost his adoring upward glance, and began to make demands, sometimes very whimsical demands, and assume the manner of a husband. Now and then he even recalled his benefactions, not very emphatically, though with sufficient explicitness to change what was at first voluntary humility into a duty.

Since Lilly had become his mistress, his attitude to the world had veered about, so that his entire life stood on a different basis.

The pedantic bronze manufacturer so dreadfully concerned for his good name and standing in respectable society had changed into a daring fast liver.

So far from hesitating to be seen at Lilly's side on the streets and promenades, he could not display himself to the eyes of the crowd often enough. The good old brougham no longer sufficed. He must also have a new-fashioned, spacious victoria, in which to drive with Lilly along Unter den Linden to the Tiergarten. When they went out together in the evening, he chose the places where most of fashionable Berlin is to be found, and tried to obtain seats from which they could be observed on all sides.

He sat in the boxes at theatre with a swelling shirt front, carefully tailored and barbered and manicured, and endeavoured to present an indifferent blasé smile to the glasses levelled upon him and his companion.

He ordered his clothes from the representatives of London houses that bob up in Berlin every spring and autumn in search of customers. He adopted a monocle and stuck his handkerchief inside his left cuff. The military officer in him came to the surface and endeavoured to ape the effeminate gestures of the fops of the Guard.

In short, he bent all his energies upon proving himself worthy of a mistress of Lilly's rank and qualities. He soon discovered that connection with so exquisite a creature, so far from damaging him, cast an unhoped for glamour about his life, even about his business, lending it an air of splendour that all his superb remodelling had not been able to give it.

If the senior member of the firm of Liebert & Dehnicke, the world said, can indulge in such an extravagance, his goods must be selling much better than we thought. And many a dealer who had formerly bought of his competitors now came to him, impelled by those mysterious powers of suggestion whose laws psychologists and historians have in vain endeavoured to fathom.

People showed him greater respect, but a respect mitigated by that jovial, confidential smile which the world always smiles when it pardons a man of proven harmlessness an interesting secret little infirmity.

Questions like "When are we going to see you outside of business?" or "What do you say to making a night of it together now and then?" questions from persons who had paid no attention to him formerly, became as cheap as the bronze wares of Liebert & Dehnicke.

"By right, I ought to charge you to the expense account of the business," he once said with a smile to Lilly, who by and by ceased to feel pained at delicate jokes of that sort.

The evening excursions, which took place three or four times a week, gradually became a matter of habit, and rapidly acquainted Lilly with all the soap-bubble pleasures that float from the witch's cauldron of Berlin life.

It was now too late in the winter for those great public balls, at which one shams the mysterious lady of rank beneath a silk domino. To compensate there were the theatres where observances are lax and the lowest vices of the Parisian boulevards, diluted and warmed over, are dished up to tickle the palates of hungry pleasure-seekers; all-night cabarets, where obscene jests are clothed in literary garb, and wild women escaped from the confines of middle-class life vie with professional music-hall singers for the palm of vulgarity; bars and grill-rooms; back rooms of aristocratic restaurants which the law forbids to be locked, and in which chilly orgies are smiled upon mockingly by correct waiters; and, to wind up with, certain cafés, sparkling with lights and blue with cigarette smoke, where the weary nerves seek and find their final stimulation in contact with prostitutes selling their wares in open market.

In the beginning Lilly opposed these doings. Her senses demanded satisfaction of another sort. She had a vague feeling of mournfulness, as if each day of this new pleasure-filled life were carrying her farther and farther from those laurel-lined stairs to which her longing had gone out. But when she saw that her every wish for quiet encountered sulky resistance, she gave up her desires voluntarily, and kept her dreams for a better time, a time which would bring all her hopes to fruition, which—which—her fancy might venture no farther.

Besides, it was always so fascinating, so dazzling.

Lilly and Dehnicke were seldom left alone. In proceeding from place to place they would meet acquaintances, many of whom Lilly had seen at the carnival; and they would join company informally; or frequently, appointments were made beforehand. So there was quite a group of them, a little fixed nucleus, about which newcomers kept crystallising.

One of the faithful was that sweet little brunette with the unsteady, glowing eyes and the foolish smile, who had wanted her friend and herself to form a little family group at supper with Lilly and Dehnicke. Her name was Mrs. Sievekingk. A vague desire for "life" had caused her to run away from her husband, a physician somewhere in Further Pomerania. After having gone through various experiences she was now living with the proprietor of a large steam laundry, a red-haired swell, thin as a broomstick, Wohlfahrt by name. He suffered from dyspepsia, and Mrs. Sievekingk always had ready in her hand-bag an assortment of pills and powders. But this touching, energetic care of him did not prevent her from deceiving him for the sake of any man who courted her. Everybody knew it and nobody blamed her. She was a poetess and had to create experiences to sing about. As a result many a lover who thought he was sinning with her in absolute secrecy would a few weeks later discover an exact portrait of himself as the hero of a passionate sketch or a murky love poem in some magazine of the latest school.

There was Mrs. Welter also, the divorced wife of the renowned composer, whose round, russet

face—she had returned lately from a mysterious pleasure trip to Algeria—formed a droll contrast to the golden aureole of her mass of dyed hair. It was dangerous to associate with her. She borrowed of everybody she met, although she was in comfortable circumstances, receiving an ample alimony from her former husband's rich relatives. Her constant state of want was due to her infinite goodness, which led her to turn over all she possessed and all her friends gave her to two cashiered lovers, each of whom in his way was a scamp. Nobody knew to whom she was attached at present. She was frequently seen with a district attorney, who was stiff as a poker and too formal to use a toothpick on his hollow teeth, and so sat for hours in silence busily rolling his tongue between his jaws.

Among others was an extremely thin little shrewmouse, dainty and devilish, with steely eyes and thin pinched lips turning inward. She always wore white silk, and dragged a rustling, fan-shaped train. She called herself Mrs. Karla. Nobody knew her real name except her lover, a mere boy, the son of a manufacturer. Pale, puny, and completely in her toils, he followed her about until dawn indulging her in her sapping lust for pleasure. In an unguarded moment he revealed that she was the wife of a Jewish scholar who lived in absolute seclusion, and actually believed that she was occupied in satisfying the social demands of the Berlin West Side. And while she wantoned with all sorts of people in music halls and *chambres separées*, her husband sat quietly at home poring over his statistical tables.

There were women of every description, for whose past and whose means of subsistence no one concerned himself, provided they were pretty and elegant and not exactly *cocottes*.

In addition to the ladies' legitimate escorts were a large number of gentlemen, who came every evening to fish in troubled waters. These gentlemen constituted the real enlivening element, and among them was the Dr. Salmoni who had wielded "the big stick" at Mr. Kellermann's carnival while smiling a mournful smile. In his company, Lilly felt, she always grew embarrassed and reticent, although it seemed to her a secret bond united them. As at the carnival, he exercised his caustic wit upon every person who crossed his path, with the exception of herself, whom he passed by considerately. Now and then he dissected her with his probing eyes, and two or three times he whispered softly *en passant*: "What are you seeking to find here, lovely lady?"

Mr. Kellermann, too, presented himself not infrequently; grew befuddled, and then threw out remarks about "a chained beauty crying to be set free," remarks which Lilly assiduously endeavoured not to hear. At the end of the evening he usually discovered he was out of pocket, upon which Richard came to his rescue.

Such was the world in which from now on Lilly's days—and nights—glided along.

She received mysterious messages of all sorts; invitations from strange gentlemen to discreet rendezvous, flowers sent anonymously, from modest bouquets of violets to gorgeous baskets of orchids, visits from ladies of suspicious character, who were organising private charity circles, and with highly significant smiles asked Lilly to join—a turbid surf of desire forever rolling up to her threshold. At first it frightened her; finally she took no notice of it.

Spring came, and with it the races at which everybody appears who lays claim for any reason at all to membership in the world of elegance.

Since Lilly had been enthroned at Richard's side, the slumbering cavalry officer in him had been awakened to such lively consciousness, his passion for native horse-breeding had swelled to such vast proportions that he would not have dreamed of missing a single race. Although he never betted, his pockets were stuffed with crumpled tips; chances and pedigrees constituted his sole topic of conversation, and Lilly, who took not the least interest in it all, willingly lent him her undivided attention.

One morning, on studying the account of the previous day's race in her paper, the following passage attracted her notice:

"Among the charming representatives of the world which knows no *ennui*, was the impressive beauty who for some time past has permitted glimpses of herself everywhere, and who still radiates the discreet atmosphere of the *haute volée*, which, it is rumoured, was once her native element. She favors violet, and in accordance with a famous precedent, she might be dubbed '*la dame aux violettes*.' We congratulate ourselves upon the appearance of this new star, who will only add to the reputation of our metropolitan life."

"Who can that be?" thought Lilly, slightly envious, and passed in review the beautiful women she had admired the day before.

Then suddenly the blood rushed to her head. Her glance sought the Redfern costume, which she had not yet hung away, and was lying across the back of a chair. It was two years old, but so wonderfully well made that it could compete with the new creations of the spring. Since this was the only suit of the sort she possessed—Richard must be spared unnecessary expense—she had worn it several times in succession.

"Yes, she no longer doubted—the item referred to her and no other. Her first thought was:

"How pleased Richard will be."

She, too, was pleased. Mrs. Laue's boldest prophecies seemed about to be fulfilled. She was growing famous. She actually figured in the papers.

But that feeling of dread! That enigmatic, senseless dread which forever crouched in the bottom of her heart, and crept to the surface at the very moment a new event led her on a stage further toward grandeur and happiness. Since she had stepped into the world at Richard's side, she had encountered nothing but what awakened gladness, pride and hope. Everybody respected and flattered her. Scorn of herself, self-torturing thoughts, had passed away, giving place to a quiet appreciation of her own value in the presence of strangers. But that stupid, dull dread never left her. It would not be silenced.

Earlier in the afternoon than usual, Richard came down the street beaming and openly waving the paper up to her.

After they had embraced ten times and read the passage in the paper twice as often, Richard turned taciturn and gloomy, folded his arms like Napoleon, and paced up and down the room with short, sharp steps.

You could see ambition seething in his brain.

The bell rang.

Little Mrs. Sievekingk was announced.

She had come for a friendly little talk with Lilly several times before, though the two had not grown more intimate as a result. This time she arrived opportunely, to help them taste the joy of Lilly's fame.

Her grey velvet suit shimmered in the afternoon sunlight, and the red turban with the waving aigrette nestled in her dark, curly head like a tongue of flame darting downward.

She held her hand out to Lilly with her seductive smile, but when she turned to Richard, her eyes flashed with some of the energy with which she insisted upon her lover taking a dose.

In the presence of strangers Lilly and Richard still kept up the myth of a Platonic friendship. So Richard modestly reached for his hat to extract from Lilly the polite request that he stay a little longer. But the small, dark woman anticipated them.

"Don't be foolish," she said, "don't behave as if you weren't perfectly at home here. You may call each other by your first names, as if from a slip of the tongue, and I'll pretend not to have heard a thing."

Lilly and Richard smiled, and while Lilly poured a cup of tea for her guest, Richard played with the paper. He wanted to make certain whether Mrs. Sievekingk had learned of the great triumph.

"What I really came for was on account of that stuff," she said, "and you are the very person I want to speak to about it. I suppose you're awfully proud of it."

Richard made a deprecating gesture, and smiled complacently.

"To be quite frank, I credited you with a grain or two more sense."

"I beg pardon," Richard observed, taken aback.

Lilly started. Her dread of the morning grew into the suspicion that her great fortune had a cloven hoof.

"Just let me speak," said the little woman, her eyes now flashing very steadily with a conscious purpose. "I have experience in such matters. My red-head began the same way with me. Has the thought never occurred to you, Mr. Dehnicke, that when a choice creature like this one sitting here, something so sweet and glorious that you'll never find her like, entrusts herself to you, you have assumed a vast responsibility? Do you think we're here to puff and swell your vanity? We're not factory girls or ballet dancers to be stuck into silks and laces and led around to show the world that you're a fine buck. We have fallen from society, I know, but we're not to be classed, not by a long shot, with those women to whose ranks you would like to reduce us."

Richard wanted to reply, but could not find the right words, and Mrs. Sievekingk continued, bending toward Lilly tenderly:

"So here comes a poor little mite in its unsuspecting aristocracy, and says: 'Take me. Do with me what you want.' And what will you do with her? You'll make a fast woman of her, at least what the world takes to be a fast woman. Don't contradict me. As a beginning you've already done very well." She pointed to the paper.

"Once the yellow journals take us up, then the counts of the Guard are on the spot, and then, may the Lord have mercy on us! They're much better-looking and more chivalrous than you; and if we *must* become *cocottes*, we'd like at least to know for whom and for what. And if you affect indifference, then you're nothing in our opinion but a bad joke of yesterday."

Lilly's breath was taken away. She had not thought it possible that anyone should dare to speak to Richard in such a tone. She laid her hand on his shoulder deprecatingly to pacify him. She feared he might become angry and enforce his rights as master of the place.

The very contrary occurred.

"I will gladly do what you say," he replied, mealy-mouthed, "if only I knew—"

"I'll tell you what you don't know. You mustn't lead her around like an animal in a show. Don't expose her to the gaze of all sorts of people. Don't seat her in the front of the box at opera for every rake to stare at."

Richard plucked up his spirits for a defence.

"Aren't *you* to be seen everywhere?"

"Certainly. Because I myself want to see things. That's the reason I ran away from my horror of a husband. Nevertheless I don't take box seats. And I don't fly around race tracks either. I'm by nature a Bohemian, while Lilly, with her quiet, refined heart, is a bourgeois, and a bourgeois she ought to remain, as if she were your wife by law. But neither of us wants to descend to the demi-monde, I mean what we mean by demi-monde in Germany. In the French sense we've been in it a long time. That's what I have to say to you, my dear sir."

Richard arose helplessly, quite red in the face, gnawing ferociously at his moustache.

"I've always had nothing but her good at heart," he said. "Beside, it was your wish, too, wasn't it, Lilly?"

Lilly could not make denial. She did not want to shame him any further; and she turned aside without replying.

"And supposing it was her wish a thousand times!" the little woman rejoined in Lilly's stead. "You should have said to her: 'My dear, you don't understand. Since we are not married'—*nota bene*, that would be the best for both of you—'we must live modestly, otherwise I should do you mortal injury, I should throw you in the mire.'"

Lilly felt tears rising to her eyes, as always when the subject of marriage in connection with Richard and herself; arose. Not to show her emotion, she quickly left the room to fetch Richard's overcoat. It was already quarter of six.

She accompanied him to the door and kissed him tenderly. He must by no means suppose that he had jarred her or that she bore him a grudge.

When she returned to her guest, she took his part eagerly. He was very dear and good. He had saved her from ruin, and certainly meditated no evil.

"I'm not here to sow dissension," said the little woman, laughing. She then asked to be allowed to remain a little longer. "My first name is Jula, and please avail yourself of it in the future."

They sat hand in hand on the straight sofa, over which Walter's masterful smile had been replaced by an extremely indifferent sheep-shearing scene. On the glass plate in front of each was a bit of nibbled cake. For the first time in her life Lilly enjoyed the pleasure of possessing something like a friend—she had always felt uneasy in Miss von Schwertfeger's presence.

The canary bird sang a sorry spring song, and the sparrows outside in the chestnut trees responded. The May sun painted red spirals on the wall, and from time to time a greenish golden flash darted from the aquarium when one of the little fish shot through the waving algæ.

The hour of confidences had struck.

"I put on mighty superior airs just then," said Mrs. Jula. "But it was necessary to, my dear. Because you're just like me, you are standing on the very edge. One touch, and over we go—where no one will pick us up. If we could rely on our own character, our plight would not be so bad, but there are no two ways about it, we can't always be faithful—we don't want to be."

"How can you say such a thing?" cried Lilly, horror-stricken.

Mrs. Jula ran her little red tongue along her lips.

"Just wait, my dear. The men we meet are really not calculated to make us see that we are here for one alone. In fact, the only way to enjoy them is in the plural. Oh, I could tell you things! But I don't want to alarm you. Besides, there's a danger attached to the plural. Each man we give ourselves up to robs us of a piece of what is best in us—what is best, I tell you, even if we can't clearly define it. It isn't consciousness of our own worth, because, if possible, that survives. It's not purity either. We don't give a fig for purity. Happiness, certainly not. We should die of dulness if we stuck to one man. I've spoken to a number of women, and they all have the same feeling. Some of them think it's better not to fall in love, and do it just from caprice. Some swear by the grand passion, which is to consecrate everything. No two persons, I suppose, think alike in this respect. And now I want to give you a little advice, because your turn will come some day. Don't accept any gifts, at least, no gifts of money value. At the utmost flowers, and none too many of them. And don't give gifts in return, because everything belongs to 'him.' Married women may; but it's not seemly for us. In general, avoid the *amant de cæur*, because *amant-de-cæurdom* is characteristic of prostitutes. Married women may do all that, because they have to take revenge for being tied to the 'one.' We, on the contrary, are free. We are permitted to go whenever we want to. But we mustn't. Anything, but not that."

"Why mustn't we?" asked Lilly, who suddenly began to feel her chains.

"Married women may. They *may* everything. They may be divorced as often as they want, and carry their heads just as high as before. As for us, each time we're thrust lower into the world of prostitutes; and the oftener we change, the more we become free booty. All very well if we have money of our own. But neither you nor I have. They hover over us like vultures ready to swoop down upon us. If she's allowed herself to be supported by him—and *him*—and *him*, why isn't she to be had for *my* good money, too? That's the reason we must hold fast to the one we have, no matter how small and horrid he is, no matter how repulsive we think him.

"I don't understand," said Lilly. "If you're with a man, you love him."

"Oh—do you mean to say you loved every man you were with?"

"Why, there weren't so many," replied Lilly. "Beside my husband, the general"—she could not deny herself the joy of uttering that proud word—"there was only one other, and now—here—"

"Oh, stuff!" cried Mrs. Jula in righteous indignation. "Do you want to blossom in my eyes as a rose of virtue?"

Lilly protested she was speaking the truth.

Mrs. Jula could not credit it.

"Why, then, you're not one of us! You ought really be a judge's wife."

Lilly laughed. She who had always thought sentence had long before been pronounced upon her immoral conduct, now heard herself ridiculed for her excess of virtue.

"Oh, if I were to tell you the stories of all the women we meet," continued Mrs. Jula. "One of them goes with girls in secret. One rents out rooms to students, but only to students she likes. And then there's one"—her voice sank to a whisper—"who fetches her lovers in from the street."

Lilly shuddered.

"What! I've sat next to a woman like that, and never suspected it!"

Mrs. Jula's eyes glowed into space.

"It's dreadful, isn't it?" she said, and laughed. "Well, it doesn't bother me. I have my poems. They lend sanctity to my acts and wash me clean again. It's for their sake I do it all. I need sensations, yes, I need sensations. I must feel my blood chase through my veins. I must study, study—something new in each one. No matter how inane a man may be, so inane that a thimble would hold his soul, nevertheless he has one hour of intoxication to give you, one hour in which all the bells chime and even the spheres make their heavenly music. And the more men you possess, the more life you possess, the more souls you creep into. All the doors of life fly open. All the secrets are revealed. If you can hear the pulsebeat of a stranger, can feel it under your fingers—he's yours—he's you yourself. Then you live one life more. Yes, that's life. That's what I call life."

Lilly said to herself she could not possibly take this talk seriously, though hot and cold waves shivered through her body.

"I don't understand what you say," she replied, and rose.

Mrs. Jula did not even hear her. A mystic fire smouldered in her eyes. She looked like a priestess sacrificing to dark gods.

It struck eight o'clock.

The maid had set the table in the dining-room, and had laid a cover for the strange lady, who did not seem disposed to leave. She now came to announce that the meal was served.

"Will you stay and dine with me?" asked Lilly, somewhat against her will.

At last Mrs. Jula woke up. She neither accepted nor declined, but arose and disengaged her flaming hat from her dark curls.

"I'm crazy, am I not?" she said, and the foolish, seductive smile blossomed about her lips again.

Drawing a breath of relief, Lilly opened the door to the dining-room.

The table gleamed with snowy damask, strewn with leaves of light formed by the pierced shade of the hanging lamp. The gaily coloured dishes, which Lilly had bought cheap at a sale, were a copy of an old Strasburg pattern. The knives and forks as well as the set of casters and the sugar tongs were of the finest plate, to be distinguished from real silver only by the mark.

When Richard stayed for the evening meal, he should find everything as shining and substantial as at his mother's.

Mrs. Jula burst into raptures.

"Oh, how beautiful your place is. How dear! How charming! Am I not right in saying you were born to be a married woman? You ought to see my rubbish at home. What's the use? If my red-head has spoiled his stomach in a restaurant on larded lamb kidneys or turkey *aux truffes*, the next day I have to prepare gruel and toast and I serve it to him directly from the pot. What's the

use of making a lot of fuss and setting a table?"

"Thank the Lord!" thought Lilly. "She's herself again."

The meal was modest enough—various cold cuts with roasted potatoes, and the remnants of a pastry for dessert. But Mrs. Jula ate as if such delights had not been spread before her for years. And she had to know exactly where Lilly got her supplies.

Lilly informed her accurately. For the sake of cheapness, she said, she got her cold meats from a man in the country, whose address she would be glad to give Mrs. Jula.

"I divined it immediately," said Mrs. Jula, softly, her eyes staring meditatively. After a pause she added more softly: "That's just the way it was there."

"There—where?" asked Lilly.

"Why, in my home."

Suddenly Mrs. Jula threw her napkin on the table, jumped from her seat, and stepped to the open window, wringing her hands and pressing them to her forehead.

"I'm going to ruin! I'm going to ruin! I'm going to ruin!" she moaned out into the night.

"What's the matter?" faltered Lilly in fright, and also jumped up.

"I want to go back to my husband. I want to go back to my husband. He's a cross old piece, I know. And it's death to live with him. It's true, it's true! But I do want to go back to him. I'm going to ruin here. I'm going to ruin here."

Lilly stepped behind her and stroked her neck.

"Why should you go to ruin here?" she comforted her. "You just now gave me such splendid advice about how to keep from going to ruin. Besides, you have a mainstay in your art which I lost long ago." She looked with a sigh at the sample closets, in which the last of her pressed-flower woods reposed unseen. "No, you won't go to ruin You will reach the heights, from which you will look down on us poor women."

Mrs. Jula sobbed on her shoulder.

"Never again, never again," she wailed. "I can't pull myself out of this whirlpool. It's as if I were poisoned. My brain is poisoned. I'm going to ruin. I'm going to ruin."

Lilly clasped her gently under the arm, and led her back to the unlighted drawing-room, and seated her in the corner of the sofa where she had sat before.

"It's nice and dark here," Mrs. Jula said, whimpering like a child. "So I'm going to confess everything, everything. But close the door. There mustn't be a ray of light."

Lilly closed the door of the dining-room.

They now sat in darkness. The evening dusk reflected from the canal through the chestnut trees, still thinly leaved, poured a vapoury grey over the tear-stained face.

"Before," began Mrs. Jula, "I told you of a woman who seeks her adventures on the street, and you jumped up in horror. Do you know who that woman is? *I* am that woman."

"For God's sake!" cried Lilly.

"Yes, I am that woman. The evenings my red-head leaves me alone, I put on dark clothes, and go to parts where no one who knows me is likely to meet me. If somebody I come across pleases me, I give him a look—as a rule he turns back and speaks to me—and I go with him to common saloons, or to a little confectionery shop—anywhere he wants to. Or I sit with him on a bench in the dark—and if he pleases me still more—I go with him—wherever else he wants to."

"Oh, how terrible!" cried Lilly, pressing her hands to her eyes. Now she knew why a few months before something had been pulling her to the street all the time, all the time; why a delicious shiver had coursed through her body when a man spoke to her in the dark. She had simply been too fearsome to answer him.

"Now that you know what I am, you won't want me to stay sitting here on your sofa," cried Mrs. Jula. "Be perfectly frank. I'm ready to go." She reached out pleadingly for Lilly's hands.

Lilly seemed to herself like a Good Samaritan who has met one who is grievously ill and must render that assistance which the moment requires.

"But why do you do it?" she asked gently. "You are not so lonely. How did it come about?"

"Yes, how did it come about? Do you know how *your* life turned out as it did? It's all very well and good for people to reproach us with weakness. One necessity always holds out its hand to another. Each wish gives birth to another. And you always think you're doing what is right and what fate has prescribed."

"That's true," faltered Lilly, recalling the decisive moments of her own life.

"This is what I've always said to myself: my poetry requires it. I must have experiences, pictures,

that *frisson*, as the French say. But all that's a mere pretext. The truth is, we hunt and hunt and hunt. Your husband's not the right one. Your red-head's not the right man, and none of the rest of them—your sporting business man, or your eh-eh-lieutenant. But he must be *somewhere*! The stranger sitting at the next table, he's the one, surely. So you come to an understanding with him—after all he's *not* the right one. It is most certainly not the fine ones. Because they take the trouble to possess us without taking the trouble to find out whether there's anything fine in us, too. So you keep on hunting. Perhaps you will meet him on the street. Finally it turns into fever, which wholly consumes you. Sometimes I can scarcely fall asleep in anticipation of the next dark evening when I shall rove about again. Now, do you see, I must be going to my ruin? When I saw your beautifully set table, all of a sudden a longing for my home and my husband came over me again. Yes, I sometimes have that longing. He has bleared eyes and he smells of carbolic acid. Oh, that vile smell! I'd like so to smell it again For all I care, he may even throw the stethoscope at me again. Besides, he wrote to me I should return to him If I want to, I can. *But*—I will remain here—and go to my ruin. Life's funny."

She rose and groped for her hat and hatpins lying on the table.

Lilly did not want to let her go in such a state of mind.

"If you feel it is driving you to your ruin, that it's a poison in your blood, why don't you try to resist? Why don't you pluck it out of your system? Mere force of will must help some."

"I've said that to myself," rejoined Mrs. Jula. "But I've never had anyone to whom I could speak about it and who could help me. Now I've found you, it will be easier for me. Now I feel I might be able to. Maybe I will."

"Do you want to give me your promise?" asked Lilly, holding out her hand to her.

"Yes, I promise," Mrs. Jula cried, and delightedly clapped her hand in Lilly's. "You will be my saviour. You are already. I feel it. To show my thanks I will stand guard over you and see to it that no one spoils you. You shan't get to be what I am, or the others."

"Oh, I'll take care of myself," faltered Lilly.

"Yes, that's what you say! But when the dreary void comes—and 'he' grows more and more insipid—just you see! You've nothing left to say to yourself—and you mustn't have children—for God's sake!—we *don't* have them—all of us know how to prevent them from coming. You mustn't share his activities with him either. He acquaints you with as many of them as he is compelled to. And behind it all you feel the hostility of his family, who look upon you as a species of harpy. Then those cursed schemes of his for marrying that he dishes up whenever he's angry. Above all, the longing. It's like a steady toothache. That's it—like the toothache. You don't want to think of it, but wherever you go, it tortures you. For life *cannot* end that way. Something *must* happen. It's much worse than if you're married. Just you wait and see."

Mrs. Jula's wild words increased the pain at Lilly's heart. A desolate mournfulness threatened to attack her.

"Stop," she said. "If it must come, it will come soon enough. I don't care to think of it beforehand."

"Right you are, my dear. It doesn't help any, either."

Mrs. Jula now took leave.

"Will you remember your promise?" asked Lilly from the hall door.

"Forever and ever, I swear to you," and Mrs. Jula slipped down the stairs.

With her brain in a whirl Lilly returned to her dark drawing-room, sad and distraught, and leaned her head out of the open window for a whiff of fresh air.

She saw the little woman, who had just emerged from the front entrance, lightly and gracefully trip along the pavement.

A gentleman in a chimney-pot and patent leather shoes came towards her, passed her, started, stopped abruptly, turned about, and, when he reached her side, raised his hat with exaggerated politeness.

In the light of the street-lamp Lilly saw her face smiling up at him curiously, insinuatingly—and then they went on their way—together.

CHAPTER IX

Richard reluctantly adapted himself to a less showy existence. He still wanted to parade his possession of Lilly; but little Mrs. Jula's homily had sunk deep into his conscience, and he did not dare to disobey her.

Nevertheless he was bored and vexed and sulky, and Lilly was on the point of herself suggesting that they go to the races, when she received news of her mother's death.

She shed the number of tears and suffered the amount of affliction befitting her tender heart. In reality her mother had been dead to her so long before that her grief could not be very profound.

Before leaving Berlin to attend the burial at the insane asylum, her greatest concern was to have as simple a mourning dress made as possible. She felt ashamed that she had provided so poorly for her sick mother during her lifetime, and she wished to avoid giving offence by elegance of appearance; which did not prevent the officials and physicians of the institution from dancing attendance on her and treating her as if she were a sort of shining black bird of paradise.

She spent three glowing spring evenings at the little heap of earth in prayer and meditation, and returned to Berlin in a serious frame of mind with thoughts stirred up like soil freshly turned by the plough.

When at her mother's grave she felt she hated Richard; but when she found him awaiting her at the station she sank into his arms helplessly, eager for consolation. Now he really was her all.

For the next few months it was taken for granted that her mourning stood in the way of pleasure seeking. Richard, it must be said to his credit, behaved sweetly and considerately. He sat at home with her many a night, read unintelligible books, played backgammon, and preferred falling asleep on the sofa to luring her into the world of gaiety.

But since it was not right that he should become entirely estranged from society, it was arranged that he was to have every other evening for himself.

His beautiful mistress's reputation had smoothed his path. Relying upon the support of two of her admirers, he ventured to apply for admission into one of the aristocratic clubs, which welcomed him without a single black ball. From now on he could enjoy the supreme delight of losing his firm's well-earned money to young scions of the aristocracy, foreign attachés, and other superior beings.

Lilly disliked hearing of his losses. She worried over his annoyance, which he invariably revealed. Whenever he told of his bad luck, she felt constrained, and then offered to make up by saving even more than she had heretofore. Though he laughed each time and assured her that what she cost him signified as little as if he were to indulge in one additional cigarette a day, she clung to her conviction that she was a parasite, and was partly responsible for the welfare of Liebert & Dehnicke.

When he spent a quiet evening with her resting from his nocturnal campaigns, they always "talked business." Lilly displayed a sharp sense for practical matters, even for accounts, and her artistic judgment was sure.

Richard very often brought home drawings of models, and the two sat bent over the outspread rolls planning and consulting with each other like partners.

Those were well-nigh blessed hours.

Lilly never wearied of inquiring about the factory; how many people were employed there at that particular time; whether this or that man or woman was still working for him—she did not know the names, but designated the people by an accurate description of their appearance—what pieces were in process of making; and whether the supply of articles of one or other model had not yet given out, so thoroughly informed she kept herself as to the firm's sales.

The factory, as she often jestingly remarked to Richard, was her unhappy love. To call for him at his office at closing time was her greatest delight, and had she been permitted to, she would have busied herself at the factory every day. But he objected. His employés knew of the close relationship between them, and he must avoid gossip and ridicule.

Lilly felt sure this was not the only motive. She had long fully realised that his mother was not kindly disposed to her. Though at first he had spoken of her quite freely, he now evaded a reply when Lilly directly asked for her. Probably he feared exciting the old lady's indignation if he permitted his mistress to make herself at home in his office.

So Lilly contented herself with sympathetic interest from afar in the welfare of the little kingdom.

On the evenings she was left alone, at a loss what to do with herself, she got into the habit of visiting the house in Alte Jakobstrasse.

She left a little before ten o'clock, and took up her station on the opposite side of the street, from where she gazed reverentially at the old grey structure. She admired the imitation marble columns, which formed a decorative frame about the entrance after the fashion of a Renaissance gateway. She stared up at the dimly lighted second story where his mother dwelt, and pressed timidly into the darkness of a doorway if she saw the threatening shadow of a woman's figure glide across the curtains.

When it grew late and the tenants of the house ceased to come and go, she ventured to cross the street, mount the three front-door steps, press her face against the iron grating, and peep into the hall. The sheen of the leafy pyramid, the subdued milky whiteness of the Clytie bust, the dark glow of the stained glass window mingled to produce the mysterious, alluring impression of a dusky chapel.

The front-door steps became like a goal of a pilgrimage up to which penitents crawl on their

knees; the stained glass window became a heavenly aureole, the Clytie bust a benedictory saint.

Late in the summer Richard was called to the manœuvres.

His letters were curt and reserved, and unsuccessfully concealed his ill humour. Finally they were dated from the hospital.

He had fallen from his horse and his left knee joint was inflamed. He would be unable to ride for a long time, perhaps forever.

He returned in October wearing a gutta percha knee cap, and promptly sent in his resignation from the regiment.

The fall from his horse in truth was a fortunate incident. Rumours of his relation with the divorced wife of its former commander had reached the regiment. The comrades noticeably held aloof from him, and evidently his chiefs were merely awaiting confirmation of the report to call him to account officially; a procedure which in the circumstances would have brought his lieutenancy in the reserves to a catastrophal end.

The accident was his salvation; and his object in adopting an irritated, reproachful manner in Lilly's presence was merely to make her aware of what he was sacrificing because of his love of her.

Indirectly he had heard news of the colonel which filled Lilly with horror. It had gradually become a fixed idea of the colonel's that Anna von Schwertfeger had acted in collusion with Lilly and Von Prell; and man of violence that he was, he had chased her from his castle. Since then he lived alone, a maddened misanthrope, and it was feared he would come to a sad end.

An ominous greeting from those sunny days of Lilly's past.

A few months later that occurred which Mrs. Jula had prophesied: one day Richard spoke to Lilly of marrying another woman, not, however, for the purpose of annoying her, but because he had formed the habit of disburdening himself of every vexation by talking it over with her.

His mother was entertaining an enormously wealthy orphan girl.

Of course for Richard—wholly and entirely for Richard.

She sat at table every day, a pale, strawy blond, and looked at him questioningly with great, strange eyes:

"Aren't you soon going to propose?"

His mother delivered long sermons. It could not go on the same way. A few more seasons like the last and all the respectable families would point the finger of scorn at him.

It was enough to drive him distracted.

Lilly felt as if glacial waters were trickling down her back.

But she bore up bravely. She smiled at him, and betrayed no more excitement than if he had been consulting her about some doubtful factory model.

"Do you feel you could get to love her?" she asked.

"What does 'to love' mean?" he rejoined, avoiding her gaze.

"Well, everything has to be taken into consideration."

"You talk just as if I were serious about it," he cried. "Altogether you act as if you didn't care, as if you would like to be rid of me in a twinkling."

With languid eagerness Lilly tried to assure him she did not wish to stand in his way, not in the least, least bit. She had only his happiness at heart, and if he cared to make her proud by showing confidence in her, he would not take this step, neither now nor later, without discussing it with her beforehand.

He was touched. He kissed her and said:

"Oh, it's nonsense."

But the conversation left Lilly as in a nightmare, and the one thought obsessed her:

"If he deserts me, I shall sink into the mire after all."

Grief over her mother's death was a vanishing cloud compared with this torturing anguish.

The vultures Mrs Jula had spoken of occurred to her, all those vultures with their white fronts and black dress suits, who were waiting to snatch her to themselves with their moneyed claws

the instant her friend and protector abandoned her. From them her thoughts flitted to those other vultures in Kellermann's picture, who perched on the sunburnt rocks ready to pounce on the naked beauty when she should lose the strength to defend herself.

"Her chains are her weapons," thought Lilly. "And that's the way it is with me. If I am set free, I am lost."

The next day she and Richard carefully avoided the dangerous topic, though Richard remained distraught and uneasy.

Finally Lilly took courage, and though her feelings compressed her throat like a murderous clutch, she said:

"I see you haven't come to a decision yet, Richard. Wouldn't you like to bring me her picture, so that I can see what she is like? No one knows you so well as I do, and no one will know so well whether she suits you or not."

Richard violently denied that he was undecided. What did *he* care for that doll of a girl?

But his resentment was disingenuous, and his eyes stared into vacancy.

She had five millions.

And the next day he actually brought the photograph.

Lilly laid it down without unwrapping it. Mere contact with the picture made her hands tremble. She feared the first sight of the girl's face would expose her own great distress.

"Why, you're not even looking at it," said Richard, with some disappointment in his tone.

"Time enough after you've gone," said Lilly, rejoiced that she could smile so indifferently.

She called to him when he was out in the hall:

"I'll tell you to-morrow—you'll know then."

The next instant she caught up the picture. Her heart knocked at her ribs. But first she had to wave "good-by" to Richard, as was her habit and duty.

And then—and then—

A girl's face, good, placid, somewhat peaked, with poor, though amiable eyes. Her blond hair was plaited country fashion, and the heavy braids, thick as a woman's wrist, drew her head back a bit. A timid smile played about her full lips.

Something just to be loved, something which would revive with happiness as a spray of lilacs in fresh water. Not turbulent, none too gifted—wifely and yielding.

Just what Richard needed.

Lilly placed the picture on a chair and threw herself on her knees in front of it. She prayed and wrestled with her soul.

She had to reiterate again and again:

"Just what he needs. He won't have another such chance."

And the five millions!

If she were not to set him free she would be one of those harpies which Mrs. Jula said the world of respectability considered her and her like to be.

"But I am in possession, therefore mine is the right. What good are her five millions to me, if I go to ruin on account of them? Why need I sacrifice myself for him, for him or for anybody in the wide world?"

"Harpy, harpy!" rang in between.

So thought the vampires described in children's mythologies as having beautiful hair and murderous claws.

"I will tear to shreds the flesh of him whom I possess."

Oh, what a night!

She crouched in bed with her knees drawn up and her face buried in her lap, sobbing, sobbing.

At last, toward morning, she found what she had been seeking. Out of tears, out of bitterness, out of shuddering and prayer arose the alleviating resolve: that very afternoon when he came she would tell him—but no!—why wait until the afternoon? Why wait until he entered the rooms where the force of familiarity, his loving resistance might shiver the great sacrificial work to bits?

It must be in some other place where she seemed more of a stranger to him, which she could leave the instant she felt his proximity caused her to waver.

She was not allowed to visit him in his office without special permission. But at the midday

recess, when it was quieter than at other times, he retired to his back room for his actual work of the day, and she might be sure of entering unseen and speaking to him without fear of interruption.

So sacred a resolve sanctioned everything.

She used the morning for assorting his letters and tying them together. She wanted to hand them to him along with his betrothed's picture when she bade him farewell. He need never fear she might cause him trouble in the future.

Then she dressed—more carefully than usual—washed herself with milk of lilacs to remove the traces of tears, waved her hair, and drew it into a knot at the nape of her neck, as she had seen on statues of Greek women. She was their equal—like them, serenely raised above sorrow and joy.

She drove to the office.

The clock struck quarter past one when she stood in front of the columned gateway.

Nobody was to be seen in the yard except the porter, who lifted his cap with a confidential smile.

She was still their employer's mistress.

If only she had taken the precaution to send in her card.

The front office door was open as usual when he worked in the back room, and she well knew the secret spring of the gate in the railing.

She prudently knocked at the inner door, which as a rule stood slightly ajar, but which to-day was closed.

"Come in," he said.

She stepped in and faced—his mother.

Lilly had never seen her, and she had imagined her quite, quite different, a tall, thin, imposing old lady. Next to Richard's desk sat a medium-sized, rotund woman with a black lace cap on her grizzled hair. She looked at Lilly with an expression of surprise and displeasure in her cold, grey eyes.

Lilly instantly knew it was she.

Richard, who had been leaning back comfortably in his revolving chair, jumped to his feet.

Rigid with fright, Lilly stared at the old lady, who now rose from her seat also, while an evil gleam of anger and contempt lighted up those cold eyes.

"A fine state of affairs," she cried, turning her head jerkily from Richard to Lilly and back to Richard. "I'm not secure even in my own home. I beg of you, Richard, do not expose me to another meeting with a person of this sort."

With an indignant snort she pushed past Lilly, who stood to one side in respectful terror.

"What are you doing here? What do you mean by coming here in this way?"

Richard had never shouted at her so before.

He planted himself squarely in front of her, thrust his hands in his trousers' pockets, and gnawed the ends of his moustache. His head hung on his left shoulder. He looked like a treacherous, butting bull.

She wanted to hand him the picture and the letters, tell him everything she had intended to; but her voice failed. Her knees threatened to give way.

"I—I—I—" she faltered, and choked.

"I—I—I—" he mimicked her. "I—I—I'd like to wriggle myself in here. I—I—I'd like to be mistress here—isn't that so? No, my little angel. This can't go on! It has to stop—at once! I've long had my suspicions of what you call your unhappy love of the factory. Get out of here! Get out of here, I say."

Before he had finished Lilly was out.

She still held the parcel in a convulsive grip.

She reeled as she walked along—past bright red houses, which threatened to fall on her. A truck loaded with flour bags scattered white clouds. A pulley screeched in a factory yard. When someone came toward her, she made a wide détour, keeping to the edge of the pavement. She feared he might grin his contempt at her.

A skein of silk thread lay on the pavement. Lilly picked it up, and thought of hanging herself.

Something must be done.

To be abandoned—very well—if it could not be helped. Each one, when her turn came, would have to resign herself to her fate.

But to be chased away—thrown out—like a thief—like the vilest woman of the street—to be shaken off like a disgusting worm, to be spat upon!

Something must be done.

Anything to take revenge upon him.

Even if he was now unsusceptible to her revenge—all the same! He would discover he had been to blame throughout. If she descended into the mire, which had heretofore filled her with horror, if she went to ruin—!

Something must be done—any deed of self-degradation which made her fit to be treated in that way and no other—and freed her from those torments—those torments.

Her heart hung in her breast like a painful swelling. She could have drawn a line about it, so sharply defined it was against her side. It seemed to be in the clutch of sharp claws.

Again those lurking vultures occurred to her, the vultures of Kellermann's picture.

They were waiting for Lilly Czepanek. For whom else?

Suddenly something flashed and hissed in her brain like a tongue of fire.

That was it! That was it!

She summoned a cab.

On! On!

Whither?

She ordered the coachman to drive as quickly as possible to Mr. Kellermann's studio.

She ran up the steps, the same steps down which eight months before she had glided at Richard's side rocked in bliss. All a-tremble she stepped into the dark anteroom, which had the stuffy smell of a badly aired bedroom. Her hand almost failed her as she knocked at the studio door.

Mr. Kellermann in his breeches and slippers was squatting on the floor beside the Turkish tabouret in exactly the same position as at her first visit. He was busied with a coffee machine, and looked contented and seedy.

"Mercy on us!" he said, and drew the collar of his night-shirt together. "What signifies this sudden appearance, O noble goddess? Are the suns setting again?"

Lilly did not reply. She laid her hat and wraps on a chair, and began to unhook her waist, looking about for a screen. There was none.

The models who came to pose for Mr. Kellermann were not squeamish.

He jumped up and stared at her.

When he realised what she meant to do, he broke into exclamations of delight.

"What did I say? What did I say? I said you'd come. You see! We've reached the point at which we're screaming to be set free."

"I'm not screaming," she replied, drawing up the corners of her mouth disdainfully. "If you please, look somewhere else."

He made a dash for the picture leaning against the wall in its blind frame, blew the dust off, drove the wedge in tight, and adjusted the easel, laughing all the while, and grunting:

"She came after all."

Lilly had torn off her outer garments and was pulling at the drawing ribbon of her chemise. Her paralysed fingers could scarcely untie the knot.

Now she stood entirely unclothed.

The garish studio light pricked her flesh painfully as with a thousand needles.

She wanted to groan and creep into a corner, but she turned her clenched fists outward, threw back her shoulders, and presented herself to the painter's greedy gaze.

"Why don't you begin?" she asked. As she spoke she felt that her smarting scorn was distorting her face.

"I'll begin immediately," he stammered, choking over each word. "I won't utter—a syllable—or the vision will vanish. I'll begin."

He snatched up the palette, pressed the tubes, and readjusted the picture on the easel.

He made a few strokes, then threw the brushes down. He reeled like a drunkard.

"No use this way," he said, mumbling to himself. "You must pose."

"Just as you wish," she replied, still with that mocking smile, and stretched out her arms like the

beauty of the picture.

He was not yet satisfied, and wanted to approach her. He did not dare to.

"I will move the mirror, so that you can see for yourself what is wrong in your pose."

He did so.

Lilly shuddered. A strange wild animal, which was not even beautiful, seemed to be standing there.

"Not right yet," she heard him say. "The attitude is meaningless—you've got to know what it's for."

He went to the back of the studio and rummaged among all sorts of gear and fetched out a tremendously thick chain, the colour of rusty iron, which did not clank while being handled.

"It won't be cold and won't weigh you down," he said with a short, forced laugh. "It's made of papier maché."

Then she had to suffer his coming close to her and laying the chain about her body.

He was panting and his breath streamed upon her hotly.

Each tremulous touch of his fingers was like a sabre slash.

He returned to the easel, groped for the brushes and began to paint again.

Suddenly he cast everything from him, seized the picture with both hands and dashed it against the easel. One of the rods tore through the canvas and split it in two.

"For God's sake!" cried Lilly, horror-stricken.

He threw himself upon her.

She feebly attempted to defend herself with the chain.

But the chain was made of papier maché.

And she would not have had it otherwise.

Down into the mire, quickly, with closed eyes!

The next day Richard paid his customary afternoon visit. His lids were reddened and his eyes glassy. He looked completely crushed, but he behaved as if nothing had occurred.

Lilly had scarcely expected him, and she received him with frigid astonishment.

"Oh," he said, "on account of yesterday. After you left I had a tough discussion with mama. You mustn't come to the factory. I had to promise her that. As for the rest, I think we'll not speak of it any more. The young lady's leaving this evening. So let's kiss."

They kissed. And all was as before.

CHAPTER X

Once more the chestnuts put on their yellow cloaks and the peep holes in the foliage widened. From her window Lilly could see the ducks foraging, and the odorous, fruit-laden barges on their laborious way to market sunk deep in the water under their summer cargo.

Once more the world muffled itself up for winter weather; once more metropolitan amusements turned on their gay lights.

In decent half-mourning the chase began again. Richard objected to remaining like a pickle in a jar.

This time, however, they entirely renounced box seats at dazzling shows and suppers at aristocratic restaurants. Richard no longer had to establish himself triumphantly in the possession of a famous—at the same time cheap—*horizontale de grande marque*. They quietly remained on a middle-class level, where German champagne reigns supreme and the star Kempinski is in the ascendant.

But here, too, in cabarets and theatres where smoking is allowed, in jolly little nooks and respectable looking back rooms, they passed numberless hours in riotous abandon.

The women, who in the other world had felt somewhat out of place and embarrassed, enjoyed themselves better in these more modest surroundings, and the gentlemen were content that their shirt fronts retained the starch longer.

The personnel remained about the same. Only a few dandies dropped away, who saw no fun in life unless it offered them an occasional opportunity to receive a condescending nod from a few lieutenants of the Guard in citizens' clothes.

Lilly followed the crowd, and thought it had to be so.

For the most part she sat there saying little and smiling a friendly smile. She permitted the gentlemen to pay her court and was moderately responsive. She listened indifferently to the confidences of the ladies, all of whom were well-disposed to her, because as everyone soon realised, Lilly had no desire to poach on another's preserves.

They might have taken her to be limited or phlegmatic, if from time to time the champagne had not relaxed her rigidity and enlivened her with a different spirit. She slowly came out of her state of torpor. Her eyes flashed, her cheeks reddened. She laughed aloud, made madcap remarks, told the colonel's club jokes, and finally fell into a sort of ecstasy, in which she sang comic songs in a tremulous chirp, imitated well-known actors, and even danced the bold dances she had seen on the variety stage.

Her memory was incredibly good. She remembered things she had heard only once, and quite unconsciously, for in her normal state she recalled even less than others. The wine first had to wash away the barriers that always hemmed her being.

Her associates soon became aware of this, and tried to trick her into the condition that promised them a merry entertainment. But she resisted with all her might. She waged constant warfare without even Richard as an ally. It flattered his vanity to have his beautiful mistress admired because of her talents.

The next day Lilly always felt bruised and battered and despondent.

And sometimes when the field of her spiritual vision was completely filled with red, kicking legs and the empty teasing dribble of comic songs, she heard a still small voice in admonition:

"There was a time when you lived otherwise. There was a time when you aspired to the heights."

But Lilly feared to listen to this voice.

She felt she was worthless because she was defenceless.

And because nobody was there who understood her and held out his hand to her.

Frequently, on the evenings she was left to herself, she slipped out of the house as if she were committing an evil deed, and took a seat in the gallery of some good theatre, where she thought no one would recognise her; or at a concert, among the music students, who sat on the steps or leaned against the railings, following the selections with thick scores in their hands. Lilly behaved as if she were one of them.

But concerts no longer touched her. She felt uneasy and out of place, and turned her attention to some young man because of his bold profile or his fine head of hair.

"He is one of those favoured talented persons," she thought, tormented, and looked at him long and languishly, until he returned her dallying with ardour.

Though she burned to have him speak to her, she lacked the courage to grant him additional signs of her favour, having before her eyes Mrs. Jula's appalling example. Besides, the throbbing of her heart was sufficient enjoyment.

Already she was so completely under the spell of an erotic world that every excitement of her mood was immediately transmuted into a desirous love game.

And the longing, that eternal toothache, of which Mrs. Jula had spoken, had begun to drill her nerves.

It had come like a thief in the night. It filled her sleep with flaming pictures and converted her waking hours into a twilight doze.

She waited, but nobody came. Nobody took the trouble to pick up her lost soul from out of the dust.

There was only one man who observed her and seemed to have a suspicion of what was taking place in her soul.

He was Dr. Salmoni.

Dr. Salmoni was considered a great man, one of the luminaries in Berlin's intellectual life. He was editor of an art magazine, which had once conducted a revolutionary campaign against the great men of the old school, and had fashioned new gods, erected new altars at which the masses might burn incense. But the steady burning of incense was not in Dr. Salmoni's line. He promptly bethought himself that the divinities before whom every Tom, Dick, or Harry was crawling on his knees, were, at bottom, creations of his and of his friends, fetiches to be rejected, just as they had been exalted. And he began a merry war upon them also. People easily endured Dr. Salmoni's hate; his quips sputtered in the air harmless as skyrockets; nobody believed his imputations. The only time he was dangerous was when he showed pitying benevolence. Then somebody's reputation was surely at stake. In certain circles Dr. Salmoni's praise was equivalent to a death

sentence.

As in the previous winter, the distinguished Dr. Salmoni condescended every now and then to take part in the innocent sport of the little circle whose forte was not exactly intellectuality. His appearance always caused a flutter of joyous reverence; the company instantly moved closer to make place for him, and as soon as he leaned back gently in his chair, smiled his sad, compassionate smile, and stroked the peak of his light-brown Van Dyke beard, they hung on his lips expectantly awaiting a titillating stream of spiteful sallies.

But the jester's rôle did not always suit him. He plunged into profound tête-à-têtes, or dreamed in silence, according to his mood. Sometimes he even showed a naïve, trusting side of his nature, like a leopard playing with dogs.

He seldom addressed Lilly; but his piercing eyes often glided over her face, as if to spy upon her feelings and grope about in her soul.

One evening he seated himself next to her, and asked her to cut his meat for him—he had strained his wrist throttling a certain celebrity. Waxing more intimate, he next asked her to feed him, though his left hand had by no means been disabled.

So for the first time they entered into a conversation.

Lilly quailed. She feared she might not acquit herself creditably.

"I am surprised," he said. "You've been going about with this loud crew for over a year, and I don't read the slang in your eyes yet."

"Slang in my eyes? What do you mean by slang in a person's eyes?"

"Do me the favour to regard the women here." He pointed furtively at Mrs. Jula, Mrs. Welter, Karla, and a few others. "Look at the way they roll their eyes and exchange glances. It's the lingo of a—well, I won't say vice—I despise words without nuance—I'll say of a thievish fancy. Do you understand?"

"I think so," faltered Lilly.

"But you still have some of the childlike expression you had when you made your début. Not altogether. A fleck of disdain is in your eyes. Disdain is not the right word. At the edge of deserts there are certain salt seas—dark green and empty. Do you catch the idea? Because the ground is poisonous."

"Possibly," said Lilly, constrained.

"Nevertheless, it's wonderful. Your soul's like a filter. It assimilates nothing but what it wants to. Or have you a secret store to draw on, which gives you the right to mock at us—some constant ideal—some goal in the hazy distance—some great song—a Song of Songs?"

Lilly started up with a faint outcry, but not so faint as to fail to attract general attention.

"I merely stepped on her foot," Dr. Salmoni explained, "and she is still innocent enough *not* to consider it unintentional."

All laughed.

"A joke exactly suited to their understanding," he whispered, bending toward her shoulder. "I'll pretend not to have heard your involuntary avowal. That alone has value in my estimation which is voluntary. And I will not ask you as I did a year ago: 'What is thy quest here, lovely lady?' I will ask you: 'What hast thou to lose here?' I myself will furnish the answer. Your style—you have your style to lose. You are on the point of becoming styleless; which is always a misfortune and a crime. To me style is virtue, greatness, genuineness, force, religion, a God-ordained quality—all in one and a few things more. Remain bodily and spiritually intangible. Rise to a healthy, gladsome vice—*tant mieux*. Dress your hair for evening prayers, or let it flow over the pillow like a bacchante—but decide which."

"I believe a moment ago you were pleading for nuance," said Lilly, the edge of whose wit was sharpened by his, "and now you're advocating a dogma."

"Hear, hear!" he praised her. "Excellent. But no. I'm not preaching a dogma. I'm preaching the exercise of one's will, the will to personality. Do you understand? The result will be rich enough in nuances. Undoubtedly you have the material in you for a *grande amoureuse*, but alas not the courage."

"Well, then, not the material," she flashed back happily.

He laughed like a child.

"In one's old age one gets lectures on logic from little, virtuous women." He magnanimously allowed her the pleasure of having outdone him in repartee.

Thereafter Lilly reflected much upon the conversation. What a vast deal he knew of her! Was he in alliance with supernatural powers?

"The will to personality," he had said.

She felt blissful. Up to the heights again!

On another occasion, as they were walking behind their companions along Friederichstrasse, still gaily alive at midnight, he adopted a different tone.

"I have a sure feeling that you are afraid of me," he said.

"I?" she queried, confused and drawing a deep breath. "Why should I be?"

"Because you know I have a message for you, a message to which, in the bottom of your heart, you don't feel equal."

"I don't understand," she stammered, though she fully took in his meaning. She knew precisely what rôle he could play in her life if—

"I am a man who likes tones pianissimo. I don't care to blow my sensations on a comb. Otherwise your ears might have tingled on certain occasions. However, I must say, it's abominable to see a woman like you, a woman created to wander on the heights of thought and enjoyment, seduced by a few Bismarck herrings into cutting capers with them. I won't mention names, but I assure you, you can't get drunk on lukewarm dish water, and intoxication is the great thing in life, at least while our blood runs lively in our veins."

Lilly trembled on his arm.

They were passing a crowd of roysterers, young fellows shouldering their canes, with swimming eyes dreaming into space. One whistled Wagner, another sang a students' song; and sweet little street-walkers cast longing, seductive glances at them. Lilly and Dr. Salmoni passed more people, adults and half-grown girls, men and youths. All seemed under the spell of the same transport. It was like a great dance, at which each offered his neighbour hand and mouth and body and soul.

"What can I do?" she whispered, dropping her chin on her heaving breast.

"I will tell you," he replied with a smile which harboured dark promises. "You must learn to live another life along with this one. One all for yourself, for yourself and a few select. Do you understand? As a Frenchman once said, you must lay out a secret garden, in which you will cultivate in absolute quiet those thoughts and desires that seem dear to you, and above all, those that seem to be forbidden and those that you have stolen by the way, no matter how. Do you understand?"

"Whatever I have stolen has brought me misfortune," said Lilly, hesitatingly.

"Rather the law which calls it stolen. The distinction is a difficult one to make. However, you may believe me in this: so long as we are not permeated with the religion of self-exaltation—do you understand me, child?—so long as we haven't rooted out the words 'attachment' and 'duty' from our thoughts, our road is not perfect. We continue to knock our toes on the crushed stones that the others heap up ahead of us under the pretext that they are levelling the way."

"Sometimes they do," said Lilly, recalling all the good things she had received from Richard.

He smiled at her with compassionate indulgence.

"You seem to be suffering from what I call chain madness."

"What is that?" asked Lilly, suspecting, to her dismay, that he again divined what lay in her innermost being. Could he know of the shameful rôle that a certain chained beauty had played in her life?

"It is said," he continued, "that if galley slaves who have worn chains for many years are liberated, they cannot endure their freedom. They complain that their arms and legs have been chopped off. They miss the support and weight of their chains. You have such beautiful arms for stretching upward. Just exercise them a little."

"And such long legs for running away," she supplemented with a tortured laugh. "The only question is: Whither?"

"Oh, oh! Why run away immediately?" he asked, stroking her hand, which rested on his arm, and speaking as to a child. "You would simply run into the arms of another so-called duty. First you must be free inwardly. You must first forget to fetch and carry for persons who are themselves meant to fetch and carry."

"Teach me," she burst out.

"I will bring you some books," he said, as if deliberating, "books which will lead you back to yourself. To-morrow at noon, I will—"

At that moment they were separated.

In bed Lilly lay with clasped hands smiling up at the ceiling.

She was again aspiring to the heights.

But the next day when he was to come, dread fell upon her again, dread of him, of Richard, of herself.

It was the first secret visit, the first to knock a breach in the peace of her home.

When she saw him step from the cab with several volumes in his arm, she flew into the kitchen and told the maid to say she was not at home.

But the instant he left she seized the books which he had brought.

Some were printed in Roman type and looked dreadfully scientific. However, they were intelligible, and Lilly took up one after the other. What she read sent the blood coursing turbulently through her veins, and mounted to her head like sweet wine.

All the books spoke of the "will to power," "the free man," "the right to live one's life," "the religion of passion," and similar things. In each pure beauty was extolled as the goal of human endeavours; in each the word "individuality" recurred numberless times in numberless connections. Each taught you to look down upon your fellow-beings with vigorous pride, and despise them as a blunted, debased, tortured and enslaved mass. In each you wandered along in blessed solitude—or in the company of a very few like-minded, noble souls—on free wind-swept mountain heights surrounded by an eternally bright ether.

It was a constant offering of incense, an insatiable lashing of oneself into satiety, pleasant murder, hymn-singing rape. The main subjects invariably were intoxication, dreams, life's festivals, and ecstasy.

Thus, a veil of intoxication and dreams was spread over Lilly's soul. She felt she was enveloped in a sapphire haze shot with the purple of a distant glow. She heard hot, wrathful music storming onward in discords like mænads tearing down every hindrance in their way. She felt she was climbing up perpendicular rocks, ever higher, ever higher, fighting the whole time against the dizziness which threatened to cast her back into the abyss. But she did not sink. She clung to the edge, which bruised her hands, and laughed down—laughed—laughed—at the sorry wretches there below crawling along in flocks, permitting themselves to be ground to death for their bit of daily bread.

Then she felt sorry that she alone had scaled such heights, that she alone should be up there enjoying the wild, golden sunlight, while all the others little conceived that deliverance was at hand. She wanted to hold out her hand to her poor, starving brothers and sisters and draw them up after her. But they could not understand her message of salvation—he had said "message of salvation." She saw wasting faces, dank with the sweat of death; glassy eyes unable to turn from the gleaming penny, their pay. She saw pregnant bodies, swollen yet emaciated.

The working woman in Richard's wrapping room recurred to her. She recalled her hands flying in feverish haste about the swaying doll. She and others recurred to Lilly, with the timid hate and the hopeless yearning in their weary eyes.

Her unhappy love for the factory, which she thought had been extinguished forever on that day of shame, awoke within her again, as a quiet, painful tenderness, like the spring anticipations that tremble in us when the February snows begin to melt.

This, to be sure, was hardly the sense or purpose of Dr. Salmoni's books. But they served another purpose most admirably. Her faint toothache rose to a veritable anguish. The desire for a man, any man not Richard, who understood her and swept her along with him, overwhelmed her with such force that she could only twist this way and that and feel she would perish under the lash.

Somewhere the "one" was surely to be found. Was it not possible for a favouring wave in this sea of humanity to toss him to her feet?

One evening she put on simple, dark clothes—she might have been taken for a seamstress returning from work—and slipped down the street, as she used to when Richard's house drew her to it with a thousand secret threads.

Since she was unskilled in strolling about aimlessly and needed a goal, she listened to the voice of her newly awakened love, and took the accustomed route to Alte Jakobstrasse. On the way she shudderingly avoided two old beaux and a fresh clerk.

The latticed gates of the famous marble-columned portal cried an iron "Halt!"

She stood a long time pressed up against her old door on the opposite side of the street, and stared at the house to which fate had anchored her.

Lights were burning in his mother's room.

The two gas jets of the chandelier resembled her cold, clear eyes. The rest of the jets were not turned on, probably from motives of economy.

Of the factory nothing was to be seen save the dark top of the chimney towering above the roof of the house in front.

A sorry greeting. Nevertheless a greeting. She would have liked to say "How do you do?" to the

beloved staircase also. But she no longer dared to cross the street.

Then, as if after a good deed accomplished, she turned homeward feeling at ease.

She repeated the visit three times in the course of the week. She began to feel that the aimless journeys were a life necessity.

Once, just as she was disposing herself comfortably in her protecting doorway, an elegant slim gentleman, who evidently had come the same way behind her, stopped and raised his hat.

Dr. Salmoni.

Lilly in her fright nearly forgot to return his greeting.

If he were to betray her to Richard! Richard would assume that jealousy, or even worse, had driven her there.

"Well, well," began Dr. Salmoni, complacently rolling the words in his mouth. "It strikes me as somewhat touching that we should meet directly opposite Liebert & Dehnicke. As you know, I'm a gentle nature, a soul in socks, as it were. So I refrain from asking you what stirrings of your heart prompted you to come here. You know the fairy-tale of the queen who sallied forth to find her king, and ended in finding a swineherd. Thus a pearl may stray into a bronze ware factory. I should not have permitted myself to follow you intentionally. I was seduced by a certain play of lines and curves. Perhaps a certain suspicion of brilliance shone through—but a young pheasant should not be shot out of season. Let your fruit ripen, is a very sound motto, and not only with respect to *soi-disant* love. But it's questionable whether mottoes are worth the while. They smack of respectability, and respectability smacks of Virginia tobacco, and Virginia tobacco smells, and is celebrated far and wide *because* it smells. Do you get my profound meaning?"

"I should like to leave this spot," said Lilly. "If we were to be seen here!"

"Oh, here of all places we may be seen together," he rejoined, laughing with childlike glee. "It would take a perverse imagination to assume that we selected this very house for a secret rendezvous. But as you wish."

He offered her his arm. She declined.

They walked side by side through dark, tortuous streets on the farther west side.

He talked to her steadily. One idea suggested another. One wheel of fire set free another. Sometimes it appeared to Lilly he had totally forgotten her presence and was speaking for his own delight in the play of his fancy. What he said seemed to have no bearing upon herself and her sorry existence.

But no, she was mistaken. His gold had been coined for her after all. He merely gave too much, and her brain lacked space to receive all of it.

He walked with an elastic, somewhat tripping tread. His cane, stuck head downward in his coat pocket, tapped against his shoulder. His white silk necktie gleamed. She saw nothing else of him. And he talked, talked. Sometimes she felt that she was being boxed on the ear, and anon that she was being stroked tenderly.

When he made mock of Richard and Richard's friends, she wanted to contradict him, but he never mentioned names. Besides she had always thought the same, it seemed to her.

He alluded cautiously to her aristocratic past, chose pictures from country life, extolled discreet horseback rides *à deux*, and the transports awakened by reddish, golden dawns. Lilly felt he had been present at all the events of her life.

"I have lived a good deal in castles," he added by way of explanation. "I know it all."

Oh, if his past had been similar!

So he drilled ever deeper into her soul.

When he began to speak of the books he had brought her—he considerately ignored her having denied herself the time he had called—she ventured a languid resistance.

"Please don't lend me anything of the sort again," she entreated.

"Why not?"

"The books confuse and sicken me—I don't know. You said they would lead me to myself. On the contrary. It seemed to me everything was growing strange which I had once looked upon as right and sacred.

"Perhaps it should be so," he replied, setting his cane a-dancing. "Perhaps that is the prime demand I have to make of you in the name of a higher life. Let me tell you a little fable apropos. Once upon a time there were two good old missionaries. To satisfy a strong spiritual craving they wanted to spread Christianity in Central Africa. There is really no need for such queer fish, but they do exist, and we must accept the fact. They took a small portable organ with them for enhancing the solemnity of their sermons. In the sweat of their brows and the encouraging heat of the tropics, they dragged it hundreds of miles into the interior, where dwelt the poor naked

savages upon whom they had designs. There they set their organ down and began to play. But scarcely did the poor naked savages hear the first chords, when they took up their clubs and beat the good missionaries to death—on account of the spirits, of course, who resided in the chest. Life does the same to us if we attempt to play on the good old organ of our moral exactions."

Lilly felt she could not cope with his superior intellect.

Now he laid her arm in his without question, and she did not venture to withdraw it.

They walked along lowering factory walls, amid whose dark masses a lantern now and then spread its milky circle of light. Scaffoldings stretched their bony arms to the sulphur-coloured sky, and from parallel streets came the intermittent clang of electric tram gongs.

"Where are we going?" asked Lilly, anxiously.

"We're going out of the way of society. And if I wanted to exploit the present conjuncture of circumstances I should profit by your being lost, your feeling that you need protection. But I'm not a calculating nature. In matters of emotion I'm like a child. I take whatever the heavens rain down on me. Aren't you the same way?"

"I'm too heavy," replied Lilly, ready to bare her soul to him. "I'm full of scruples. I think a lot over everything."

"The question is *what* you think," he said gaily.

She wanted to reply and talk to him—tell him all her thoughts. She felt like holding out her heart on her open palm, so that nothing should remain concealed from him. But shame before his great wisdom sealed her lips.

"Why do you take the trouble to bother with a stupid thing like me?" she asked, to show him her humility at least.

"Perhaps because I have a mission to fulfil in your life. 'Perhaps,' I say, because one can never be sure whether there is such a thing as reflex action of the emotions. Certain *moments psychologiques* will teach us."

Though his meaning was not at all clear to Lilly, a hesitating sense of happiness stole over her that so mighty a man should actually concern himself with her.

"You are entirely in his power," she thought, "and you will be whatever he wants you to be."

At that moment he drew her arm a little closer, and her pressure in response brought his hand for an instant on her breast.

She was overwhelmed with fright. He might think she was offering herself to him. If he were to take her home, were to ask—

"I'd like to get into a tram," she faltered. "I'm very tired."

He whistled for a cab, which just then came swaying out of the fog.

"No, no," she burst out, thinking of nothing but that she must not lightly forego the joy of his friendship. "Not with you—I must go home alone—on account—"

She tore her arm from his and ran to the next stopping place so quickly that he was just about able to reach her before she jumped on the first tram that came along. She scarcely said good-by.

The smile with which he looked after her was by no means melancholy.

He might, he should triumph.

She, Lilly Czepanek, was once again aspiring to the heights.

Three days later they met again; this time in a large company which had visited a *café chantant*, and was to wind up the evening at a respectable bodega.

Unluckily somebody else took the seat at her side, which she had carefully reserved for him.

That upset her.

The champagne heated up everybody's spirits.

Lilly, out of spite and boredom, drank more than was good for her.

Provocative merriness burned in her eyes. Her cheeks took on the Baldwin apple hue that they all dearly loved. Her laughter rang out clear, her body moved more nonchalantly.

Suddenly she heard a general outcry: "Lilly! Lilly! We want Lilly!"

Terror stopped her pulse.

She had never ventured to perform in his presence. In fact, she had not been asked to when he had been there, for then *he* formed the centre of attraction.

But she felt:

"I can do it to-day. To-day I will show him what I am."

She rose, brushed her hair from her forehead, and gave herself a little shake, as was her wont when she jerked aside the everyday Lilly, the craven-hearted Lilly, the Lilly of the oppressed feelings, the Lilly who feared to face her fellow-beings, the stiff-jointed Lilly.

She made a dash and began.

First she imitated the beautiful Otéro, and crowed and cuckooed. Her auditors rolled with laughter. Then she hit off certain cabaret stars. Sucking her fingers like an innocent babe, she sang in flute tones: "Please let me in your room."

She croaked in a droll, bull-frog bass: "Once I was ambassador," and peeping from behind the clothes rack she cooed the song of the passionate dove: "Coo—coo—coo—kiek!"

They insisted on her concluding with a fandango. She protested. In vain.

They shoved the tables against the wall, and Lilly, making her own music through her teeth, whirled about the room more madly than ever before, and finally collapsed in a corner almost swooning.

The tumult of applause promised never to subside.

The women kissed her again and again, the men stroked her hair and arms, the stiff district attorney sounded a trumpet blast, and Richard, quite pale with pride, stood there in his Napoleon attitude, tugging at his moustache.

But Dr. Salmoni remained at a distance, sad and modest, as if it all concerned him not in the least.

The only sign by which she knew he realised it was all meant for him was a rapid glance of understanding which he threw to her like a laurel wreath.

She was still rocking in the tempest when the company prepared to break up.

That had been intoxication, the sort of which he had spoken. It hissed like a flame through her heart and limbs.

Dr. Salmoni himself helped her on with her fur coat—Richard was busy paying the waiter—and while he deliberately laid the sable scarf about her shoulders, he whispered close to her ear:

"May I come to-morrow?"

"Yes," she screamed, alarmed at herself.

Then in defiance of her own cowardice, she turned abruptly on her heels and shouted sharply, as in anger, directly in his face:

"Yes, yes, yes, yes!"

"What's the matter?" everybody asked.

She merely laughed shortly. What did she care for the others? Wasn't she aspiring to the heights again?

The next morning it was all a spectral dream. The one clear point was: "He's coming."

With the applause still ringing in her ears she had stretched herself and thought:

"Now he knows what I am. Now he knows I'm no dull, shrivelled, half-way creature for the valleys, no slave nature, no sheep that runs with the flock, no Mrs. Grundy-made fool, who voluntarily conforms to each and every convention. Now he knows I'm a free, proud woman, who, like himself, drinks in the light on the heights, one of those complete women, those mænads who dance a wild dance over abysms and mock at death even when he has them in his clutches."

Then her faintheartedness crept over her again. What after all had she done besides drink herself into a champagne mood, sing a few comic songs, and dance an abandoned dance? She had behaved like a music-hall danseuse, and had harvested the very doubtful approval of a semi-intoxicated audience.

If that alone was required for belonging to the elect, to the mighty, laughing, chosen ones, of whom Dr. Salmoni's books spoke!

No, oh, no! After last night's performance he could feel nothing but contempt for her, or, at most, pity. It was to tell her this to her face that he would come to visit her, if at all. He would let her feel her lowness and then go his own way, benevolent but untouched.

She would not suffer him to go. She would cling to him and cry:

"You promised to lead me up to the heights out of these depths of distress, out of this insipid

existence, out of this void! Be true to your word. Do not desert me. I will do whatever you wish. I will be your thing, your creature. But don't desert me."

In feverish expectancy she dressed, waved her hair, and rouged her lips, pale from nights of pleasure. She made herself as beautiful as she could.

A little before twelve the bell rang.

He?

No. Mrs. Jula.

As if by mutual agreement she and Mrs. Jula had avoided each other since that evening of confidences. And now, without having announced her visit, here she stood, wearing her most cordial expression, and asking for a brief interview.

Lilly hesitated.

"Really I shan't keep you long, my dear. I understand—you're expecting some one."

"Not that I know of," replied Lilly, aware she was blushing.

"Don't deny it. Dr. Salmoni is coming. I know the joke. I once stood the same way, pale one instant, the next instant red, and waited for him. The only difference is, my house gown wasn't such an angelic red. I was plain Bordeaux red. All the same to him. He takes us in Bordeaux red, too."'

"What do you mean?" Lilly faltered.

"What do I mean? Do you know what our circle with all our pretty legères women is to Dr. Salmoni? It's a sort of fishing pool, where he angles from time to time to land something for which he just then happens to have an appetite. There you have it, my dear!"

"That's slander!" cried Lilly, flaring up. "He's never made approaches to me. We've never so much as mentioned the word love to each other."

"No need," replied Mrs. Jula, and laughed exultingly. "He doesn't bother with such petty things. He knows when the time comes we shall swim into his net without it."

Lilly felt herself getting still angrier.

"We've always spoken of pure, noble things, of a proud humanity. And if you and your like cannot understand his language, if you insist—"

"One moment, my dear," Mrs. Jula interrupted her. "No need to be insulting. I came to you out of good motives. As for the others—it was *toute même chose* to me. I even licked my chops. But *you*, I love you, even if you don't want to have anything to do with me. *You* he's to leave as you are. And last night, when I saw how far things had gone, I couldn't quiet down. I had to come to you before he—"

"Really, you're mistaken," said Lilly, though unable to refrain from a furtive glance at the clock.

Mrs. Jula, upon whom the glance was not lost, made a little grimace.

"Never mind. When the bell rings I'll slide out through the guest room. But before then I am in hopes of having completed my work. See here, child"—she seated herself at one end of the sofa and drew Lilly down beside her—"why, all of us poor women crave to rise again, or once did, when like you we were tolerably faithful to the one. At the psychological moment, enter Dr. Salmoni. He doesn't have to work so hard for some of us, but he seems to like it. He must first salivate on us like an adder on a sparrow. He has various methods. With a cold mug like Karla, of course, he behaves very differently from the way he behaves with such as you or me. To us he says in the beginning: 'I cannot get over my astonishment at seeing you in these surroundings. Tell me, what seek you here?'"

Lilly started.

"Well, did he, or didn't he?"

"Yes—but—"

"Very well, yes. That's all I want to know. Then he describes the dangers threatening us provided we continue to live in chains. His pet abomination is duty. He cannot bear it. As if we were so awfully particular about our little bit of duty. Lordy! Well, is that the way it went?"

"Yes—but—" stammered Lilly.

"Good. Then *he* will deliver us. *He* will guide us. He's the mountain guide ordained. 'Upward—up to the heights!' *N'est-ce pas?*"

Lilly turned her face away to conceal her blush of shame.

"Next in turn come the books. Miserable palaver written by immature little scribblers in imitation of the great Nietzsche. Nevertheless we all fall into the trap. It gets into our blood like Spanish fly. It quite befuddles us. The thing that so infuriates us afterwards is that we actually believed in the scoundrel's woebegone pathos, although the mangiest cynicism crops out of every pore of his

body. But we're such sheep, and he's so clever—so clever. Yes, he is clever. You must give the devil his due."

"But how does he manage," asked Lilly, who no longer dared to shield him, "how does he manage to make it appear that he lived through our entire past with us?"

"Yes, child. People in similar circumstances usually have similar experiences. He can easily reconstruct our past—of those of us who came from the country. I'm a landed proprietor's daughter. Didn't he tell you in a by-the-way that he had passed a great part of his youth in castles?"

Lilly assented.

"Later I learned he had been private tutor to a Jew living on a leased estate near Breslau. But they bounced him pretty soon because he was saucy."

In the midst of her sad disenchantment Lilly had to burst out laughing.

"Fine," said her friend in approval, stroking her hands. "You may well feel happy. I wish someone had come to me the same way. Because afterwards, oh, how it hurts!"

"Yes, tell me, how is it—afterwards?" asked Lilly, hesitatingly.

"Very simple. After he's gotten what he wants, finis. He buttons up his coat, says in a voice quivering with emotion, '*au revoir*,' but there never is a *revoir*. You never see him again."

"Impossible!" cried Lilly, horror-stricken. "A man can't treat a woman so currishly."

"You—*never—see—him—again*, I tell you. What do you suppose? The man has weightier matters to attend to. I wrote my fingers sore—not a line in reply. Mrs. Welter lay on his threshold. Karla got the jaundice, she was so furious. And so on. But his name is eel. When you meet him later in company, you don't read the faintest recollection in his eyes. At the very most he 'jollies' you like the rest."

Lilly, alarmed, brought it home to herself that she, too, had "later" encountered a conscience in company and had forcibly extinguished every recollection, no matter how much the conscience besought her with his comically mournful glances. One person behaved like the other in this world where you threw your dignity away like an ill-fitting dress.

She hid her face on the sofa arm shaken with a storm of shame and guilt.

"Never mind," Mrs. Jula comforted her. "Nothing has happened yet."

The bell rang.

Lilly hurried to the kitchen to tell the maid to dismiss the visitor, but Mrs. Jula restrained her.

"What's gotten into your head?" she whispered. "Would you have him think you're afraid of him? That way you'll never be rid of him. Laugh at him. Do you understand? *Laugh* at him—long and hard."

Lilly wanted to run after her and beg her to remain. Was she, Lilly, his match? He was already entering the room.

Drawn to her full height she looked at him as at a dead enemy.

"My dear child," he said, kissing her hand, which she quickly withdrew.

He had exercised great care in dressing. He wore straw-coloured gloves, and held his silk hat pressed to his breast. His monocle danced on his white waistcoat. An air of smug self-confidence, of unpretentious mastery enveloped his being like a mild glory. The way he settled himself comfortably in his chair, the way he amiably crossed his legs indicated that of course she had been subjugated.

Lilly was no longer fearful or timid, nor did she experience the pangs of disillusionment. She was simply possessed of cool, conscious curiosity.

She followed each of his movements with astonished eyes, as he passed his hand over his shining hair cut brush fashion, and pulled his trousers up and exposed the red-dotted stockings on his ankles.

She kept saying to herself:

"So *that's* what you are, *that's* what you are."

He began to speak in a soft, compassionate, caressing voice, while his peering eyes glided up and down her body.

"You're excited, dear child. I understand. When two people like us are brought alone together for the first time in their lives, their feelings run away with them. Don't be ashamed. What led us to each other is such a delicate, subtle understanding—the fluid between us is of such a rare, fleeting quality—"

"Yes—fleeting, especially," thought Lilly, "—that it would really be a shame if we did not taste every drop of it. And a superabundance of feelings would simply be a hindrance to the spiritual

epicureanism in both of us, particularly in me."

As he spoke, slightly smacking his lips and swaying back and forth, the refrain of a Viennese ditty in her repertoire occurred to her: "I have much too much sentiment."

"He has much too much sentiment," she said to herself, and smiled involuntarily.

He saw the smile, which she tried to conceal by lowering her face, but he misinterpreted it.

"There is a coy virginity about you," he said with an admiring shake of his head, "which always fills me with astonishment."

"Oh, you jackanapes," thought Lilly, and smiled again.

Now he hesitated a bit. He had not had all his experience for nothing, and a flash of greed and suspicion darted from between his lids.

"Oh," he continued, "has some of the delightful humour that you surprised us with last night remained over for to-day?"

"Perhaps," she replied with an upward glance which was almost coquettish.

"Oh, splendid!" he cried. His face now brightened into a mischievous smile, in which gaiety and devilishness counterbalanced each other. "Are you one of those who can laugh in her sleeve at—at—how shall I say?—at the whole humbuggery of it all—and at yourself? At yourself, my child, that's the main thing. Then you and I are one—nothing divides us. Then—"

"May God forgive me," she thought, and held her handkerchief to her mouth to suppress her tittering.

"Laugh at him," Mrs. Jula had said.

But he seemed to take it as an invitation, as a delicate, friendly hint to cut the preamble short; for he sprang toward her and clasped her body.

She pushed him back—she wrestled with him.

Tears of shame and indignation welled up in her eyes.

"What sort of a thing have I become?" a voice within her cried, while she struck at him with her fists.

In the midst of the struggle she succeeded in reaching the bell.

The maid appeared.

He picked up his hat from the carpet, murmured something like "riffraff," and disappeared.

Disappeared also from the little circle that he had sometimes honoured with his presence.

Henceforth Lilly ceased to aspire to the heights.

CHAPTER XI

The next year Lilly went through two little love affairs which were of no significance in her after life.

During a four weeks' stay in the Riesengebirge, she met a novelist whose name was then on everybody's lips. He was airing his newly acquired fame in the Bohemian resorts and plucking what flowers he found by the roadside. He forced himself upon Lilly without much ceremony, and a few days later went his way in search of pastures new.

And in Berlin she favoured a handsome, extremely elegant hussar of the Guards, who had flirted with her from his seat at the next table in an aristocratic restaurant. But he wounded her pride by attempting to repay her with a little leather box which came from the jeweler's. She sent back the box and turned him off.

She disliked the thought of both adventures, and soon wiped them entirely from her memory.

At Christmas a companion came to live with her. She had frequently complained to Richard that her life was empty; she craved something alive and loving to take care of. So he gave her a little naked monkey which could not warm itself even in her bosom. When angry, the monkey spat his scorn of her yearning in her face.

Every now and then a marriage scheme was again propounded.

Lilly knew the signs perfectly.

When Richard paced through all the rooms, taciturn and distraught, wrinkling his forehead; when

apropos of nothing he began to philosophise on the futility of all things earthly; when mama required the carriage at unwonted hours, and little packages of concert and opera tickets filled his purse, she knew something was impending.

And then it seldom lasted long before Richard broke silence.

One had two millions, the other three. Influential relatives, mines, factories, legacies, government contracts, whole blocks of houses, and innumerable building lots nodded in the distance.

Sometimes Lilly's drawing-room hummed with so many figures that it might have been a stockbroker's office.

One of the prospective brides even was poor. But she was a general's daughter, and mama adored her.

"I'm a general's widow," said Lilly.

Whether rich or poor, they all disappeared, because none of them was good enough for him.

Lilly meditated and schemed; this is the way she should be, and this way, and this way. She must have white, column-like arms such as the Danish girl at the carnival; and she must have an extremely delicate, scarcely perceptible bosom—her own seemed to Lilly to have become too voluptuous—and when she laughed, two dimples must form in her cheeks, because dimples were a sign of peaceableness.

Peace she demanded for him above all. She knew he could not bear disputes. As a matter of fact they never did quarrel. But if a little disagreement arose, he went about for days looking miserable, spoke in a woebegone, sick tone, and had to be petted like a child. Which she did with joy, though he by no means deserved it.

For, whatever the standpoint from which you viewed such things, he had become an out and out good-for-nothing.

He might be pardoned the very respectable sums he lost at the club, but he debauched like a married man, and his experiences were none of the purest.

One day a pretty young thing with an eight weeks' old baby on her arm came to Lilly and wept and screamed, and declared Lilly must cede her place to her because she had the child by him and so the greater right.

Lilly comforted her and gave her some wine, and, filled with envy, tickled the baby's wet little chin until it laughed. Whereupon the girl left quieted, and even kissed Lilly's hand on parting.

That afternoon Richard listened to an eloquent discourse.

Lilly felt herself to be entirely free from jealousy.

Whenever he appeared looking embarrassed or with a crafty expression in his eyes, his head inclined all the way to the left, and radiating an odour of cheap perfumes, she always received him with an indulgent smile, which he understood very well and feared like a plague.

However valiant his resolve to maintain silence, it scarcely lasted half an hour before he sat there hopelessly stranded, making partly veiled confessions and asking for praise and comfort.

In a life of this sort, which reflected all the faults and perfidies of marriage without bestowing its sense of dignity and natural rights, it was inevitable that Lilly should withdraw into herself more and more and look forward to her future with increasing gloom.

She passed her days as on a swaying bough in momentary expectation of being blown into the depths. Then again her life seemed to her like a straight, bare road, which gave no signs of coming to an end, but ever unrolled hopeless stretches ahead.

Always the same pleasures, the same faces, the same aimless drifting from place to place until dawn.

Sometimes she felt so weary—as if after a day's hard labour.

Sometimes, too, she went on strike, and remained in bed reading the *Fliegende Blätter*, or dreaming of old times with closed eyes.

Mrs. Asmussen's sunless hole among the books became a paradise, her mush, food for the gods. Lilly's thoughts stepped cautiously about the pictures of her girlhood loves, as if it were a crime to charm them back into being. From this arose a happy, yet fearful presentiment that one or the other of them would return, and hold out his hand, and say: "Now you have strayed in strange lands long enough. Come back home."

Which of them it was she did not venture to say. But one of them it must be. Something, something *must* happen. It could *not* go on the same way.

Now and then, when her secret disquiet filled her with unrest, she took again to her nocturnal strolls. In the electric tram she would ride to distant districts, where, with a guilty soul, she sauntered along lively streets.

Just like Mrs. Jula.

Yet she could never bring herself to listen to any of her pursuers.

It was on one such excursion in May far out on the north side, somewhere near the Rosentaler Tor, that she met a young man who paid not the slightest attention to her, who did not look like a gentleman, and yet seemed familiar.

So familiar that her heart pained her.

She racked her brain, but could not place him.

Making up her mind quickly she turned about and followed him.

He wore a brown, sweat-soaked hat and a salt and pepper suit with a yellow tinge to it, which had seen better days. His coat collar was shiny, and his knees had worked great bags into his trousers, the bottom of which hung in black fringes over his crooked heels.

None of her friends in disguise. Her friends wore different trousers.

He stopped in front of various display windows—a cigar shop, a butcher's, and, longest of all, a haberdasher's. From which Lilly concluded his undergarments also required a change.

When he turned his profile toward her, she saw a lean, bony face with a prominent nose and a bush of reddish-brown hair on either side of his chin. He did not appear to be sickly; rather seedy or withered. But the lids of his small, slit-like eyes were swollen and inflamed, and before he stepped into the garish illumination of the shop window, he planted dark-blue goggles on his nose.

He carried a thin cane, which he pressed into the shape of a bow on the pavement and then let shoot out straight again. The silver handle of this cane, which did not harmonise with the shabbiness of his clothing, recalled something to Lilly connected with chilliness, warm rolls, autumnal glow, and Sunday chimes.

She cried aloud. Now she remembered.

Fritz Redlich! Yes, it was Fritz Redlich. No doubt of it. Her girlhood love! Her girlhood love! Her great warrior in life's battles! Her St. Joseph's protégé!

Oh, God, her St. Joseph! And the revolver! And the potato soup with sliced sausage! And the three graves at Ottensen!

"Mr. Redlich! Mr. Redlich!"

Trembling, laughing, she stood behind him and stretched out both hands.

He dropped his goggles and blinking his weak eyes, suspiciously scrutinised the tall, elegant lady from behind whose lace veil two great, tear-filled eyes were shining a blissful greeting. Then he awkwardly pulled at the brim of his hat.

"Mr. Redlich—I'm Lilly—Lilly Czepanek. Don't you remember me any more?"

Yes, now he remembered.

"Certainly," he said, "why shouldn't I?"

As he spoke he gave a furtive jerk at his waistcoat, as if that were the readiest way of improving the poverty of his appearance.

"Dear me, Mr. Redlich! We haven't seen each other for an eternity. I think it must be seven or eight years. No, not quite. But it seems much longer. Everything's gone well with you in the meantime, hasn't it? And I suppose you're dreadfully busy. But if you're not, we might spend a little time together now."

He really was quite busy, but if she so desired, they might remain together a while.

"How would it be if we went to a restaurant and took a glass of beer?" she suggested, still between laughter and tears. "Well, well, Mr. Redlich, who'd have thought it possible?"

He was decidedly opposed to taking a glass of beer.

"Restaurants are always so stuffy and full of people, and the beer here is so wretched—unfit to drink."

"The poor fellow has no money to pay for it," Lilly thought, and proposed sitting on a bench instead. It made no difference, just so they were together.

"That's worth considering," he said, "although—" He looked about warily on all sides to see if anyone was scandalised at the ill-matched couple.

They turned into the quieter Weinbersgsweg. Lilly, looking at him sidewise with pride and emotion, as if she had created him out of nothingness, kept murmuring:

"Is it possible? Is it possible?"

In a dark spot near a church they found a pleasant bench overhung with lilac buds which a love couple had just vacated.

"Well, now tell me all about yourself, Mr. Redlich. My, the things we have to say to each other!"

"There *is* a good deal to tell," he replied, hesitating, "but perhaps my lady will begin."

"Oh, pshaw, I haven't been a 'my lady' for a long time," cried Lilly, blushing consciously.

"Yes, to be sure—I heard something of the sort," he replied.

Lilly felt there was a note of blame in his tone, as if his susceptibilities had been offended.

"But I'm not in the least sorry," she hastened to add. "All in all I lead a much freer and pleasanter life. And I haven't the slightest cares. I have a charming little home. In fact, I'm in the best of circumstances. And I'd be ever so happy if you were to come and see for yourself. I'm always at home in the middle of the day. And I'd like you to dine with me some time."

"Oh," he said, obviously moved by the pleasant prospect.

She drew a breath of relief at having steered so smoothly past the rocks of her autobiography.

And he asked no questions. On the other hand he seemed as little disposed to be communicative in regard to his own situation past or present.

"Life has a sunny and a shady side," he said, "and he who sits on the shady side would do well to reflect whether or not he should speak much of it."

"But you can trust an old friend like me," cried Lilly. "Imagine we're sitting here on our porch in Junkerstrasse. Do you recollect? That evening we spoke to each other the first time was an evening just like this, in May."

"It was warmer," he rejoined quickly, and drew his coat together at his neck.

"Are you chilly?" she asked, laughing, because she was aglow.

"I didn't bring—" he paused an instant—"I didn't bring my spring overcoat along to-night."

"Then we'd better get up," she said, becoming meditative.

"We can tell each other all we have to say just as well walking as sitting."

So they strolled about the dark church a number of times, but no autobiographical narrative resulted. She evaded and he evaded, and when forced to speak, they regaled each other with generalities.

Lilly praised her happy lot in life, and he sighed repeatedly.

"Yes, it's hard, very hard!"

Exactly as once during examinations. The rhythm of it still sounded in her ears, as if she had heard it the day before.

"How are your father and mother?" she asked to change the subject.

His father had died two years before after a short sickness, and his mother still sewed neckties.

He adjusted something invisible under his raised coat collar, probably a gayly patterned testimony of maternal skill and goodness.

After Lilly had expressed her sympathy she ventured with throbbing heart to inquire after Mrs. Asmussen and her daughters.

Mr. Redlich smacked his lips audibly.

"Very unpleasant neighbours. The elder girl married a paymaster, who will probably be dismissed soon on account of his irregularities. The younger has charge of the library, the mother is completely in the clutches of drink."

He spoke with the same offended air as when Lilly had referred to her divorce.

"He must be extremely moral still!" she thought, with a sense of her own guilt and unworthiness.

But he was unhappy. That was certain.

And poor, very poor. Poorer than she had ever been in her life. Perhaps he was suffering the pangs of hunger while he walked at her side shivering in his thin, shabby jacket.

"How would it be, Mr. Redlich, provided your business permits you to, if you were to come to dinner to-morrow?"

His business, as a matter of fact, made it practically impossible for him to get off in the middle of the day, and he hadn't a moment's time for changing his clothes; but if she would receive him in the suit he was wearing—

"Oh of course," she laughed. "I'll even serve you with your mother's potato soup."

With that she pressed both his hands and slipped into a street car.

Oh, what a piece of good fortune!

Now she had the thing she had so long been seeking. Some one whom she could care for and pet and spoil; some one to whom she meant more than a toy or a show piece, who needed her as he needed bread and air, who languished for a gentle hand to lead him back to hope and joy.

Some one all to herself, all to herself!

Out of the grave of her youth he had risen exactly as she had dreamed in her dreams.

Life would again become rich—and happy—and full of secrets, tiny, gay, absolutely innocent secrets.

That night she slept little, wakeful as a child the night before Christmas.

The next morning, to the vast astonishment of the maid, a buxom wench from the country, who had rapidly fallen into city ways, Lilly rose early—the maid knew her to be a bit lazy—and went off to market.

"A friend is coming to dinner," Lilly laughingly explained.

She had to buy everything herself, the meat, the radishes, and above all the sausage that had once been the pride of his mother's potato soup.

She even attended to the cooking herself.

She set the table and removed the palm from beside the aquarium to have something green in the dining-room in place of flowers, which she had forgotten to buy.

He was the first dinner guest she had had for two and a half years, and such a dear one—the dearest, perhaps that life could present her with.

At half past twelve the maid, turning up her nose, announced a young fellow who insisted upon speaking to the lady.

"Why, that's he!" cried Lilly.

"He doesn't look it," observed the maid with a haughty upward inflection in her voice. Shrugging her shoulders she dawdled behind her mistress, who ran to meet the guest.

At first he shyly hesitated to step into the lighter part of the room, and hugged the door post and pulled at his suit, which really looked dreadfully frayed, even more so than the night before.

His inflamed eyes, two red rifts, blinking behind his round glasses, gave him a sheepish, groping, helpless appearance. The bold thinker's forehead had acquired an unpleasant backward slope because the genius lock no longer fell over it. And the triumphant blond mane had turned into a strawy, matted mass, apparently untouched by a comb this many a day.

He was unable to say much.

He swallowed the potato soup with tremulous devoutness, leaving the slices of sausage for the last. When his plate was quite dry he spitted them on his fork one at a time, and on conveying each bit to his mouth cast suspicious glances to right and left as if somebody were standing nearby to snatch it away.

The roast he received with greater composure. He heaped his plate high without paying the least attention to the maid, who grinned villainously.

He drank Richard's good claret in long draughts. A mottled red flecked his cheeks; he laughed and felt he was himself again.

At first Lilly had been somewhat depressed; but as he gradually thawed out, she began to hope he might be made to pass muster after all.

Then it suddenly occurred to her that now at last an opportunity presented itself for the genuine salvation of a human being, not merely a game of enamoured self-deception as with Walter von Prell.

The thought filled her with blissful, confident hope.

After the meal they went into the drawing-room. With masterful ease of manner born of the unwonted drink, he promptly seated himself in the rocking chair and tickled the snarling monkey.

He sat leaning back in the chair with his legs stretched out. The fringed ends of his trousers slipped into the expanded tops of his boots, exposing the tattered rubber drawing loops.

It was an appalling sight.

"I'll have to do something," thought Lilly, and cogitated on the best way to help him.

As for Mr. Redlich, now that his spirits were in turmoil, he turned his innermost being outward and aired his views of life.

Oh, what a display of gall and poison!

He had become so embittered by long privation and eternal envy of those who seemed gay, happy, and favoured by fortune, that no values, no attainments, no prosperous undertakings could withstand his onslaught. Everybody was hollow, corrupt and hypocritical. Everything depended on birth, cliqueism, "pull." Success, no matter in what line, was an ineradicable stain.

But this time also he said little of his personal experiences. Lilly could not even discover if he was still a student. He acknowledged only one thing, with bitter resentment, that his deepest feelings had been badly damaged in his constant struggle for existence.

While he spoke and laughed spasmodically, two lugubrious, sarcastic folds cut a deep semicircle in each emaciated cheek. Lilly dimly recalled that a tendency to those folds had existed in the times long ago.

"Oh, you poor, poor fellow!" she thought, and vowed soon to make a man of him again, both outwardly and inwardly.

But his visit left her feeling sad and depressed.

"After all—am I better off?" she thought. "Where is the confidence in life I used to have? Where is my joy of life? Where is my Song of Songs?"

The next afternoon, before Richard came, she devised a plan by which she could give Fritz Redlich new clothes without damage to Richard's purse or Fritz Redlich's feelings.

"Think of it," she said to Richard while they were drinking tea together, "two great events occurred to me yesterday, one a very happy one, the other very sad. The first is, I met a dear old friend I used to know when I was a girl. Before he went to the university he lived on the same floor as I did. And this morning a poor student was here. He looked simply wretched, and he asked for something to eat. In case he comes again, have you any old clothes to give him? No matter what. He needs everything."

"With pleasure," said Richard. "I don't know what to do with all the stuff I have at any rate."

But the other one, the friend of her girlhood, made Richard thoughtful.

"What's he like?" he asked.

In her endeavour to keep the two mythical beings quite distinct, she began to sing the "other one's" praises much too emphatically. He was a highly endowed and quite prominent scholar, who had just completed his university course, and now stood at the entrance to a brilliant career —a paragon of knowledge and intellect and heaven knows what else.

What was his specialty?

She really did not know. Something awfully erudite, at any rate. And he would surely choose an academic career. Nothing else was worth while for him.

Lilly talked herself into such a tangle of lies that finally she scarcely knew what she was saying.

Richard, who in the consciousness of his intellectual poverty, felt a tremendous respect for a great mind, grew red in the face and looked uneasy and nettled.

"I suppose he'll be wanting to visit you?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied, rejoiced at having steered in this direction so smoothly.

"Congratulate you on your affinity," he said with a mocking bow, and added, laughing: "Provided I needn't meet him."

Perfect.

The next morning a man employed in the factory brought Lilly a huge bundle from Mr. Dehnicke. It contained a fine summer suit in the latest style looking almost new; shirts, a pair of boots, and blue, silky underwear.

Richard seemed to want to prove his magnanimity in a particularly striking way, because prodigality toward the poor was not in his line.

The next difficulty was to turn the garments over to Fritz Redlich without offending him and having him refuse them.

When he visited her three days later she took occasion, after dinner, to show him through the rooms. He must see how she lived, she said.

When she came to the door of a lumber room she opened it quite naturally as she had the others. There among discarded waists, broken vases, withered plants, and similar litter, hung the suit.

"I brought it along by mistake, and some more men's clothes, when I left the general's house," she explained. "It's getting worn just hanging here."

Mr. Redlich's small, sickly eyes became bright and greedy.

Perhaps he knew some one who could make use of them?

"Not that I know of," he replied disdainfully, though unable to withhold a glance at his own trousers.

Perhaps he had met some one to whom he would be doing a favour if he gave him the suit?

No, he could think of no one.

Despite her fear of hurting him, Lilly said straight out, she didn't believe she was mistaken—a remarkable similarity of figure—though the general had measured a bit more about the waist—and if he wanted to entrust the suit to an inexpensive tailor—

The suggestion angered him. Did she think he was a charity case? Nobody could class him so low as that. He was a man of firm principles, and his principles would never permit him to wear a person's cast-off clothes.

With a sigh Lilly desisted from her project.

But he could not make up his mind to take leave. He sat in the drawing-room an interminable time. Finally she had to hint to him to go, because Richard might enter any moment.

At the head of the stairs outside her door, he turned and asked, stuttering, whether the next time he might come in the evening.

"Haven't you leisure any more in the middle of the day?" she demanded, taken aback. For Richard's sake she did not care to receive visitors late in the day.

No, not that. So far as leisure was concerned, it was—it was—. He hung on, and Lilly listened fearfully for sounds on the staircase below.

"Then what is it?"

"I should like to think the matter over very carefully, and—and—"

"Well, and?"

"And if it's dark, perhaps I could take the package right along with me."

With that he jumped down the steps.

"The poor fellow, how he must choke down his pride!" she thought, looking after him.

The same evening she sent him all the clothes by express, and pinned a letter inside, in which she excused herself again and again for enclosing a twenty mark note, in the first place, for a hat, in the second place, to spare him difficulties with the tailor.

When he reappeared a few days later, he was scarcely recognisable. The suit fitted him to perfection, and in order to keep the tips of his boots from turning up—they were too long for him—he had stuffed them with cotton wads.

Even the maid sent him friendlier glances.

A pity he would not part with his beard and the tousled shock of hair. But for that disfigurement you might even appear on the street with him. His cheeks had filled out, and his eyes had improved, thanks to the help of the physician to whom Lilly had dragged him by main force; and gradually his manners softened down. He no longer gulped his food, or picked his teeth with his finger nails; and he learned how to drink claret.

His inner being, like his external appearance, also began to reflect the peaceful comfort of the hospitable home. He abused with discrimination, and sometimes even the crime of happiness seemed pardonable in his eyes.

He displayed delightful tact in never probing into Lilly's situation, and she was grateful to him.

Although she avoided questioning him as to his own doings, occasional allusions and complaints of his enabled her to piece together a picture of his unsuccessful career.

After two years of starvation, he gave up the teaching profession, and, consciously sacrificing his convictions, took up the study of theology in his native city for the sake of one or two scholarships.

"After all!" thought Lilly, deeply stirred. She recalled the red, sunny morning when the Sunday chimes sent up their greeting from out of the green valley.

But his supreme sacrifice seemed to have done no permanent good. During the last year he had kept himself alive by occasionally addressing envelopes, and in other mysterious ways, concerning which he was not explicit.

"Nevertheless," he said, "I maintained my dignity. And even if I am poor and despised, I know my worth, indeed I do."

He paced the room, fiery and lowering. When he threw out his chest and ran his hand through his mane, he almost resembled the young hero who had once filled Lilly's enthusiastic fancy with pictures of inordinate ambition.

To complete her work and lead him entirely back to happiness, she tried to find out what lot in life he desired for himself.

He wanted to go away. Leave Berlin! He wanted to feel himself a man again, who does his duty and knows where he belongs and is permitted to breathe pure air.

"All of us want something lovely like that," she thought.

It would have to be a tutorship in a family, anywhere in the country, preferably with a minister of whose library he could avail himself.

"And round about the linden trees will bloom," thought Lilly, "and the wheat will wave in the breeze, and the cattle will wind their way to water."

She nearly cried with envy.

From that day on she worked industriously to satisfy his heart's desire. She gave him money to insert advertisements in the *Kreuzzeitung*, wrote letters herself in reply to all sorts of offers, and asked her little circle of friends to do what they could for him.

All these transactions had to be carried on in secret to avoid attracting Richard's attention. Even so she had much to suffer from him these days.

He found her wanting in attentiveness to him; he rebuked her for being cold and loveless, and detected a hostile influence in her every word.

"That's probably what your intellectual friend says." "You should ask your brilliant scholar." Thus it went without cease.

One day the bomb exploded.

Despite his promise to have the maid announce him when strangers were present, Richard stepped into the dining-room while Lilly was at table with her girlhood friend. He had neither rung nor knocked, and a frown of revenge puckered his brow.

Lilly jumped from her seat, paling.

As if caught in guilt, Fritz Redlich also jumped up. He stood there awkward and sheepish, while the corner of his napkin slowly glided from his buttonhole into his soup plate.

For a moment silence prevailed. Nothing but the tittering of the maid in the kitchen was to be heard.

"I beg pardon," said Richard in the same threatening manner. "I merely wanted to make sure how you are really getting along."

"Mr. Dehnicke, a good friend of mine—Mr. Redlich, my old friend," said Lilly.

Now Richard scrutinised his dread rival more closely—looked in amazement and disapproval at the rank growth of his beard and shaggy mane—his gaze travelled downwards—and brightened—a nonplussed look, but also a joyous look of recognition, betrayed itself in his features. Wasn't that *his* suit and *his* shirt?

His eyes dropped lower without halting at the napkin in the soup plate.

Weren't those *his* trousers? Weren't those *his* discarded boots which the brilliant intellectual scholar was wearing?

"Oh, that's it," he said. "Nothing more." With a wicked grin of scorn he turned to Lilly, who could scarcely keep on her feet. "May I speak to you alone for an instant?"

"Will you excuse me, Mr. Redlich?" she said, and in her confusion and from force of habit, she opened the door to—the bedroom, as if that were the prescribed place for single ladies to receive their gentlemen friends. Richard, who was as accustomed to the way as she, followed her, unconscious of the exposure of intimacy.

"Listen," he said upon shutting the door. "I was a donkey for having been jealous of your affinity. But now I swear to you, your friends may come and go, morning or evening, any time you wish. I'll always keep old suits on hand for them. Good-by—goosie!"

He left. She could hear him laughing even after the door fell shut behind him.

She was frightfully ashamed. How would she ever summon the courage to appear before her girlhood friend again, before that moral person who had shrunk at the mere mention of her divorce?

Then she realised she was standing in the bedroom.

Everything was revealed, all the disgrace of her existence, all, all.

No matter how unworldly he might be, the rôle of the man who had so suddenly intruded in the apartment and as suddenly disappeared, must be patent.

A long time she hesitated, the knob in her hand, listening to what Fritz Redlich was doing. She feared his tread, the clearing of his throat. His very silence boded evil.

At last, trembling, ready to confess everything amid tears of contrition, she stepped into the dining-room.

Lo and behold! He sat quietly at his accustomed place rubbing at the spot the wet napkin had made on his waistcoat. The blue goggles lay next to his plate, and he blinked at her amiably with no air of constraint.

"Has the gentleman left already?" he asked innocently.

At that moment the roast was brought in, and he fell to with avidity, making no further mention of the interlude.

Actually—so pure was his conscience that he did not detect the impure even if thrust under his very nose.

Oh, how grateful she was to him!

To prove her gratitude she told him he might come evenings also—Richard permitted it—without waiting to be invited.

If she should happen to be out, the maid would prepare supper for him, and see to it that he lacked nothing, absolutely nothing. And mindful of the wry face the maid had cut the first day he came, she enjoined her emphatically:

"Now be real pleasant and friendly to him, so that he always feels at home here."

The buxom wench turned down the corners of her mouth and said nothing.

Lilly now went to work in behalf of Fritz Redlich with redoubled zeal.

She again found a ready assistant in Mrs. Jula.

"Leave the thing to me," said Mrs. Jula one day "There's somebody up there I've known a long time"—she hesitated a bit—"he's all-powerful, and has taken the Good Lord's place in many a minister's family. If I were to write to him—but, of course my name must be kept out, it's still a red rag to the bull up there."

The next day Lilly sent her one of the advertisements that Fritz Redlich had inserted in the paper. Mrs. Jula was to forward it to a certain person, and the response would then go directly to Fritz Redlich without the intermediation of a third party. Lilly preferred that his future fortune should appear to be due entirely to his own efforts.

And behold! Mrs. Jula was successful.

One evening the next week Fritz Redlich appeared at Lilly's unexpectedly—a frequent occurrence now, whether she was at home or not—and complacently informed her his advertisement had been so convincing that he had immediately received an invitation from a minister in Further Pomerania to send his references and be ready to leave Berlin at short notice. The minister seemed to be quite keen for him.

Lilly's heart throbbed with pride. Nothing in the world would have induced her to betray that she was at the bottom of his good luck.

His happiness was her work! He himself, therefore, was her possession, more absolutely her possession than anything in the world.

During the meal an exalted, blissful silence prevailed. Since he had not announced his coming, there was no potato soup, the usual first course.

She excused herself for the omission, and added with a little pang:

"At any rate you won't take many more meals with me."

"Probably," he said with an embarrassed glance at the maid, whose presence evidently troubled him. Had she not been there, he would very likely have given warmer expression to his feelings.

After the meal they seated themselves in the drawing-room.

It was July, and a hot breeze blew through the open windows. But the naked little monkey, whose cage stood next to the aquarium, shivered even at this season, and had to be wrapped in a cloak, an attention to which he submitted, snarling all the while.

The canary sang its evening song, and twilight fell.

Fritz Redlich sat in the rocking chair, in which he liked to lounge after a meal. Lilly walked up and down the room agitatedly.

"Now I'll be lonely again," she thought, "and I'll fling myself about as before."

Yet, what a piece of good fortune it had been. What good fortune!

She told him so for about the hundredth time.

"Yes," he rejoined, "what I managed to achieve here through my struggles is really a piece of good fortune." He emphasised "my struggles." "When I think what dreadful years those were, how often I had to do violence to my real character, how often my principles were endangered. And not only that," he added after a melancholy pause, "if one considers the doubtful, impure situations into which life throws one, it is really no wonder that one is infected with the prevailing spirit and commits acts one would rather have left undone. I tell you, Mrs. Czepanek, it's hard, very hard."

"Oh, don't always call me Mrs. Czepanek. Say Lilly right straight out. We're old friends."

"I will gladly if you wish it."

Lilly felt a tenderness for him such as she had not experienced since her days in the library. Yet it was different from then. It was a motherly, sisterly tenderness. No, not exactly that either. It was a bit of everything, and something in addition, which drew nearer and nearer hesitatingly, like a light in the distance.

"Tell me something, Fritz," she said, standing in front of him. "Have you ever been in love?"

He started as if he had been hit.

"In love? What do you mean?"

"Well—what do you think—I mean?" she laughed, scratching the arm of the rocking chair with her thumb nail.

He seemed to breathe more easily.

"For that which one calls real love I've never had the time or the desire."

"And hasn't any woman ever loved you?"

"Do I look as if a woman could love me?" he rejoined, shrugging his shoulders.

His embittered dejection annoyed her.

"Well, well," she said, shaking her finger to comfort him with a little teasing.

He started again, as if the mere thought of such a possibility filled him with dread.

Poor fellow! A girl's eyes had never sought his in a glow, a woman's arm had never clasped his neck in bliss. He had been denied the supreme delight that makes life worth the while both for man and woman.

An avowal burnt on her lips drifting down from times long, long ago, which would prove to him how mistaken he was.

She choked it down.

Not to-day. Later. Perhaps when he came to say good-by before leaving Berlin.

Darkness fell, and the light of the street lamps played on the walls and ceiling. The monkey had rolled himself into a ball in his cloak, and the little canary also slept.

Lilly still paced to and fro, gently grazing his elbow each time she passed the rocking chair.

She halted in front of him again.

There he sat, he whom she had once loved so hotly, and suspected nothing. Suspected nothing of what women's arms could bestow.

Poor, poor fellow!

"You must really have that shock of hair of yours trimmed," she said with a constrained laugh, "then you'll succeed better with the women."

With difficulty, as if she were drawing up a hundred pound weight, Lilly raised her left hand, and laid it on his hard, crisp hair, which sank under the light touch like a cushion.

He stopped rocking abruptly, looked about on all sides uneasily, and coughed a little.

"Why, yes," he said after a pause. "That's good advice. If I want to make a pleasant impression in my new position—"

As he spoke he turned to the window, causing her hand to slip down on his neck.

Lilly swallowed a sigh, and he jumped up to take leave.

She was too embarrassed to invite him to remain.

The maid was already standing outside with a lamp to light his way down the stairs.

"Day after to-morrow!" Lilly called to him from the window.

He nodded up his thanks, and disappeared in the dark.

Poor, poor fellow! Engulfed in bitterness and despondency, he walked away little divining what

happy gardens blossomed about him.

The rest of the evening Lilly was absorbed in anxious, confused thoughts.

"I ought not to have laid my hand on his head," she said to herself.

Nevertheless she was glad she had.

The next morning a postal card came from Mrs. Jula saying she had gotten word from "up there." Everything was proceeding smoothly. Lilly's protégé was to enter his position immediately. Money for his travelling expenses had already been forwarded to him.

Lilly wept tears of joy.

Her work was complete. Her girlhood friend had been saved and won back to life. With work and effort, with deception and fear she had made him her own.

And when he came the next evening, as had been arranged, she would tell him all: that about her loving him when she was a girl—everything.

And once again—before parting—she would lay her hand on his mass of hair. Then what would might follow.

The next evening she exercised greater care in dressing than was her wont when she and Fritz Redlich were together. She herself had cooked his potato soup and cut the right amount of beefsteak for him—he no longer devoured such huge portions. All the maid had to do was put it in the saucepan.

The clock struck eight. He had not come.

"He's busy packing," she comforted herself.

The clock struck ten. Hopeless. He was not coming. But perhaps he was standing on the street outside the locked door clapping the way Richard sometimes did.

Lilly remained leaning out of the window until the clock struck eleven.

Then she went to bed sad and weary.

The next morning she received the following letter:

> "My dear Mrs. Czepanek:—
>
> After I have succeeded through my own efforts in establishing a livelihood for myself, I deem it my duty to terminate my former life, which, as I pointed out to you several times, too frequently forced me into circumstances conflicting with my principles. My firm character was led into temptations from which, I will candidly confess, it did not always emerge intact.
>
> I am well aware that I am under great obligations to you, and I hereby duly express my thanks. Nobody shall say Fritz Redlich is an ingrate.
>
> I have kept an accurate account of the cash that circumstances compelled me to accept from you. I will return it, also the suit I am wearing, as soon as my salary will enable me to. But had you really respected me, you would have spared me that humiliating encounter with the gentleman to whom the garment in question evidently once belonged.
>
> I may not conclude without making the following remarks: improve your ways, Mrs. Czepanek. They are a slap in the face of all the laws of morality. I believe, in giving you this advice, I prove myself to be a truer friend than if I had continued to let you think me a dunce.
>
> I remain your ever grateful
>
> Fritz Redlich,
> cand. phil. et theol."

Lilly suffered long and deeply from this experience.

It was not until some months later, when the maid gave notice because the solitary evenings with the very moral young student had not remained without consequences, that Lilly could get herself to see that the incident had its humorous aspect.

CHAPTER XII

Early in the autumn of the same year Richard went to Ostend to have a married man's vacation, while Lilly cheaply and innocently passed for a widow of rank in a hall resort on the Baltic sea.

She accepted the homage of several old maids, allowed a young missionary to dedicate a volume of verse to her, and respectfully declined the honourable proposal of a widower, the city treasurer of Pirna. Those were six weeks to her liking.

The following winter went in much the same way as the preceding.

At Christmas Richard presented her with a hired carriage, the door of which, of course, was decorated with the seven-pointed coronet. He had engaged it in order to avoid disagreeable encounters with his mother, who spoke of Lilly with increasing severity, and had frequently demanded the equipage when he was out driving with his mistress.

He also gave Lilly a sable cloak, one of the new-fashioned sort, with countless tails, which cost a small fortune.

Despite Richard's reproaches she made little use of either. That feeling of dread, never to be stilled, told her that such false display would drive her ever on into the world which she wanted to flee.

And while Richard endeavoured with dogged greed to drain the cup of worldly delights to the very dregs, Lilly's desires went out more and more to middle-class respectability. She clung to it as the last hope, which enabled her to drag through her existence, the complete poverty of which tormented her increasingly there amid the lights and music and laughter.

The only one in her circle who now and then stimulated her intellectually was Mrs. Jula. Mrs. Jula could tell stories, and she showed familiarity with other worlds, her experiences in which she elaborated with a lively fancy.

But for some time a veil of impenetrable mysteries have shrouded that foolish curly head of hers. The erotic verse she was wont to publish disappeared from the new-school magazines, and her nymphomaniac little tales were nowhere to be found.

When her friends asked her teasingly: "What's become of your art?" she would laugh coyly, like a bride, and reply: "Wait; you'll see."

Lilly would now have liked to become more intimate with Mrs. Jula, having long ceased to consider herself morally superior; but she could not succeed in approaching her and so she locked her distress and her longing in her own soul, and went her way thirsting.

It happened on the nineteenth of March. Lilly never forgot the date, because it was St. Joseph's day.

A day of rough spring winds and reddish sunshine.

One of those days on which the world's orchestra seems to tune its instruments before thrilling our senses again with its great spring symphony.

The grass on the canal embankments was already turning green, the ducks going in pairs rocked themselves on the wavelets, and great foamy shimmering slabs of melting ice floated to annihilation.

Lilly, overwrought by her painful, confused longings, could not endure remaining indoors. She wanted to run, cry aloud, climb over fences, throw herself on the bare earth—no matter what—but get away for a few hours from her prison, which smelled of powder and perfumes and was burdened by the spirit of idleness.

She dressed herself for going out, gave a few directions to the maid—this time an elderly, patronising person, thoroughly accustomed to service with single ladies—and without troubling to order her carriage, took the electric tram to the Grunewald.

At the fencing where the spick-and-span houses of the rich come to an end, and the abused woods rise high above the restraining yoke of man, Lilly got out and walked rapidly without caring in what direction.

A few automobiles whizzed past. Some gentlemen in one of them laughed and beckoned to her, perhaps merely in sport; perhaps they actually recognised her. In either case it was best to leave the public road. So she turned into the path leading along the lake to the old Jagdschloss.

Here nobody was to be seen far or near.

The cold March wind swept across the milky water and whirled in the reeds, causing the dry stalks to rattle and crackle. Ice still glittered near the edge, though the crust was so thin and sieve-like that each little wave striving for the shore sent tiny springs shooting up through the holes.

Here and there from a pine bough came a bird's song, sorry enough to extinguish timid spring hopes.

"In the city streets it looks more like spring than here," thought Lilly.

But the freshness of the wind redolent of moss and pine needles did her good. She battled against its might, taking long strides. Her cheeks tingled, her frozen blood thawed, and sent fresh life pulsating through her fallow body.

And her fallow soul.

Suddenly she shook with a fit of laughter. It was all nonsense, her regret and her yearning, Richard's snobbish ambition, his mother's eternal marriage schemes. Even the respectability she desired was utterly vapid.

What would she do with it? She, Lilly the free, the wild, the ruined? There was something else, something higher. There must be. Not in Dr. Salmoni's sense. No, oh, no. Something as hard and pure and life-bringing as this March wind sweeping through her limbs.

Above her in a pine tree she heard a chipping sound which she had learned to recognise at Lischnitz. It was a call both of fear and invitation, which ended in a snappy "Tshek-tshek."

Lilly stood still, looked up, and whistled.

A pair of squirrels had been chasing about the trunk in corkscrew lines, and now, at her appearance, stood stock still in fright.

"Tshek-tshek," Lilly clucked to incite the little red coats to play. She did not succeed, and picked up a pebble from the ground.

Just as she was about to throw it, she saw, behind a tree trunk, two eyes fastened on her, large, questioning astonished eyes, which narrowed under her gaze, and darkened, and tried to turn away, but could not. She knew those eyes. She had looked into them long, long, long ago.

But, no, she had not; she had never before seen them.

The young man who, like herself, had been watching the squirrels play and was still standing half-concealed behind the trunk, his hat in his hand, was an utter stranger. Impossible that she had ever in her life met him. If she had, she would never have forgotten him.

It was not easy to forget that serious, reserved Greek face, with the nervous nose narrow across the bridge and the shining dreamer's eyes.

His appearance was not extremely elegant. It pleased Lilly better so. He wore a brown, somewhat old-fashioned overcoat, and the suit beneath, of which she caught a glimpse, was of a woolly material sprinkled with little tufts, by no means of German make and certainly not English.

Gradually life came into him. He put on his hat, and stepped from behind the tree.

"Now he'll speak to me," the sickening thought shot through Lilly's mind.

No. He merely raised his hat, glanced at her again for the fraction of a second with an expression of query, astonishment, and, at the same time recognition, walked past her, and took the way she had just come.

Lilly also wanted to leave the spot, but she was unable to; and since she must not be discovered looking after him she hid behind the same tree that had concealed him.

"I wonder whether he will look back."

No. He did not look back either. She felt hurt and neglected.

The tall figure dwindled in the distance. "Never been in the army," she thought, judging from his rather heavy gait. Then it seemed to her that he stooped, drew himself up again, and looked back. In fact, he spied about a long time as if compelled to discover her.

But she kept herself carefully hidden and did not move.

He walked on and disappeared behind a curve.

"What a pity I didn't take the carriage," thought Lilly.

She might be overtaking him now without appearing to follow him, and the seven-pointed coronet would not have failed of its effect. As it was, he naturally cherished a bad opinion of the lady who walked about alone whistling like a boy and throwing pebbles at poor enamoured squirrels.

Nevertheless, while walking homeward, she felt as if she had been presented with a lovely gift.

Where could she have seen him before?

She recalled a young man of the Dresden days. It was once when she was out walking arm in arm with the colonel along the Prager Strasse. She had seen eyes fixed upon her with the very same sad flash of recognition in them.

Then—she remembered it well—she had wanted to look back and ask him:

"Who are you? Do you belong to me? Do you want me to belong to you?"

But even the partial turn of her head would have been a crime in her husband's eyes.

And now, now that she was free, free to choose her friends according to her heart's desire, she had let him go, him, the one—whether the same as the Dresden man or another—who belonged to her, perchance, as she to him.

She walked along with half-closed eyes, and conjured up his image. A small, dark, two-cornered beard, so close-cut on his cheeks as to give them a blue sheen. Such beards were seldom to be seen in Berlin. Frenchmen and Italians affected them. Full, firm, tightly compressed lips, lips such as a sculptor chisels. A high, square forehead, on which something like wrath seemed to be imprinted, not ordinary wrath against herself or any poor mortal. It was not of this world, and it really was divine love.

Thus Lilly's enthusiasm fed itself. She forgot the way, and strayed about, finally arriving at a spot in an entirely different direction from that which she should have taken. The most dreadful things might have happened to her in the woods, where solitary ladies are exposed to encounters with tramps at any hour of the day. But she scarcely gave heed to her danger. She reached home two hours too late, tired, but in a glow.

She could not eat. She threw herself on the chaise longue and dreamt.

The bell rang. She heard a man's voice.

It could not be Richard. He never came before half past four.

Adele entered. There was a strange gentleman outside who wished to know whether the lady had lost her card-case. He had found one in the woods.

Lilly jumped to her feet. Actually the little brocade case which she had held in her hand with her silver net purse was gone. In her excitement she had not missed it.

"Like what does the gentleman look?"

Tall and young and handsome, in fact, very handsome.

"A short, dark beard?"

"Yes."

Lilly reeled.

"Let him come in," she stammered. She did not think of beautifying herself. She merely ran her hands over her face and hair in a dazed way.

When he appeared in the doorway she scarcely recognised him, so thick was the red mist before her eyes.

"I beg pardon," she heard him say—it was the serene voice of a man whose ways are not impure—"I would not have disturbed you had your address been on your cards. I found your number in the directory, but I couldn't be certain whether there were not more of the same name in the city."

"You're very kind to have taken all that trouble," she replied, inviting him to be seated.

"My name is Dr. Rennschmidt," he said, waiting behind the back of his chair until she had settled herself in a corner of the sofa. On sitting down he drew the card-case from his pocket and laid it on the table.

She smiled her thanks; and feeling she must enhance the value of his courtesy, she said the case was a memento she prized highly, the loss of which would have distressed her.

"A memento of my husband," she added.

His face grew a shade more serious.

A little pause ensued, during which his eyes rested steadily on her face, reading, questioning, comparing, and wondering. Nothing of that bold groping of other men's glances. A clean, unconscious joy amounting to devoutness lay in his look.

"Didn't we meet just a little while ago at the edge of the woods?" Lilly asked warily.

"Yes," he replied with animation. "And if I hadn't been so awkward I should have begged your pardon immediately for having unintentionally spied on you. I saw how startled you were. But I myself was so—how shall I say? All I thought was: 'Clear out. You'll be serving the lady best that way.'"

His frank, blithe manner did her good, though it shamed her a little.

"Now you've done me a much greater service," she said, feeling as appreciative as if he had saved her life.

"Oh, don't speak of it. If only I had turned back instantly. But the earth seemed to have swallowed you up. I was worried about you."

She smiled to herself, fearful in her happiness. A little more, and she would have acknowledged where she had stowed herself.

"What did you think of me when you saw me strolling about the woods alone?" she asked.

"That you don't feel alone when you're with nature. Otherwise you'd have had company with you."

"You're right," she replied eagerly. "Besides, my carriage was waiting in the Hundekehlenrestaurant"—after all the carriage would play its part—"but it was imprudent of me. I suppose you are also very fond of nature?"

"Very? I hardly know. I must say in Cordelia's words: I love it 'according to my bond; nor more nor less.' To love nature is really no merit nor peculiarity. It is simply a vital function. Don't you agree with me?"

"Certainly," she faltered, and thought, "Oh, how clever he is? How will I acquit myself?"

"But to be quite frank," he continued, "I am having a strange experience with nature here. I cannot accustom myself to it. Its poverty oppresses me. I am like one who has outgrown his home and reproaches himself for it. I try to get back to my old attitude, and I admire and flatter German nature whenever I possibly can. But first other pictures in my mind must fade. You see I have just returned from Italy, where I spent the last two years."

Heaving a deep sigh Lilly stared at him. She felt as if now he were absolutely unearthly.

"Two whole years?" she asked in astonishment.

"I am working on a large scientific work, on account of which—no, I was really sent to Italy on account of my health. My uncle, who's a father to me, wanted me to go. I didn't think of the work until I got there. Then my own country and my studies, everything, fell into the background."

As he spoke his eyes glowed and stared into space, full of will and enthusiasm. The old, slumbering desire for Italy began to beat its wings again in Lilly's breast.

"Yes," she cried with the same enthusiasm as he, "isn't it so? There all ideas grow, and you feel what you can do, and you become what you wanted to be from the first. Isn't it so? I've never been there, but I feel what I say strongly. There, in the home of everything great and beautiful, you yourself become greater and more beautiful—and—everything—sordid passes away. Isn't it so?"

He listened dumbfounded, and embraced her with a beaming gaze.

"Yes," he replied almost solemnly. "It is so, exactly."

She tingled with delight. Did it not seem that with these words he made an avowal of the inner union between them, the avowal she had hoped for from the very first instant of their meeting? Did it not seem that nothing now separated them?

She looked down helplessly.

Was he really the embodiment of that shade which had so senselessly fastened itself upon her soul since the Dresden days?

"I feel as if we had met before," she said softly without raising her eyes.

"Exactly the way I feel," he rejoined hastily. "But it cannot be, for I should know where and when."

"Were you in Dresden six years ago at about this time?"

"No," he said. "Six years ago I was studying at Bonn. The semester came to an end at this season, but I went directly to my uncle, who was having his castle restored."

"Where is his castle?"

"Near Coblenz."

So they had not met in Dresden.

"But if we both have the same feeling—" said Lilly.

"There are pictures in our souls which seem to be recollections, but in fact are previsions."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that one—that one—walks as on the edge of a knife between the past and the present, and reels and falls into a void the instant—"

"What?"

"The instant—" he broke off—"I beg your pardon, are you an artist?"

"Why?" she asked, unpleasantly taken aback. Did he want to make merry at her expense?

"I read your sign outside."

The sign! "Pressed Flower Studio."

Violently torn out of sweet dreams and plunged into bitter reality!

But now she must be on her guard. She must not lose his esteem.

"In a way," she replied. "A very modest sort of art which I used to pursue. But it made me very happy. I learned it just after I lost my husband"—the fatal "divorce" would not pass her lips—"less for the sake of a livelihood than to lend my life content. But then I had to give it up—because—of a trouble with my eyes."

Three lies in the same breath.

Why not? She was lies within and lies without. Every gesture, every thought was a lie. But the great cry of her soul vibrating through her entire being, "You shall be mine; I will be yours," was *not* a lie. And for his sake she continued to lie.

"I don't like to speak of it." She wiped her eyes with her handkerchief. "It still pains me. And please don't ever again refer to it in the future."

"Again," "in the future," she had said, as if taking it for granted that they would continue to meet. Her words filled her with shame and confusion.

She rose and turned her face aside.

"I beg pardon," he said, abashed. "I could not have divined—" He rose to take leave.

"Stay, stay, stay!" her soul cried. But she was unable to speak. She was benumbed.

Perhaps he had seen through her lies, and had instantly realised who she was, and did not care to remain. She felt haughtiness congealing her features.

"It was very kind of you," she said, graciously extending her finger tips.

The moment had come in which to invite him to visit her, but the words froze on her lips.

He had turned very pale and looked straight into her face expectantly.

"I hope we meet some time again," he said finally.

"I hope so," she replied very formally.

He lightly touched her hand with his lips and left.

Over! Over! And her fault!

Happiness had come, had laid its blessing hand on her forehead, and had flown away again, leaving behind nothing but this pain, a wild pain, such as she had never before felt. It fairly tore at her throat and heart like a physical affliction.

During the night she devised a thousand schemes for hunting him up and meeting him again.

He was a scholar and probably frequented the library. She would go there and read and study, and some day she would surely meet him.

Or, simpler still, she would write to him.

"I don't love you," she would say. "Why should I? I scarcely know you. But I am confident that I could be something in your life. Therefore—"

Then, disgusted with her lack of dignity, she rejected every plan.

No, Lilly Czepanek after all would not throw herself away in such fashion.

Once more it became impossible for her to remain at home.

In the daytime she walked along the Potsdamer Strasse and Leipziger Strasse, where the metropolitan bustle is the greatest. In the evenings she did not visit distant districts as formerly, but with a busy air hurried incessantly up and down the lonely banks of the canal near her home.

Despite her strict economy she always kept the light burning in her drawing-room, and did not confess to herself why.

It was about eight o'clock in the evening four days after the meeting. The stars hung like lamps in the heavens. Lilly was pacing along the further bank of the canal, when she noticed the figure of a young man who was looking fixedly in the direction in which her home lay.

She could not distinguish his features, because he kept his back turned. Besides, he had selected a dark spot for his coign of observation.

With a slight throbbing of her heart she continued on her way, though after a while her legs refused to carry her further in the same direction. She had to turn about.

She found the dark figure still standing motionless among the trees. From across the water the

light in her drawing-room peered through the bare branches.

This time he heard her tread, and faced about.

She recognised his features and started.

He also thrilled with the shock of surprise. For an instant he foolishly pretended not to see her, but then he drew a deep breath and took off his hat with an abashed smile.

Lilly trembled so, she could not hold out her hand.

"Dr.—Rennschmidt," she managed to say.

He was the first to recover his composure.

"You will wonder," he began, stepping alongside of her, "why I stand here in the dark and look over there. If I were to say it was a mere chance, you wouldn't believe me. So I will frankly confess I could not rid myself of the thought that at our parting something went wrong—there was a misunderstanding—precipitancy—I felt I ought to beg your pardon for something."

"If you felt that way, why didn't you come up to me, and tell me so?"

"Was I permitted to?"

"Why not?"

"You see, we men have no rights with women except such as they give us. No others exist for us. To be sure, we may stand in the dark here, and bite our lips—"

"Did you?"

"Don't ask me."

His voice did not quiver, but a tremour ran through his arm, which grazed hers.

Lilly, alarmed, stopped and helplessly looked back at the dark way she had come.

"That means—I—I must say good-by?" he asked.

In the light of the lamp she saw his eyes clinging to her with a look of fearsome inquiry.

"Oh, no," she replied slowly, as if some one else were speaking in her stead. "Now that we are together, we will remain together."

"I think so, too," he said. The same gravity of an oath lay in his words as she had put into hers.

They walked along in silence.

Then he began in a lighter tone.

"But I must call your attention to something. Your light is burning. If you really do want to favour me with an hour, I'm afraid the thought of the waste will disquiet you."

"Well, we'll put it out!" she replied gaily, and turned on her heels so abruptly that he continued to make two or three steps forward.

As they crossed the slender arch of the Hohenzollernbrücke, he pointed up to the heavens.

"Jupiter shines on our undertaking. I like him better than Venus, who runs after the sun and needs a rosy flooring for her feet."

"Which is Jupiter?" asked Lilly standing still.

He eagerly showed her the lord of the heavens and five or six constellations. Lilly clapped her hands like a pleased child.

"Now I'll always feel at home up there when I'm alone evenings and look out of the window." She refrained from saying more of what was in her mind.

While he waited in front of the door, she ran upstairs, turned off the light, put the key in her pocket, and hastily told Adele she would take supper out that evening. She lingered for nothing else and came hurrying down again.

Outside the apartment door she reeled with joy and clung to the post and sobbed.

But by the time she reached the street her bearing had become quite proper.

"If you are willing to entrust yourself to my guidance," he said, "I know a little corner no one would dream of finding us in. It's practically in Italy."

She drew a deep breath.

"If only he wouldn't speak so much of Italy," she thought, though for nothing in the world would she have gone elsewhere than to his Italian restaurant.

They walked along the canal for about five minutes talking nonsense. The medley of lights of the Potsdamer Brücke was quite near when he paused in front of a narrow, dimly lighted shop

window, where about two dozen wine bottles wreathed with green cotton vines grew like asparagus out of sand.

"Here Signor Battistini serves a Chianti, than which none better is to be had in Florence," he explained.

They entered the shop and crossed a small anteroom, in which the proprietor, black as the ace of spades, was pasting labels behind the bar.

"*Sera, padrone*," Lilly's friend greeted him.

From the anteroom they passed into a rather long, hall-like room filled with simple tables and chairs. The only decoration consisted of crisscrossed garlands of shiny green paper bits, evidently ambitious of being considered vine leaves, which twined about the bare gas brackets and fell over hooks in the walls. To inform the guests of the occasion for this luxuriant display, a placard hung from the centre wishing them on this March evening a "Happy New Year."

"What do you say to this fairy garden?" asked Lilly's friend, while the waiter, black as his master, with an improbable pair of fiery wheels in his face, beseechingly held out his hands for her cloak.

At the other tables sat young fellows with thick hair, who rolled long, thread-like cigarettes between their teeth and nearly thrust the knuckles of their clenched fists in one another's eyes while spouting Italian with fascinating rapidity.

"Marble cutters," Dr. Rennschmidt explained in a low voice. "Our great sculptors employ them as assistants. They earn a great deal of money, and as soon as they have saved enough they return to Italy to establish a household."

Two women sat apart from the men. Their black, lustreless hair drawn very low on their foreheads gave their eyes the appearance of torches burning in sombre woods. Gold rings hung in their ears, and their dresses, cut too deep at the throat, were held together by roughly made brooches. They looked at Lilly's tall figure in envious admiration, then fell to whispering busily.

Dr. Rennschmidt nodded to them cordially, yet with an indifferent air, as one who has nothing to conceal or reveal.

"Ballad singers belonging to a Neapolitan folk-song troupe. Their leader deserted them, and they're now looking for an engagement."

"Where am I?" thought Lilly.

It was like a dream, as if an Aladdin's lamp had transported her to a strange land. The one thing by which she knew she was in Berlin, Germany, near the Potsdamer Brücke, was the placard's complacent "Happy New Year."

"I've been coming here every day since my return," said Dr. Rennschmidt, after they had settled themselves comfortably in a corner. "I cannot cure myself of homesickness for the south. The best German cookery has no charms for me, and I must have my Chianti. But to-day we'll order some other wine, because you have to cultivate a taste for Chianti."

He nodded to the waiter, Francesco by name—Francesco, as if he had just stepped from a romance about knights and brigands. The two held a lively conference, the result of which was a dusty, light-coloured bottle.

The dishes were strange confections of macaroni and meat swimming in yellowish red gravy.

Lilly could not recall ever having eaten anything so delicious. She told him so. But what she did not tell him was that she had never in her life, never since she could remember, felt so good.

The last course was a "*giardinetto*," a "little garden," of mandarins, dates, and Gorgonzola cheese.

The frothy, yellow wine with an aroma of nutmeg bubbled into the glasses scattering bright drops.

Leaning against the wall, Lilly let her eyes rest dreamily on her new friend's face.

He turned his head now this way, now that, with rapid little movements like a bird's. He seemed constantly alert to observe and absorb. Or perhaps his manner was due to his desire to bestow some additional attention upon her. His eyes gleamed with eagerness and exuberance of life, and the network of wrinkles on his brow rose and fell nervously. The cloud of wrath on his forehead apparently was nothing more than his seething ardour.

He had a dear, droll habit which increased the impression of eagerness. He would raise his outspread fingers to his head as if to run them through a heavy mass of hair. But the mass was no longer there, and his hand clapped against his bare forehead and rested there a second or two.

Everything about him bespoke force and decision—to Lilly's admiration, well-nigh to her dread. Nevertheless, although a golden brown tinge of health from the south still coloured his cheeks, his body was not robust. His throat was delicate, his breath came and went hastily, and sometimes, when a veil fell over his eyes as if he were looking inward, a soft weariness crept over his features which gave him an extremely youthful appearance and evoked motherly feelings.

"So *that's* what you are," she thought and stretched herself in blissful peace. "At last."

"Why are you closing your eyes?" he asked solicitously. "Aren't you feeling well?"

"Yes, oh, yes," she said caressingly. "But speak to me, tell me about down there where I've always wanted to be and never could be."

Lilly went on to tell him of the great yearning which the consumptive teacher had awakened in her, and how it had continued to smoulder under all the ashes life had cast upon it.

"I in your place would have made a pilgrimage there barefoot."

"Pshaw," she said. "I've had money enough. But I've never been free. Once I got as far as Bozen and had to turn back—as a punishment—because a young man ogled me."

"Oh, dreadful," he laughed, "that was hard luck. Much harder than you divine."

"Oh, I divine it," she sighed. "I need merely look at you."

"Why at me?"

"Because you shine like Moses after he witnessed the glory of the Lord."

He became serious.

"There are glories up here, too. But you're right. I have so much life and light stored up in me from down there, so many sources have been opened up, so many germs have begun to sprout—sometimes I hardly know what to do with all my wealth. I write my fingers bloody, and more keeps coming. I would like ever to give, give, give. But I don't know to whom."

"To me," she implored, holding out her hands palm upward. "I am so miserably poor."

He looked at her with great, severe, clairvoyant eyes.

"You are not poor. They have simply let you starve."

"Isn't that the same thing?"

He shook his head, continuing to keep his gaze fixed upon her rigidly.

"What was your husband?" he asked.

"I—am—the divorced wife—of an army officer of high rank," she replied with downcast eyes.

This time—thank the Lord!—it was not a lie.

Yet, to be accurate, she had lied.

For see what she was *now*!

He clasped her hand, which lay next to his on the table, and held it an instant.

"If it is difficult for you to speak of your life, don't," he said. "Later, perhaps, when we know each other better, you will tell me. I will tell you about myself—and how I—came to do my work."

"The work of which you spoke that time?" Lilly asked, strangely stirred by the sudden solemnity of his tone.

Drawing a deep breath he stretched out his clenched fists and his eyes stared into space.

"Yes—the work for which I live, which is my goal and mainstay and future; which takes the place of father and mother and friends and lover. For which this draught of wine was vintaged, and this hour created, and you yourself, you with your lovely, delicate beauty and your two begging hands, which were really fashioned for giving."

"I thought you wanted to speak of your work," said Lilly, softly.

"I am speaking of it. I always speak of it. I only want to show you how restlessly it absorbs my experiences. How many, for instance, have sung, painted and sculptured the Annunciation! And how many scholars have grubbed over it! Yet when I see the good, humble, astonished, almost frightened Virgin Mary eyes you are making this very instant, I feel the final word has not been spoken, the supreme conception is still to be formed. You see, that is the way everything must serve my work."

"Are you a poet?" asked Lilly, completely taken.

He smiled and shook his head.

"I'm neither a poet nor a painter, nor a historian, nor a psychologist. Yet I must be something of each, and more to boot. My work requires it."

Then he told his story.

His father had been instructor at a university and an eminent jurist. His mother had died in giving him birth, and his father did not survive her long. He then came under the care of his uncle, a rich, experienced old bachelor, who had passed a lively life in business and pleasure-seeking, and now dwelt in merry singleness in his castle. He had given Dr. Rennschmidt an

education and had assured him a small income which enabled him in a modest fashion to indulge his wishes and whims. Dr. Rennschmidt had intended to follow in his father's footsteps and enter an academic career, but the examinations, which he had passed honourably, had tried his health. So, to satisfy his uncle, he had given up the idea of a university career for the time being, and had gone out into the world. He had been drawn to Italy by his studies in the history of art, which he had always pursued with interest, though without considering them his life work. What fascinated him more than the churches and the museums was the free, beautiful humanity in which the lively southern race expressed its personality. He felt as if it had awakened in him a new, free humanity, conscious of its own powers. He felt more and more strongly the original unity of artistic and personal experience, past and present. The heroes of mythology and history, the characters in poetry and painting, and the poets and painters themselves all became so real and familiar that they seemed to be part of his own being. Surrounded by a people saturated with its own history, possessing the skill of a thousand years' exercise of art, always in touch with the spirit of the time, it seemed possible to him to penetrate into the emotional world of past generations. He learned to distinguish monuments of different periods and follow those related to each other step by step along the course of time.

His guide always had been and remained art. Art was best able to wring speech from the silence of death and bid the dust add new forms to the old. Only one thing was still missing, knowledge of the sources of its convincing might, the A B C's of the language in which it expressed its thoughts.

Lilly strained herself to follow him. She had never before listened to such language; yet it was not strange. Remnants from of old, from long-forgotten times seemed to cling to the bottom of her soul, which harmonised with what he said.

"One day," he continued, "while I was staying in Venice, I went off on a short excursion to Padua. By railroad it's about the same as going from Berlin to Potsdam. I wasn't keen about seeing the art there, because I was still in the honeymoon intoxication of my love for the early Venetians. It was only for the sake of completeness. I got into a little church in which there are frescoes by Giotto. Do you know who he was?"

"Certainly—Giotto and Cimabue," she said proudly.

"Then I needn't say more. I really had little left in me for him and his people, because, as I said, the quattrocentists had heated my imagination. Now just conceive a Roman amphitheatre completely ruined and overgrown with ivy, nothing but the outer walls still standing, like the walls of a garden. In the enclosure is the little church built of brick, as sober and prosaic as a Prussian Protestant praying barn."

Lilly smiled gratefully. A side-thrust at Protestantism was still a personal favour to her.

"Services are no longer held there. It has been set aside as a national monument. When I entered I saw nothing at first but a blue radiance from the walls, a sort of modest background, with long rows of pictures on it, the story of Christ told quite simply, the way a preacher speaking to poor people would tell it on Good Friday, provided he is the right preacher for poor people."

"But aren't we all poor people in the presence of Christ?" Lilly ventured to interpose.

He paused, looked at her with large eyes, then assented eagerly.

"Certainly. But not only in the presence of Christ, in the presence also of every great personality, of every great truth. But it isn't easy for us to cultivate that feeling—to make it clear to ourselves that we must be poor when what is given to us ought to enrich us. Religion is best able to inspire us with the feeling, if it finds the correct means of expression. And the Italians did. A poor man spoke to poor men. Therein lay the wealth of Giotto's gift. For what moves us to tears is not his vast competence, it is his incompetence. Do you get what I mean?"

"I think I do," said Lilly, her face lighting up. "If a man desires something of us, and can merely stammer and stutter his desire, he affects us more than if he says it in a prepared discourse."

"Exactly!" he cried joyously. "That's why Giotto's scant speech, his stammering created the whole language of art. Everything before him had simply been learned by heart from dead, Byzantine models. For the first time a man read life with simple eyes and a simple heart, and extracted from it what he had to say. That is why he became the universal master. To this very day if anyone succeeds in portraying supreme suffering and supreme delight with his brush, he owes his skill to that little church."

"I can conceive," cried Lilly, "that if the ocean had a source and a man were suddenly to come upon it, he would feel as you do."

In the exuberance of his emotion Dr. Rennschmidt seized Lilly's arm with both hands.

"That's the missing figure. It's strong enough to express what took place in me. But I came upon another source. While I walked along those frescoed walls, something suddenly stood before me clearly—and my work was there, sprung from nothing: the history of emotions. Emotions, you know, as art has seen and portrayed them in all generations. Not only the pictorial and plastic arts. They are only a fraction. Literature also. Poetry as well as painting, sculpture as well as music. I thought in that way I might succeed in creating a true, genuine history of the development of the human heart, which no moralist, no historian, no psychologist has yet

attempted. Why not? The documents are at hand; just as fossils lie embedded in rocks for the guidance of zoölogists. They need merely be cut out. What do you think? Isn't it a work worth spending a lifetime on?"

"It is," said Lilly, with the same solemnity.

"Oh, but there's much to be thought over first," he went on. "You cannot make an impetuous onslaught like a bull on a red rag. Often art leads us astray because it strove to reproduce something entirely different from the emotional life of its time. Whether it succeeded or not is another question. And often it was wanting in the necessary means of expression. Oh, you and I will speak of this many more times. Don't look so frightened. I need you. After this evening I could not get along without you. Nobody before you ever listened with such faith and understanding. Besides, I've grown to be an utter stranger here. The people I know are full of their own interests, and scarcely listen to me. Then, too, there's a bit of madness in my undertaking, of which I really ought to be ashamed. But one thing comforts me: a bit of madness has underlain every great work until that work was completed and had compassed its end. Of course everybody has the same idea of his own work. So some time I'll rise above that feeling. But now, while I'm wrestling, and every day I think I have discovered a new vein of gold and then am compelled to throw a good deal away because it's pinchbeck, if I have nobody on whom I can pour out what oppresses and torments me, why the jumble fairly chokes me. So fate sent me to you. It was like an inner voice, which would not let me rest at my desk, but sent me out to watch your light. Now I have you, and I won't let you go. God knows, I shouldn't be so bold in my own behalf, but it's for my work. It is clamouring for you. For heaven's sake, why are you crying?"

"I'm not crying," said Lilly, and smiled at him.

But the tears kept rising, and veiled his lovely picture.

"I know what it is," he said sadly. "I wasn't considerate. You are regretting your lost art, because I spoke so happily of my own work." Lilly started back as if she had seen a ghost, and made vehement denial.

"No, no, it isn't that! Really not!"

But he persisted in his belief; which drove the thorn of her own unworthiness all the deeper into her soul.

"Let us go," she requested. "There is so much assailing me—happiness and unhappiness and all sorts of things—outside I'll be calmer."

It was long after midnight. A cold wind swept across the water and soughed in the bare branches.

He offered her his arm, and Lilly nestled in it as if she had been at home there from times immemorial.

For a while they were both silent

"In five minutes he'll leave me," she thought. She could not bear the grief of impending loss.

"One thing is lying heavy on my conscience," he began. "You might think me overweening because I make so much of myself. But I don't wish to appear more important than others. I know every vigorous young fellow must have a similar work to bring purpose into his life. One has a book to write, another a business to carry on, another a dependent to support. For some it's enough if they keep their heads above water. It doesn't matter what. If you let yourself go, you're lost. And none of us want to be lost, do we?"

"I think I lost myself long ago," whispered Lilly, shuddering and crouching like a whipped dog.

He burst out laughing.

"You, the best, the finest, the noblest."

She knew how undeserved his praise was. Yet how delicious, oh, how delicious.

They were now walking so closely pressed against each other that their cheeks almost touched. She closed her eyes and ardently drank in the warm breath of his life. She felt she was being wafted to unknown blessed distances.

She did not come to herself until they reached her home.

"When?" he asked her.

She had no time the next day. She was invited out. But the day after. Yes, the day after, she had the whole evening free. He need only call for her.

For fear she might after all ask him to come the very next day, she hurried into the house, ran up the steps, and concealed her happiness in the hushed apartment.

She did not turn on the lights. The street lamps, shining on the walls of the drawing-room and touching rainbow colours on the chandelier prisms, provided sufficient illumination.

She began to wander through the open doors from room to room, into the corner where the bed stood, around the dining table, across the drawing-room, into the cold guest room, which had

never received a guest, up and down, back and forth, singing, crying, exulting.

And from amid her tears and singing and exultation suddenly arose—how did it go?

> Come, my beloved! Let us go forth into the field,
> Let us spend the night in the villages.
> Let us get up early to the vineyards,
> Let us see if the vine have blossomed.

No, not quite—a little different. But she would surely get it.

Impetuously she raised the lid of the piano, which had long remained closed. As if the neglected instrument, unforced into silence, had suddenly acquired a life of its own, a flood of sound rushed toward her, of which she had deemed neither the piano nor herself capable.

> Let us see if the young grape have opened,
> Whether the pomegranates have budded,
> There will I give my young love unto thee.

Yes, that was the way it went. Exactly. She had found each note again.

Where had it kept itself hidden all those long years?

It seemed as if the last time she had sung it had been the very day before.

Yet worlds of suffering lay between.

No, not suffering.

"If only it had been suffering," thought Lilly, "the Song of Songs would never have become mute."

CHAPTER XIII

The next morning on awaking Lilly began to worry anew.

Nobody was so blind as not to detect, on coming closer how worm-eaten was her existence. Least of all he whose fine feelings vibrated under each spiritual touch and awoke an anxious echo in her soul.

Even if it were possible for her to create a sort of island on which she might prevent him from coming into contact with her world, wasn't her very appearance a traitor? All those mad nights could not have passed over her without leaving traces. Two years before Dr. Salmoni had already remarked a change in her appearance. "A cold, disdainful look," he had said.

She jumped from bed, and ran to the mirror to subject every feature to suspicious scrutiny.

Her eyes had grown tired. There was no disputing that. But they did not look disdainful. "Virgin Mary eyes," Dr. Rennschmidt had said, not "Madonna eyes." Was there a difference? On her brow were faint cobwebby lines; but she could well-nigh rub them away with her finger. "They will disappear with a little massaging," she said to herself. But the deep grooves on either side of her mouth were bad. They gave her face a haughty, satiated expression. "The paths that consuming passion long has trod," she quoted from "Tannhäuser in Rom," which she knew almost by heart.

And yet—had she not preserved her noblest, her profoundest feelings? As if to save them up for this One, and now that the One had come, it was too late perhaps.

She spent the day in misery, and when Richard came for his tea, he found red eyes.

That afternoon proved to her clearly what she possessed in Richard. He asked so few questions, and was so sympathetic and full of solicitude, that for a moment or two she felt comforted and secure. She almost succumbed to the temptation to tell him a little about her new acquaintance, as was right between two such good friends. Fortunately she resisted the impulse. Rather let Adele into the secret, who had several times observed encouragingly:

"You may trust me fully. I know life far too well not to take the lady's side."

Wishing to avoid "the whole crew," as she dubbed the circle of her friends, Lilly pled sickness, and Richard rested satisfied. In the evening it occurred to her she had told Dr. Rennschmidt she was going out. She hastily put out the light, and sat brooding in the dark until bedtime.

The next morning the mail brought her a letter addressed in an unknown hand.

She tore the envelope open and read:

> I cannot rest, I cannot sleep before
> I speak to you, before the prayer torn
> From out my breast in passionate outpour
> Swiftly on wind and wave to you is borne.

I sit and dream by lighted lamp; still lies
My work. With hours stolen I entwine
A crown of flame that heavenly aspires
In tongues of fire up round your head divine.

Oh, chide me not for uttering words uncalled;
Chastise me not for sacred spell I've broken
In which your lofty spirit is enthralled.
I am a struggler—I must needs have spoken.

Good Heavens! Did this refer to her, to Lilly Czepanek, who ate her heart out in dull self-depreciation?

If any human being in the world could think of her so, above all *he*, the most glorious—she knew the poem, though unsigned, came from him—then after all she was not in such a bad way; then perhaps her life had not taken a permanent hold upon her; probably her innermost being had remained intact, and values lay strewn in her soul which needed only to be used in order to sanctify and bless herself and others.

Long after she knew the verses by heart she read them again and again. She could not tear her eyes from the beloved writing.

Then she tried to set the words to music. She opened the piano, and fantasied. Her playing came back to her as on the other night; everything she had known as a girl and had thought long forgotten came back. She needed merely to drop her fingers on the keys, and there it was—or nearly so.

But her finger joints were stiff, and the muscles of her lower arm soon wearied. She would have to practise and limber them.

"When he visits me, I can even play a classic for him," she thought. Buoyed by the new hope she floated further along on the current of her newly won self-esteem.

At the same time she kept careful count of each minute that separated her from the evening.

Richard found her practicing assiduously.

"What's gotten into you to-day?" he asked. "I hadn't the slightest idea you could play so well."

"Neither had I," laughed Lilly.

"You must play for the others this very evening."

"This evening?" Lilly asked, alarmed. "I thought I had this evening free."

"Free! What do you mean by free?" he rejoined, evidently annoyed. "You act just as if our going out in company were heaven knows what a sacrifice. You keep to yourself whenever you can possibly get a chance. Yesterday, in fact, Karla said nobody really knows what sort of life you lead."

"I think that applies much better to Karla than to me. Nobody really knows her name."

"It doesn't matter. Others have criticised your reserved ways, too. One man even hinted I'd better keep my eye on you more than I do, and not let you go your own way so much. So to hush them up I promised I'd bring you this evening instead of yesterday. There's no getting out of it."

Lilly instantly reflected that a refusal, far from helping, would merely arouse his dormant suspicions. So she bravely choked down fright and tears. But when he left the anguish of disappointment was all the keener.

What would Dr. Rennschmidt think if he came at the appointed time and found her out? Since he had not mentioned his address, she could not write to him, and he would have a full day in which to nurse evil suspicions.

In an agony of apprehension she sought comfort with Adele, whose dry, peevish face perceptibly brightened. She seemed to be in her element when it came to deceiving a person, or, better still, two persons.

"The best thing," she said, "would be for you to say a sick friend had asked you to come. Something sad like that takes them all in." She knew it from experience, she assured Lilly.

That evening her friends did not get much entertainment out of Lilly. She disregarded the gentlemen, and gave the ladies rude answers. Mrs. Jula, the only one whose presence would have pleased her, was absent, as had become usual of late. They finally left her to herself and Richard, the dear fellow, who had hoped to parade his possession, helplessly gnawed the ends of his moustache.

The next morning Lilly again suffered the torments of dread.

When she had come home the night before, despite the late hour, she had awakened Adele, who said he had come and had looked dreadfully upset. He had gone away without saying anything.

Another day spent in nervously counting the minutes. She stood in front of the mirror, utterly

despondent, and dressed herself for him. She would have liked to sink at his feet when he entered. Nevertheless she determined to maintain in words and gesture, then and in the future, a certain gentle, melancholy grandeur of manner which would nip suspicion in the bud, and would correspond with the picture of her he had drawn in his verses. When she thought that that stupid, much-kissed head of hers should from now on be a "head divine," she grew thoroughly ill at ease from sheer sanctity.

At half past seven the bell rang.

She received him with a conventional smile, and the gentle, melancholy grandeur, which she succeeded in adopting perfectly, concealed her harassed spirits.

His manner, she saw at the first glance, was also constrained. His eyes glided past her with a singularly empty expression.

"He has divined everything," her soul cried.

But she bore up nobly.

"I must beg your pardon," she said, "for not having kept our appointment."

"I hope your friend is feeling better," he said, while a disdainful smile of doubt played about his lips.

She made all kinds of explanations, said whatever came into her head; and without looking at him, she knew he believed not a syllable.

"I must beg *your* pardon," he rejoined after she had finished, with the same lurking disdain in his voice and smile.

"Why?"

"I sent you some verses which I hope you will consider nothing more than what they really are, a mere harmless stylistic effort without sense or significance."

"He's already withdrawing," her guilty conscience cried; and all the colder and worldlier was her reply.

"I admit your pretty verses did astonish me at first. I couldn't conceive that I was a fitting subject to inspire them. But then I thought you probably meant nothing more than what you just now said, and I did not feel offended. If you wish we won't say more about it."

He looked at her with great questioning eyes, and she rejoiced at having requited him so bitterly.

Wishing to observe the rules of decorum she invited him to stay for supper, though absolutely nothing had been prepared for a guest.

"I thought I was to be permitted to take you out," he replied in a hard, disillusioned tone.

She smiled politely.

"Just as you wish."

They descended the stairs in silence, and in silence paced along the canal, the same way they had walked three evenings before, pressed close against each other in drunken bliss. Then, too, they had not spoken; but, oh, how different had their silence been!

"What have you done the last few days?" Lilly finally asked, to make conversation.

"Nothing special. I tried to write an article for the *Münchener Kunstzeitschrift*, on which I'm a collaborator. My subject was the Sienna School outside of Sienna. But it didn't turn out very well. The editor won't be satisfied."

Lilly read reproach of herself in his words. Evidently he wanted to indicate that her entrance into his life was to blame.

And when he asked to what restaurant she would like to go, she said, her wounded heart quivering:

"I'm neither hungry nor thirsty, and people and light would hurt me."

She wanted to add something about "not wishing to be a burden" and similar things, but swallowed the words before they were spoken.

"If you wish to avoid people, we might go to the Tiergarten."

Lilly agreed. Had he said, "Come down into the water of the canal with me," she would have assented even more willingly.

The hard park roads stretched before them in the light of the electric lamps like long galleries with garish walls between which one was forced to run the gauntlet. The pedestrians coming toward Lilly and Dr. Rennschmidt measured the tall couple with cold, intrusive curiosity.

"It's worse here than in the crowded streets," said Lilly.

Her aching, despondent heart fluttered with excitement

He pointed to a side path leading into darkness; and without speaking they dipped into solitude.

Above the towering masses of branches the cloudy sky, looking like a metal whose brilliance has worn off, reflected the invisible sea of city lights. Through the lattice work of the leafless bushes gleamed the lamps lining the more public ways; and on all sides the gongs of the electric trams, shooting hither and thither, sounded like fire alarums.

But there in the interior of the park, quiet and darkness prevailed. Lilly felt she had sunk into a black sea of mournfulness.

The silence between them became intolerable.

Suddenly Dr. Rennschmidt stepped in front of Lilly and blocked the way.

"What's the matter?" she asked, startled.

"Mrs. Czepanek—Mrs. Czepanek—what I am going to say—what I am going to say"—his raised hands jerked back and forth before her face—"will either bring us together again—or—send us apart forever. I was cowardly before. I thought I could evade the truth. When I said I didn't mean what I wrote in my poem, I was lying. I felt exactly what I wrote. And a thousand times more strongly. But I oughtn't to have spoken. I know I frightened you. You were bewildered. You didn't know how to take me. You probably think me some enamoured adventurer who wants to exploit the trust you show. Dear, dear Mrs. Czepanek, I promise you I will never again annoy you with a display of my feelings. But don't withdraw your friendship from me. Please don't. Just imagine what would become of me if I were to lose you!"

So *that's* what it was!

Oh, God! If nothing else stood between them.

She could not help herself—she had to lean against a tree and cry. Her tears soon soaked her veil, and she raised it and pressed her finger tips to her eyes.

"What's the matter?" she heard his voice, hoarse with anxiety. "Did I wound you so deeply? Was what I said so very bad? I will atone for it. Just pardon me. You must pardon me."

When she heard him beg her pardon so humbly for the immeasurable happiness he had bestowed upon her, she was seized with a frenzy, and throwing her grand manner to the winds and her shame, to boot, she flung her arms about his neck with a groan of abandon, pressed her body against his, and kissed his lips, and sucked and bit them.

Under the impetus of this wild, unchaste kiss, he staggered and held himself erect on her, digging his fingers into the flesh of her upper arm.

How good it felt, because it hurt so!

"At last, at last!" her heart cried.

Now he knew who she was and what she had to give him.

When she pulled herself together, she saw he had sunk back with his head leaning against the same tree that had supported her. His hat had fallen to the ground. His eyes were closed. His face had the ashen hue of death.

For a few moments all was still. The only sound was the clanging of the tram bells.

"My love, my love!" she whispered, stooping and then drawing herself upward on him. "Wake up, my love! wake up, and come!"

He opened his eyes and stared at her with the look of a foolish slave.

"Come, come," she exulted. "Come back, come home. I don't want to roam about any more—in the woods or restaurants. Come home! Come to me!"

He did not respond. He seemed to have lost his mind completely.

A dull sense of guilt awoke in her, but was instantly stifled by joy.

"Come, come!"

With both hands she drew him away from the spot that had become the cradle of her bliss—and his, too. Was it remarkable that happiness should benumb him and rob him of his senses? He upon whom Lilly Czepanek bestowed herself, Lilly Czepanek for whose favour hundreds had begged in vain, might well lose his senses. It by no means derogated from his dignity.

While she drew him along the roads and streets, she let loose upon him her soul's tempest in a delirium of happy prattle.

Hadn't he an inkling of what he was that he should have harboured such doubts? She had belonged to him from the very first instant. A miracle had taken place in her as well as in him. Never had she known what love was until the day when the squirrels chipped over their heads. The rest of her life no longer existed for her. *He* alone was there. He and his eyes. He and his mouth. He and his will. He and the great, glorious work which she would toil for like a slave; which she would enrich with her love, because from old pictures and poems he would gather

nothing but the grey ashes of love. Genuine, young blissful love, *she* would teach him, she, Lilly Czepanek, who had waited for him ever since she could remember, who belonged to him from the beginning, from the beginning of time, you might say. He could see God had destined them for each other, because they both thought they had met before, whereas they had never met in life. At most in dreams. She had seen him in her dreams always, always. Exactly as in fairy tales.

"Perhaps it is a fairy tale. Tell me, tell me, you whose first name I do not even know. But no matter. Tell me, it's not a mere fairy tale."

But he said nothing. He walked along like a somnambulist. He followed her up the steps mechanically, and remained standing stiffly in the centre of the drawing-room, into which she had led him. When the lights were turned on, he looked about with a shy, searching glance, as if he had never seen the room, and could not recollect how he had come there.

She clung to him, and said he should sit quite still and rest, and close those eyes of his. Then she helped him remove his overcoat, and pressed him into a seat and kissed him on both "those eyes" until his lids closed and he reclined there as if actually asleep.

"Now wait, beloved, until I come back."

She ran joyously into the kitchen to order Adele to prepare supper hastily. Then she hurried into the bedroom, where she changed her rustling silk dress for a light blue tea-gown, turquoise-studded, in which, as Richard was wont to say gallantly, she was Venus herself. She arranged her hair more loosely and discarded her rings The only jewel she left was a gold bracelet.

Adele, the sulky, had transformed the table as if by magic into a bower of flowers, and her face was wreathed in smiles; for at last there were human goings-on in this respectably indecent house. The plated silverware gleamed on the fresh damask, and the aroma of golden bananas came from the fruit basket.

He might be content. Lilly was. Her dread had disappeared. She felt well-nigh victorious. But her happiness was too humble to be totally unqualified.

Her one pride, greedy for recognition, was that she had so much, so much to give him.

When she entered the drawing-room, she no longer found him reclining on the arm-chair. To her terror she saw he was standing in front of the secrétaire—absorbed in contemplation of Richard's picture.

"Oh, if only I had taken it away before!" she thought Now it was too late.

He let a confused, astonished look glide over the Venus robe, and fetching a deep breath, grasped both her hands.

"Why did you make yourself so beautiful for me?"

"Just to give you a little feeling of being at home here," she said, dropping her eyes. "Nothing more. But come. Let's go to supper. We haven't had anything to eat all evening."

"Eat and drink now? Oh, very well—I'll just sit at table, if you want."

"Then I don't care for anything either," she cried, clinging to him, and drawing her arm so tight about his neck that the pressure of his body fairly robbed her of her breath.

Peter, the little ape, who had slept in his corner the whole time, awoke and whimpered jealously, and stretched his grey arms yearningly between the bars of his cage, as if wishing to be the third party in the alliance.

Dr. Rennschmidt heard the strange sound and started.

Lilly smiled and calmed him.

"Later I'll introduce you to all my little ones. My friends must be yours, too."

He drew himself up to his full height.

"How is that possible? As what would you introduce me?"

Lilly hastily parried.

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way. I merely meant—" She was at a loss what explanation to offer. Then she felt his trembling fingers clutch her upper arm. His eyes burned their way into hers.

"Who are you?" he asked.

Her brain reeled.

"Who am I? I am a woman—who loves you—who has never loved anyone before."

He gratefully caressed her shoulders.

"Understand me," he said. "I am not trying to force myself into your confidence. But if the relation between two human beings is what ours has been for the past hour, they want to mean everything in the world to each other. I have never met a woman like you. I am utterly helpless. The few little experiences I have had don't count. In Rome a baker's daughter loved me. She ran

away with a marquis. When I was a student I went through a few similar episodes. I never mingled much in society. And now all of a sudden I have you in my arms—the noblest, the most glorious thing I've ever beheld. A creature not of this world. I keep looking at you as you stand there in your blue peplum—why, it's as if an old marble statue by Lysippus or Praxiteles had come to life. And that is to be mine? The mere desiring of it is naked tragedy. We are both making straight for a precipice, and we don't even resist."

"Why resist?" she cried, in bliss, throwing her head back, as if to toss from her brow streaming bacchantic locks. "We love each other. Nothing else concerns us."

He sank into the chair next to her, and pressed his face into both hands, his body heaving as with sobs.

She kneeled before him, and bent her head, and planted little kisses on his clenched hands.

"No," he cried, jumping up. "I will not permit myself simply to drift. If *you* think as you do, you who are willing to sacrifice everything—very well! But I, who am the recipient, I must make everything clear to you, so that you know for whom you are making the sacrifice. I mustn't leave any possibilities open to mislead you. I'm nothing but a poor young fellow who lives by his uncle's bounty. I have no prospects. I can't build on my work. And the few articles I write don't count. I must first toil for my little place in the world. It may be ten years before I secure it. And I can't let you support me. Think what you will of me, but I must tell you: we cannot become husband and wife."

At first she scarcely comprehended. It was impossible for her to realise that a man could be so naïve, so unworldly as to speak of marriage in Lilly Czepanek's drawing-room.

She burst into a strident laugh, the overflow of her scorn of her own worthless life.

"Do you think," she cried, jumping to her feet, "that I'm nothing but an adventuress who tries to rope men into marriage, one of those harpies"—Mrs. Jula's word occurred to her—"who pounce upon every passerby? For what sort of a sorry wretch do you take me?"

He looked into her face with astonished, uncomprehending eyes.

"A woman who loves a man and wants to be the joy of his life is not a sorry wretch."

Oh, if that was what he meant!

The time when in all innocence she had wanted to be Richard's wife recurred to her. How long ago was it? How low she must have sunk if this most natural conception of the relation between man and woman should have become strange to her!

She shuddered, and was aware of having turned pale.

If only he had noticed nothing amiss. She could stand much, but not that.

Humbly, in dread of his searching eyes, she replied:

"I merely wanted to let you know that you are free and will remain free from first to last. You can leave whenever you want to, and nothing will have been."

"And you?" he asked.

"What do you mean—I?"

"As what will you remain behind if I go?"

"I'll take care of that," she laughed.

The contingency was very, very remote. Why split her head over it now?

But he was not yet satisfied.

"There's something peculiar about you. A whiff of mystery. A—a—how shall I say? The shadow of a wrong done you. You mingle much in society, you say. Yet I have the feeling that you are lonely and perhaps unprotected. Whenever I try to look into you, I feel as if rude hands had been laid on you. From now on I will stand by to protect and advise you. But I'm so inexperienced in worldly matters. It can easily come about that without divining it I may merely add to the mischief in your life. And I would not for the world—you are holy to me. So you must tell me now, to-night, whatever you may of what you have gone through and suffered. Will you?"

Lilly felt evasion was no longer possible. The hour had struck of which she had lived in dread ever since she had met Dr. Rennschmidt, though it had seemed indefinitely remote.

One of Mrs. Jula's sayings again flashed through her mind:

"The road back into the community of virtue leads through lies."

It had begun with lies; with lies it would go on.

For an instant the wish shot up within her to tell him the full truth. But that was madness, suicide. In fact, she need not lie. She need merely put a different face upon matters, the face they wore when hope still shone upon her life and she actually was what she now endeavoured to appear to be.

"It must be darker," she said, extinguishing the chandelier's piercing white glare. The only light now came from the red-shaded standing lamp, which cast a flowery shimmer upon them.

Her hands in his, her head leaning against his shoulder, she began her whispered, faltered confession.

She told of her sheltered, care-free childhood, in which music held sway, a benevolent spirit and a demon in one; of her father's flight and the poverty in which she and her mother were left.

So far nothing to conceal or alter. The colonel also remained as he had been, except that she occasionally promoted him to the rank of general. It was not until Walter von Prell stepped on the stage the second time that it became necessary to mix in fresh colours. The mere acknowledgment that she had frivolously abandoned body and soul to a tattered and torn jovial ne'er-do-well would deprive her forever of her friend's esteem. So the sorry little good-for-nothing was quite naturally converted into a happy, yet ill-fated laughing hero who had been vanquished merely because all the dark powers combined against him.

Once launched, she sailed serenely on. She represented the parting as having taken place amid a thousand vows and tears and bridal expectations. As for the duel, of which she had never learned the particulars, she exaggerated its horrors vastly, her lover emerging a total cripple, who left for America resolved not to enter her life again until he should be in a position to atone for his misdeed by marrying her. So for the meantime he placed her in the care of a simple, good young man, who was all nobility and self-sacrifice. For love of the vanished friend, this young man had taken Lilly's fate into his keeping four years before, and watched over her and led her into society. With rare disinterestedness he managed the little capital remaining from her married days, and always advised her in practical matters. He came every afternoon for a social cup of tea, and sometimes he escorted her when she went out in the evening. His circle had become hers, and everybody they knew honoured and respected the fine relationship existing between them, the basis of which was his noble loyalty to his friend.

So Lilly Czepanek, with the force of conviction, recounted her life history. She almost believed in her own words. As a matter of fact, it was a fair picture of her life, such as Richard had once portrayed it, before she had begun to slip into the abyss the night of the carnival.

Of Kellermann and Dr. Salmoni and the whole "crew," of course, she said nothing. But she alluded to her unfortunate art with tears—for the last time, she said—then it should never be mentioned again.

She concluded. When, with a hesitating feeling of security, she looked up to him expecting to receive his absolution, she started at the change in his appearance. His face was livid, his eyes, fastened on the ceiling, glowed unnaturally, deep furrows of anguish had cut themselves into his cheeks.

"Doesn't he believe me?" flashed through her head.

He jumped up, and snatched Richard's picture from the secrétaire, and carried it to the light of the standing lamp.

Lilly knew he was thinking of Walter, and timidly interjected:

"That isn't he."

"Then who is it?"

"His friend—the manufacturer."

He cast the picture aside.

"Haven't you a picture of *his*?"

Yes—but where was it? The large pastel was in the lumber room. The small one very likely was stowed away in some drawer.

"I packed it away," she excused herself, "because I couldn't bear to have it in my sight all the time."

She did not tell him why the sight of it annoyed her. She preferred him to assume the cause was her newly awakened love.

How ridiculous, how pitiful it all was!

She longed to sink at his feet and cry to him:

"Forgive me, forgive me—take me as I am, do not spurn me."

Instead, she lied on, shamelessly, desperately, like an ordinary adventuress on the verge of discovery.

"Will you do me the favour to hunt for the picture?"

"Why do you want to torture yourself?"

"Please, I beg of you."

Further resistance was out of the question. She fetched the key of the secretary from a basket, opened the drawers at random, rummaged among the papers without half looking, and actually found it. There it was. She had not seen it for years.

The white-lashed eyes looked haughty and cunning.

"Lie and deceive, lie and deceive," they seemed to say. "That's just what I used to do."

"Here it is."

He stepped to the lamp, and stared at the picture long. His lips twitched from time to time, the picture quivered jerkily in his hands.

"Exactly the way I stood in front of the rich orphan's photograph," thought Lilly. But that was long ago.

Then she heard him speak. His voice was hoarse.

"Will you answer a question upon which much depends?"

"Ask it, my love."

"Do you still count upon—upon this young man's return?"

Whither did the question lead? Lilly felt she need merely say "no," and every obstacle was removed. But if she said no, all her falsehoods about Walter and his friend would have had no significance.

So she had to choose a middle course.

"Sometimes I have my doubts," she managed to say, lingering over the words. "I am waiting for two now. My father seems to be gone—gone for good. And I don't hear from him either."

"Do you consider yourself bound, just as you did then?"

She felt the halter tightening about her neck.

"Tell me."

Something in his tone seemed to bar escape. It left no nook to hide in. Her answer meant life or death.

She held up her arms as if swearing an oath.

"Since I know you I don't care one way or the other. If you want me to be true to him, I'll wait for him—till Judgment Day. If you want me to throw him overboard, I'll throw him overboard."

He threw his head back and closed his eyes, and stood there as he had in the park. She became alarmed again for his sake.

"Why does he torture himself so?" she thought. Then it occurred to her for the first time that he took her and everything she had said seriously; that he, who himself practiced loyalty, assumed that loyalty was a life principle of hers, too.

Oh, if he knew!

She was so ashamed she did not dare to speak or approach him.

He drew himself up energetically, and his forehead glowed with the wrathful will, which from the first had intimidated her.

"Listen," he said. "After everything you've told me, I know I acted on a false assumption. You are *not* neglected, the world has *not* done you wrong. On the contrary, you are protected and cared for, and you're looking forward to a future, no matter how uncertain it may now be. You would lose all that through me. The instant your friend were to suspect my existence, he would, of course, withdraw his support. And all the others who now constitute your world would go with him."

Lilly wanted to burst out laughing, and give vent to her utter contempt for everything that had constituted her former life. But another thought instantly restrained her. Dr. Rennschmidt must continue to think that Richard should not suspect his existence. To defy her past and present was to bring about a catastrophe which would irremediably expose the wretchedness of her situation. She might be his only in dark secret hours.

He continued:

"What I have to offer in return is nothing. I have nothing but my work—you know. And even my work is still in the clouds. Why, I'm not even certain of myself. If I think of what I have just—" He turned his eyes aside.

"Of course, if you don't love me," said Lilly, dejectedly.

He threw himself in front of her, placing one knee on a vacant part of the seat of her chair, and putting his arms about her body.

"Have mercy on me. You see how I'm suffering. Don't make it *harder* for me. Every day, every

hour, I should say to myself: 'Over in America there's a man toiling and moiling for her. He doesn't write simply because he's ashamed to admit that he has accomplished nothing on account of his mangled body.' I can't conceive any other motive for his silence. A man doesn't forget a woman like you. In the meantime I sit here with you in secret, and hold you in my arms. I don't know—I—a person can debauch, he can commit adultery—so far as I'm concerned it wouldn't matter. But to rob a poor cripple of his all—I think the lowest scoundrel would draw the line at that. I don't know how I'll get over it—" He collapsed. His forehead hit against the arm of Lilly's chair, and dry sobs shook his body. "But—it would be better—immediately—on the spot—better than later—when it's too late—for both—of us."

The blow had fallen. How cleverly she thought she had garbled the truth, and here she was caught in her own net of lies.

"For God's sake," she screamed, "do you mean to say you will—"

He rose to his feet.

"Farewell," he said. "Think of me in peace. Thank you."

"If I tell him the truth, he'll be all the more certain to go," she thought, looking about helplessly.

His hands, stretched toward her, were waiting, his eyes hung on her thirstily, as if to drink in the picture forever.

"I will plant myself at the door," she thought, "and throw myself on him, and stifle him with kisses."

But the desire not to lose his respect made her small and timorous.

"Not this instant," she implored, clasping his hands. "One hour—one parting hour—just one."

He gently extricated his hands from her grasp, and turned to the door.

Raised to her full height, Lilly stood in the centre of the room in her blue Venus robe and held out her hand to him. The wide sleeves fell away and revealed the mature womanly beauty of her arms.

"If he sees me this way," she thought, "he will still be mine."

But he did not turn about. He reeled. His forehead struck against the half-open door.

All of a sudden he seemed to have been wiped out of existence, and with him the light of the world. A swarm of bees buzzed about her head, and in the darkness enveloping her, she sank through the floor, deeper, deeper, into the canal—a club dealt her a blow on her forehead—and all was over.

At first it sounded like a chirping of birds, then like the murmur of a mighty throng in some wide sunny place; and then only two voices sounded, one a man's, the other a woman's. They kept up an eager, whispered conversation.

The cook—Maggie—and the lackey with the mischievous smile. Of course, that's who they were.

The colonel would enter the next instant and want her to be his wife.

Something cool and damp dropped soothingly on her aching head. Just as then.

"So I'll have to go through all that again," she thought in terror, and she began to cry and entreat:

"Oh, colonel, please let me go. I'm much too bad for you! Oh, *dear* colonel."

"For God's sake, she's raving!" said the man. After all he wasn't the horrid lackey.

Oh, how deliciously at ease she lay in the spell of that voice, in which a home-like note quivered solicitously.

"He didn't go at any rate." The thought tranquillised her, and she settled herself more comfortably on the pillow they had placed under her neck on the floor. If she had known his first name, she would have spoken to him. Why, how disgraceful not to know his first name yet. So she merely raised her arms a little toward him.

Instantly he was kneeling beside her, stroking her hands.

"Keep real quiet," he said, "real, real quiet."

"Will everything be all right now?" she asked, smiling up to him in blissful peace.

Yes, yes, everything would be all right. Ways and means would be found for their remaining together—like two friends, like a brother and sister. They wouldn't part—no, no, they wouldn't part. Nobody need be tortured so terribly as that.

Lilly shuddered and thought of the moment when the light about her had gone out, and she had

sunk into the wet, slimy depths.

Thus life would have been without him.

But now they would wander toward the dawning sun hand in hand like brother and sister in innocent gaiety, liberated and purified.

Inconceivable happiness!

Strange that neither of them had hit upon the idea sooner.

She groped for his arm and with a contented sigh nestled her cheek in his hollow hand.

But Adele, who all the while had considerately been looking out of the window, thought the compress ought to be changed, because the wound on Lilly's forehead was still bleeding.

CHAPTER XIV

Each spring in a man's life has its peculiar aspect and its peculiar history. Each spring finds him different, each stirs new depths and opens fresh, hidden wounds. One spring passes by like a dull, vapid game, because he himself just then happens to be dull and vapid. Another tortures him with a thousand fruitless admonitions, because he cannot pay off a penny of the debt he owes himself. A third finds him listless and sodden as a field which cannot recover from the winter stress. And again the spring-time chants deceptive hymns of liberation and redemption in his heart, as if *it* had the power to liberate and redeem.

But most beautiful is that spring of which we are scarcely aware for all the spring joy within us; whose bourgeoning seems but a reflection of our spiritual bourgeoning, and which is but the accompaniment of the mighty growth that broadens our minds and souls and fairly bursts the bonds of our being.

Such a spring broke upon Lilly.

Everything took on a new aspect. Never had the morning sun painted such crinkly, laughing grotesques on the walls. Never had rainy days enveloped the world in such languishing violet twilights. Never had people's faces been brightened by so much expectant festivity. Never had the din and bustle of the streets revealed so much joyous, purposeful activity.

Why, all of a sudden Lilly also was overwhelmed with work.

Every hour was filled with urgent occupations. If anyone in the last few years had dared to tell her that the day would come again when with burning cheeks and a heated brain she would indiscriminately cram names, dates, biographies, lists of great men's works, poetical quotations, and foreign terms, she would have laughed him to scorn.

But it would never do to loaf now. She must be ready with a response on any occasion, just as she had been when he asked her about Giotto. All her eagerness for knowledge, which a feeling of spiritual isolation and aimless endeavour had dammed up within her for years, now gushed out. Her mind, insatiate as a fallow, unfertilised field, absorbed whatever was thrown upon it. She scarcely needed to put forth the least effort. If she merely imagined herself repeating it to him, it remained in her memory.

She went at her studies with the utmost secrecy. Konrad—yes, his name was Konrad—must not suspect that her wisdom had just issued brand-new from the laboratory. She also kept her visits to the museums a secret. He was to suppose she had always been thoroughly familiar with the masters. In addition she had to practice many a piece of early music which he wished to hear for his work. And often she blessed her father's strict hand which had held her down on the piano stool throughout many a long night.

Lilly and Dr. Rennschmidt saw a great deal of each other—every other evening of course. He avoided coming afternoons, which, he knew, belonged to her betrothed's friend. But often he ran up to her in the middle of the day to bring her a book or some flowers and ask her for a bit of music. No matter how much she pressed him, he never remained for a meal. In fact, he seemed not to feel quite at ease in her apartment. He would walk up and down incessantly, pretty soon glance at the clock, and take leave. At first she felt hurt, then she asked him teasingly whether he thought he was in an enemy's country, and finally she adopted the policy of *laissez faire*.

Oh, she did not yet thoroughly understand him. Each day laid bare new, unusual sides of his being.

He was still very young. Not only in years. She had met many a cold, blasé old man of twenty-five. His youth was deep-seated. He thought passionately. Lilly had never seen such fervour expended on pure thinking. Ideas seemed to him like tangible beings with which he had to strive breast to breast, and which he drew to himself if they proved to be friendly to his intellectual attitude, or rejected if hostile. Similarly, great thinkers and creators of the past were either allies or enemies. He associated with them as with teachers and comrades, adoring or despising them, submitting to their reprimands, or turning them into laughing-stocks.

His thoughts and speech were in a constant state of flux with counter-currents and a whirl of contradictions. He was like a man forcibly cleaving a way, or giving merciless chase. He never remained indifferent or apathetic to a phenomenon, spiritual or physical. Everywhere he saw problems to be solved and vexed questions in regard to which he must take one side or the other. He either loved or hated. He scarcely knew a stage between.

And Lilly followed him with all the ardour of a pupil and lover. She planted each idea of his in her being and let it take root or die as chance willed. No need to cherish it; she enjoyed sufficient wealth without it.

He spoke little of his personal matters, not from distrust or reserve, but because he deemed them of small importance. Lilly had to extract jots of information by questioning.

He was very enthusiastic about his parents, though their pictures seemed to have faded in his mind or lost form.

His uncle had taken their place, the self-made man and globe-trotter who had made Dr. Rennschmidt his heir, and who even during his lifetime allowed him means for a modest, yet care-free existence.

Lilly could not fathom the inner relationship of the two men. Sometimes, it seemed, Dr. Rennschmidt cherished a tender love for the old man. Then again he was skeptical, almost bitter in his judgment of him. Evidently a profound difference existed in their natures, though they struggled for compromise.

He had few friends—chiefly old fellow-students—and he never paid purely social visits. As a result he could spend all his leisure hours with Lilly.

They sat in the restaurants, generally the little Italian bodega, until the waiter turned out the lights over their heads, to their invariable surprise—they had just come.

Or they bought their suppers for a few pennies at a delicatessen shop, and escaped the city dust in the Tiergarten, where they hunted up an empty bench somewhat removed from the public ways, yet not in too secluded a spot. It was not until love couples began to wander by in the dark like shades of the netherworld that they felt wholly concealed; and if others seated themselves on the same bench, they little objected, knowing well that love couples would never remain beside them long. They had much more urgent need of the night and solitude than Lilly and Konrad.

While the light green leaves, still stemless, gradually melted into a dark, shadowy, jagged mass, and the sunset flames above merged into the sombre purple of night, and the nightingale sang for them sometimes only a few feet away, they would sit there shoulder to shoulder waiting for the stars to dot the twilight, each evening later and fewer in number.

Their winged thoughts travelled far into the realms of music, painting, northern sagas and Italian landscapes. Questions of infinity arose, hesitating and halting, and were promptly disposed of with the sure, clear discernment of a happy, youthful latitudinarianism. Lilly was now accurately informed of the meaning of the universe and immortality and the soul and God.

Often she felt as if she had been left alone to freeze in a vast, icy waste where there was no Father, no life after death, and certainly no St. Joseph.

"What you believe, I suppose, is atheism, isn't it?" she asked timorously.

"If that's what you want to call it," he laughed.

So, from now on Lilly was an atheist, one of those who in the eyes of the Church were roasting in nethermost hell. But if excommunication did not drive *him* to despair, she, too, could suffer it. She would even endure a Fatherless condition.

Her one regret was for St. Joseph.

Although he had not entered her thoughts for many a day, none the less it was a pity never again to be able to run to him in sorrow or joy, never, at least, without having to feel ashamed of herself, and that exactly at a time when she needed him so urgently, when her experiences fairly overwhelmed her with their force and number.

She felt a desire to be lulled and calmed, and the lofty art that Konrad spread before her eyes by no means soothed her; rather, it goaded her on, though, to be sure, to fresh delights.

They went to what few concerts the late season still offered, and heard the Eroica and Brahms' Second Symphony and an unutterably exquisite production by Grieg.

They would take their stand in the cheaper part of the house, where they both delighted to be, and listen with the backs of their hands touching as if by chance. A slight pressure conveyed the feelings awakened by some subtle charm or expressive bit.

What wonderful hours those were!

And what wonderful hours when she sat at Konrad's side in the pit (where none of the "crew" could see her). As she learned to know Shakespeare's characters belonging to every age and time and Wagner's luminous fairy-tale realism, she understood fully how infinitely poor her previous life had been.

He took her to see the moderns also.

Of all the plays Rosmersholm affected her most.

She, Lilly, with her secret guilt, was Rebecca. He in his unsuspicious purity was Rosmer. His high-pitched spirituality had an increasingly strong influence on her, as Rosmer's on Rebecca. But if the filth of her existence should gradually roll from her upon him, would she not be his evil demon, his ruination?

The thought was intolerable. She wept so bitterly during the performance as to attract general attention, and Konrad offered to take her out. She indignantly repudiated the suggestion.

On going home she staggered along the river side, still sobbing. He had chosen that way because it was darker and quieter, and he half carried her on his arm.

On the Spreebrücke she stopped and stared down into the dark, living depths. He let her have her way, but when she began to climb up on the railing—to see what it was like—he forced her down from the precarious position.

"What's the difference?" she thought. "When he finds it all out, I'll have to go down there after all —and alone."

From that evening on the effort to keep him free of the slightest suspicion as long, as long as possible troubled her more than ever, occupied her thoughts every moment of the day.

Her great ignorance caused her no shame—nevertheless she fought against it with all her might —but she lived in constant terror that the slovenly, cynical tone to which she had gradually habituated herself through long intercourse with the "crew," might crop out in her conversation.

The bit of carefully cherished rigour and good-breeding which she fetched out from among the remnants of her former spiritual state did her sluggish being good. And so she acquired some of that "grandeur" which she had demanded of herself at the beginning of her relations with Konrad. This time, however, it was not empty affectation, but an inner quality, a natural outcome of the finest and tenderest feelings, which she might still call her own.

Much that had long dominated her thoughts became unintelligible to her, especially the tendency caught from her friends, to transfer everything entering the circle of her thoughts to the realm of the erotic.

In astonishment she beheld world upon world opening up beyond the narrow whirlpool in which she had been carried around and around. Such a wealth of great and beautiful things to taste and enjoy was suddenly spread before her, that she did not find the time to feel ashamed of what had been.

But when she recalled how she had once dared to kiss him, shame ran hot through her body. That moment of wild abandon, she feared, might ever remain a stain upon his image of her.

Yet there was not the slightest indication that he did not think of her with the same respect as she of him. This mutual esteem always hung between them like a gauze veil, obscuring the beloved man's face as behind a mist of mingled happiness and anxiety, though at the same time removing the sting of self-reproach from Lilly.

They were never more to talk of love. Love gave way to a sweet, fraternal, though somewhat constrained relationship. The word "friendship" was frequently on their lips. They praised its hallowing force with a most serious mien, as if they had not the faintest notion of what it meant.

It was difficult, however, for Lilly to endure Konrad's bodily proximity. The one caress he permitted himself was to lay his arm lightly on her shoulder when they sat side by side. Though Lilly then longed to press closer up to him she finally moved farther away, because the constriction of her breast mounted by degrees to veritable torture.

She never ventured in the very slightest to think that some day he might become her lover. When unable to fall asleep, she pictured herself drowsing off with her head under his shoulder—that was bliss enough.

Her fancies scarcely ever strayed into forbidden territory. The chastity of her maiden days, which the colonel's senile greed had rudely violated, once again laid its merciful veil about her tremulous soul. In fact it was all as in the long-forgotten days of her girlhood—the golden wealth of thoughts and sensations, the witching glamour about each little object, the delightful importance of the tiniest incidents, the hopeful disquiet hoping for she knew not what.

If only there had been a single human being in whom to confide her joy and fears, her happiness would have been complete.

The desire waxed so strong within her as to be nearly uncontrollable. She had found herself more than once on the brink of telling her secrets to Richard—a quick way of ending them.

One day she decided to visit her former landlady and acquaint her with her great experience.

The old friendship between Mrs. Laue and Lilly had never wholly died down. Though they saw little of each other, Lilly had kept herself alive in the old lady's memory by sending messages and little gifts.

The tenant *pro tem.* of the "best room" opened the door for Lilly.

Mrs. Laue, as always, was sitting at her long white work table tapping busily with her wet finger-tips now on a pressed flower, now on a gluey bit of paper. She did not suffer herself to be interrupted, not even when Lilly on taking a seat beside her pushed toward her the sweets she never failed to bring.

"No, thanks, child," said Mrs. Laue. "Each bite more is one flower less. People like myself have to wait for a holiday before we can eat. We have nobody to provide for us and keep us like a princess. I'd like to be in your shoes just one day before I lie in my grave—go out walking early in the morning—with nothing to do but feed a couple of gold fish."

"As if that were happiness," sighed Lilly.

"Do you mean to complain of your lot?" cried Mrs. Laue indignantly. "If I were in your place, I'd thank the Lord every hour of the day for having sent me such a friend."

"Do you think that would satisfy all your hopes?"

"Why, what else do you want?" Mrs. Laue—ceaselessly tapping—rebuked her. "He can't marry you any more—that's out of the question. Besides marriage would be nasty after all you've gone through. But listen to me. Be careful! If you always behave yourself nicely, he will make you an allowance, and you'll have something to live on all your life."

"So, I'm just to aim for an old age pension?"

"Well, what else?"

"I can conceive of many other objects in life."

"What? Work? Try it. See what it's like after you've been nothing but emotions for years. Or take another lover? Then you'd be sure of a fine time. Let me tell you one thing, child; never for a single instant think of another man. If you were to do that, you'd deserve to paste flowers like me—sixteen hours a day—until you die."

While incessantly pasting one flower after the other, she poured out a volume of well-intentioned admonitions.

Lilly rose shivering.

There was nothing to be hoped for from that quarter. She looked about her with a sudden feeling of estrangement.

"I'll never come back here again," she thought.

The next morning the uneasy desire to open up her heart and obtain counsel again awoke, even stronger and more tormenting than before. Her friend Jula occurred to Lilly.

To be sure, the clever, hot-blooded little woman had held herself aloof from the crew's jaunts. Her friends had not the least idea of what she was doing, and her red-head, when appealed to, became reticent. But Lilly felt sure Mrs. Jula would not withhold the bit of comprehending sympathy she needed.

It took Lilly a long time to find her.

The coquettish yellow silk nest her red-head had fixed up for her near the "Linden" was empty.

Mrs. Jula had migrated to a suburb, the porter informed Lilly. She had thought the neighbourhood too dangerous; which made no sense, because the street was never empty, day or night.

Lilly smiled. The porter gave her the address, and she drove out to Mrs. Jula.

In a little bosky corner where the poets and philosophers dwell, Lilly found a very sober little house, brimful of books and manuscripts and busts of eminent men.

Mrs. Jula seemed to have undergone a great change. She no longer wore her curly hair in a disorderly pompadour about her forehead, but smoothly parted and drawn down over her ears. This gave her a disquieting touch of virtuousness, although that way of wearing the hair was just then the height of fashion in the very world in which virtue for esthetic reasons has little value.

Though she came to meet Lilly, as always, with outstretched arms, her cordiality seemed not wholly genuine; and though she beamed with delight at seeing her friend again, her expression was somewhat distraught, as if she were holding much in reserve.

"Without asking Lilly about herself or paying any attention to her appearance, Mrs. Jula burst into an account of her own affairs.

"You'll be tremendously surprised, but I can't help it," she said. "I never kept my little scruples of conscience a secret from you—they were really superfluous—my sins had never been so dreadful —"

"Hm, hm," thought Lilly.

"So you shall be the first of our former circle—"

"Former?" thought Lilly.

"—to learn of my return to a decent existence. Well, not to beat about the bush, I'm going to get married."

"Your red-head?" asked Lilly, happy and sympathetic.

"Well, not exactly." Mrs. Jula regarded her finger-tips with a condescending smile. "My red-head has given me his blessings, but that ends his rôle."

"Then who is he?" asked Lilly, struggling to overcome her bewilderment.

Now Mrs. Jula hung back a bit after all.

"You see, it's a long story," she said hesitatingly. "To understand it thoroughly you'd have to know more of the circumstances of the past two years of my life. Did you ever happen to hear of an authoress by the name of Clarissa vom Winkle?"

Lilly recalled having seen the name in puritanic family sheets, which she had looked through in cafés and confectionery shops.

"Now listen: that Clarissa vom Winkle, who won a very acceptable reputation for championing the cause of simple, bourgeois morality as against the pernicious new-fashioned ideas of love—that Clarissa vom Winkle am I."

Lilly was too strongly under the spell of her own fate properly to appreciate the humour of Mrs. Jula's avowal. Just a glimmering suspicion dawned upon her mind of the monstrous farce we human beings figure in at life's bidding.

"Now on that account you're not to think me a convert or a bigot or something of the sort," Mrs. Jula continued with a certain little air of dignity, which became her as well as her quondam cordial cynicism. "There never was a special Day of Damascus in my life. I've always had, as it were, two souls in my breast; the one which—" she hesitated a moment—"well, which you know; and another which craves self-restraint and white damask and so on. That's the reason your unsuspicious loyalty always impressed me so, my dear. You probably recollect that I urged you to cling to your loyalty through thick and thin, because—you can't deny it—it's the crown of a woman's life. That's just what I said. Do you remember?"

Lilly was unable to recall such sentiments, but she did recall many others scarcely harmonising with them. She began to feel quite uneasy. Her friend's new conception of life seemed ill adapted for a source of peace to her in the joyful stress that had led her to seek sympathy with Mrs. Jula.

"Well, to continue," said the little lady. "I was always able to sell my essays and novels quickly, especially if I took them to the editors myself, and I found I was on the road to accumulating a tidy capital. My red-head became little more than an ornament. That's the beautiful thing about virtue. For the person who understands it, it is much more lucrative than sin." She ran her little red tongue over her lips in her knowing way, but maintained a perfectly demure face. "And then it was in disposing of my works that I met my husband to be. You know—I'm at last divorced from that old horror up there. This one is the editor of a new magazine for women. It stands for quiet domesticity and already has very good advertisements. He's a man of great intellectual gifts, and very firm moral principles, which, I suppose you've noticed, have not remained without influence on me."

She made a little double chin and folded her hands in her lap.

"And how did you manage to separate from—your old friend?" asked Lilly, from whose mind all these curious facts had almost driven her own concerns.

"Separate? What are you thinking of?" rejoined Mrs. Jula, beaming again with sunny foolishness. "I wouldn't be as heartless as all that. Even if I did say his rôle had ended, you're not to take it so literally. What's the poor dyspeptic fellow to do if I refuse to set a place for him at my table now and then? Why do you look so surprised, Lilly? Something of the sort can always be managed. In the first place, I swore to my betrothed that my red-head had never been more to me than a brotherly friend. All of us women swear such things and don't even blush."

Lilly nodded thoughtfully. That evening, had Konrad demanded it, she would have sworn an oath without a moment's hesitation.

"In the second place—I'm telling you this in confidence—he contributed a considerable sum toward establishing the magazine. So the two gentlemen are partners. I arranged matters that way intentionally, because it seemed to me the best guarantee of a continuance of all-around friendly relations. Don't make such large eyes, dearie. Life is made up of compromises. Every bird feathers its nest. And if you think I'm afraid of disclosures, I shrug my shoulders. Tragedy is a matter of taste. *I* don't like it. So it doesn't exist for me. I always say to myself: you must wear a smile on your brow, but beneath the smile your brow must be of iron."

Lilly experienced a sickish sensation.

"If that's the price to pay for uprooting tragedy from one's life," she thought, "then I'd rather have unhappiness—I can swallow it—than all this happiness."

She rose.

No matter how high above her this woman towered in force of intellect and will, no matter how firmly she stood on the ground of virtuous life, she was no longer suited to be Lilly's friend.

"I sincerely hope you will never be mistaken in your confidence," said Lilly.

Mrs. Jula threw up her hand contemptuously.

"Bah," she said, "*those* men! A man who knows the world is a woman eater, and your 'pure' man is a simpleton. I can always get along with both classes."

"There may be a third class," said Lilly, irritated, as if Konrad had been insulted.

"Possibly," rejoined Mrs. Jula, shrugging her shoulders. "I've never come across it." Then putting both hands on Lilly's waist: "Tell me, child, perfectly frankly: if you look at me this way and compare me with what I used to be, does it seem to you that I'm posing?"

"To be quite candid," Lilly admitted, "it seemed to me so at first."

Mrs. Jula sighed.

"It's very hard to adapt your figure to a dress that wasn't made for you. Everybody has a certain moral ambition, the so-called non-moral person most of all. But there's one thing I'd love to know: what is really the more valuable in me, my former sinning or my present virtue."

She smiled up at Lilly with a melancholy yet sly expression.

This time Lilly did not respond. Beyond that complacent little scatterbrain her own happiness rose lofty and threatening as a storm-cloud.

When out on the street the feeling of restless isolation took stronger hold of her than ever. Yet she was glad she had not spoken. She knew that if she had held up her beloved's picture to Mrs. Jula's sly understanding, it would have come back to her desecrated.

Now there was actually not a soul to whom she could pour out her heart.

A few days later in glancing over the paper, as was her daily habit, her eyes were caught by a sentence which suddenly sent a ray of light into her soul: "St. Joseph's Chapel—Müllerstrasse—evening services," and so on.

Then her old, long-forgotten friend was still alive. He even possessed his own church here in cold, heretical Berlin.

In all the years she had been in Berlin she had not entered a church. After having seated herself among the Protestants at Miss von Schwertfeger's advice, she had felt she was a renegade, and had not ventured to seek solace in religion.

And now she was an atheist.

But the name St. Joseph in the paper warmed her heart. She felt as one who has wandered long in foreign lands and suddenly among a throng of strangers beholds a dear face from home.

Now she knew to whom to turn without fear of having to depart misunderstood and unheard. Even if the great scholars had done away with him a thousand times, he still existed for her stupid, surcharged heart, ready to receive the confession of her happiness.

Müllerstrasse was somewhere on the extreme north side, "somewhere around Franz-Josephs-Land," her green grocer, to whom she had applied, informed her.

She went through a maze of streets, from one electric tram to another—past the Reichtags buildings, the Lessing theatre, and the Stettin station—along the endless chaussé. Beyond the Weddingplatz, which the Berlinese consider the end of the world, was where Müllerstrasse began.

Nobody had the slightest notion of where a St. Joseph's chapel was, not even dwellers in the immediate vicinity. Finally somebody remembered seeing "a Catholic something or other," and Lilly at last found the object of her search.

A low frame structure which might have been taken for a barn, and some blossoming trees set between towering tenements.

The side door was open. Pine wreaths said "Welcome." Lilly saw a simple white hall permeated with the sepulchral smell of incense, laurel, and freshly cut pine, and in the background a niche decorated to resemble the starry heavens. Beyond the wooden balustrade separating the pictureless shrine of the high altar from the hall, rose two glorious palms. The low rumble of an organ came from the choir. The organist had probably stayed after the funeral to dream a bit.

In suspense Lilly's glance glided along the walls in search of her saint's abiding place. Was he smiling and holding up his finger here, too, with the same benevolent, threatening manner as the good old uncle in St. Anne's?

There was no place for side altars. The space was completely filled with benches. But that large picture there in the garish frame, with a console-table beneath covered with dusty bouquets—

She saw it—and started in terror.

Her saint, her dear, beloved saint, was simply ridiculous.

He had a sharp-nosed, wax-doll face with a golden yellow beard and eyes cast down in pious modesty, and he was smiling mawkishly. The infant Jesus clad in pink triumphed on his left arm, while his right arm gently clasped a spray of lilies.

Lilly's disgust turned into pity.

How remote, how inconceivably remote, was that world in which one implored St. Josephs for signs of favour.

Could it be that her good, true monitor in St. Anne's had been just as comical?

Perish the thought. He should not be, he must not be so absurd. There must be *one* place to which one's memory could travel homeward in hours of pleasant mourning.

The organ was playing the prelude of a beautiful mass by Scarlatti, which Lilly well knew from of old. Gradually she began to feel at ease.

She kneeled on the last bench, closed her eyes, and tried to imagine that instead of that blond caricature, her old friend was looking down upon her.

A saying of St. Thomas Aquinas occurred to her, which she remembered from her Sunday school lessons: "God has granted other saints the power to help us in *certain* circumstances; to St. Joseph he has granted the power to help us whatever our need."

Once he had been so powerful in her life.

She spoke to him across the hundreds of miles and hundreds of years that separated her from the altar in St. Anne's—the last time on earth, she was fully aware. There was no longer place in her soul for such childishness. And just because it was her farewell, she told him without reserve of her great experience—how infinitely happy she now was—how everything that had lain dead within her blossomed forth with fresh life—and how the entire universe was one great symphony of joy.

And she told him of the monstrous deception she was practising, and her fear of discovery—and the sweet, impatient tremour for which there could be no image or name.

Then she told him she no longer believed in him in the least—she had become an "atheist."

Then, reconciled, she laid the carnations she had brought along for the poor out-of-the-way saint among the dusty bouquets and left with lightened heart, smiling at the spring which smiled upon her.

Beside this Lilly, whom the stormy wind of her new life bore aloft to the heavens far above all earthly hindrances, a second Lilly lived, who spent every other evening with her old friends, and was the marvel of her circle, because of her triumphant mood, her merry wit, the youthful liveliness of an awakening intellect.

When Richard came for his afternoon tea, he met with daily surprises. In place of the dragging gloom, which had long coloured her days, he found sprightliness and activity, a creature of novelties never still an instant. Though now and then abashed at his inability to keep pace with her, he gladly accustomed himself to this side of her being, and praised the magical qualities of the hæmatogen which the physician had prescribed that spring instead of the usual iron.

The same scene was enacted each evening that Richard wanted to take Lilly out. At first she pleaded a cold or said she was not in the mood for meeting people. But once she had consented and was in the swing, she played with her admirers as with puppies, and awed the ladies by telling them things to their faces. Sometimes, to be sure, she sat as formerly, absorbed in dreamy silence, though now, if anyone attempted to liven her up, she no longer blushed and suffered herself to be teased without an attempt at self-defence. She paid back every intruder with such prompt, haughty satire that the men soon found it wiser to leave her to herself.

In all this time she drank herself into a state of exaltation only once, and that on the day on which —at last!—she decided to tell Richard of the existence of her new friend.

She had wrestled with herself for two months. Sometime or other it had to be, she knew; for what if they were seen together! But since she could not decide in what form to clothe the avowal, she had deferred it from day to day.

Chance helped her out of the dilemma. One day Richard, in order to obtain her judgment, brought along some sketches of vases which had been submitted to him for purchase. On leaving he forgot to take them along. Konrad happened to see them, and in a few rapid strokes drew the outline which corresponded to the original draught, and which the artist in developing the plan

had failed to insert.

The next day when Richard saw the work he looked at Lilly in astonishment. The corrections were splendid—who had made them?

Lilly, still suffering from the intimidation induced by her bungled work on the transparencies, did not dare to tell him she herself had. So taking heart she said:

"My teacher, who's giving me lessons in the history of art."

"Since when, I'd like to know?" asked Richard, his eyes growing round and severe.

In her great embarrassment she took to scolding as best—or as worst—she knew how.

"Do you think I can stand such a dull, inane, idle existence? Do you think it's a crime for an unoccupied young woman to strive for a bit of culture? Don't you think I'd be a better friend if I could keep pace with you and other clever people than if I go to my ruin jabbering a lot of nonsense and dressing myself up for show and behaving like any silly thing?"

The turn about "clever people" flattered him.

"All very well and good," he replied more mildly, "but why didn't you tell me before?"

She concocted a long story.

About three months before she had read an advertisement in the *Lokalanzeiger* in which a young scholar offered his services to gentlemen and ladies possessed of a thirst for knowledge. She wrote to the scholar, he came, and the lessons began. Pupil and teacher had grown to be friends. Though their friendship, of course, was of a purely ideal nature, she dreaded awakening Richard's jealousy; so she had decided not to tell him until time should prove beyond the shadow of a doubt the absolute purity of her endeavours.

He wrinkled his forehead, and a cunning grin, inexplicable to Lilly, played about his mouth.

"So your friend's a young scholar?" he asked. His eyes twinkled, and he looked at her sidewise, his head inclined entirely to the left.

"Yes."

"He's going to be *Privatdozent*, I suppose?"

"He's not quite certain, but he probably will."

"And I suppose he's highly intellectual and scintillating and superior?"

She turned her eyes heavenward.

"I've never in my life met a man who—" She stopped in fright. It was scarcely the better part of wisdom to give reins to her enthusiasm.

"Hm, hm," he said, as one who finds long harboured suspicions confirmed. His face was quite red, and he gnawed the ends of his moustache.

"I knew it!" cried Lilly. "You're jealous after all."

She felt as if a bitter injustice were being done her.

He said nothing more, and left lowering.

An hour later a package from Messrs. Liebert & Dehnicke was left at the door.

Lilly opened it and found it contained a man's suit, which she recognised as one Richard had frequently worn the previous summer.

A letter accompanied the package.

> "Dearest Lilly:—
>
> As I promised you that time, I shall always be ready to come to the assistance of your affinities with old clothes. To further their progress I shall also be glad to provide them with old boots.
>
> You see how jealous I am.
>
> Your Richard."

In the exuberance of her delight Lilly drank to excess that evening. Never—not even when she had danced for Dr. Salmoni—had she allowed her imitative faculties such full play. She was in a state of mad self-abandon.

In conclusion she danced on the tops of the tables set close together, a wild Salome dance, which had just then come into fashion.

Between her clenched teeth she zimmed strange oriental melodies.

"What's that she's mumbling?" the spectators asked.

Later they put the question to her.

But she had lost her senses. She was unconscious.

CHAPTER XV

The peaceful golden light of a Sunday morning in June pierced the railroad station's sooty glass roof.

Such an amount of blush brightness was gathered under the three great arches where they led into the open, that as the train glided beneath them you thought you were dipping into a sunny sea.

The gay ribbons of the dressed-up girls fluttered against the decent Sunday suits of the attentive youths, each of whom felt himself to be an indispensable master of ceremonies.

There were athletic clubs and rowing clubs and smoking clubs and singing societies, and an entire department store.

In the midst of the jolly, noisy throng a quiet, happy couple walked along looking about cautiously and keeping at a certain distance from each other, so that nobody could be sure whether or not they belonged together. They made for one of the front coaches.

Lilly walked ahead. Again she saw the faces of persons coming toward her grow rigid with a sort of solemn tenseness—a mute homage which she well knew, but which she had never accepted with so much joy as then, since the one man in the world whom she wanted to please was witnessing her triumph.

In his honour she had clad herself completely in festive white—a linen crash suit, an embroidered linen blouse, and a white straw hat with a white veil about it. She wore the hat low on her forehead, and beneath it her shining brown hair rolled in large waves. She carried a white zephyr shawl on her arm against the evening coolness, since they had arranged not to try to catch a certain train home, but remain in the country until they wearied.

They sat in opposite corners of the third-class compartment smiling slyly and saying not a word.

They were riding into the unknown.

"Follow me," he had said. "I'll give you a surprise. We will go on a voyage of discovery. I myself am by no means certain of my goal. Otherwise it wouldn't be a voyage of discovery."

The feeling of giving herself up without question was new and delicious.

About an hour must have passed and the compartment had long been empty, when he nodded to her to get out.

"Where are we?"

"What difference does it make where we are?"

Oh, he was right! Lilly never so much as glanced at the name of the station.

They walked along the uneven street of a bare little town. The sunshine lay on the yellow house fronts like a soporific. The shop doors were locked and sheets were stretched across the lower halves of the display windows to proclaim the Sunday.

Organ tones came from around the street corners like a dull breeze. A turkey cock strutted up from out of a gateway and gobbled at them—no more organ tones.

The houses grew less frequent. From the fields came a whiff of ripening grain, but the heavy fragrance of the yellow lupine overwhelmed it. Meadows of clover spread their white-dotted rugs, and in the background black firs rose from the summits of sand-coloured hills.

They stepped merrily along the unshaded road, on which little eddies of silvery white dust chased ahead of them.

Konrad knew and saw everything—how the falcon flapping its wings stood still in the air—how the wild rabbit lifting its little white rump leapt away in droll haste—every minute there was something new.

Since the days at Lischnitz Lilly had never walked out in the blossoming spring.

"Oh, if I had had a guide like him," she thought, "it would all have been so different."

In the pine woods, which gave out a hot breath, a squirrel ran past them almost over their feet, shot up a tree trunk, and at about a man's height from the ground stood still as if turned to stone.

Lilly and Konrad looked at each other mindful of the moment they had first met.

Lilly moved up to within a few feet of the squirrel, but it did not budge.

"I feel as if we were enchanted," she said. "If it were to speak to us, I shouldn't be a bit surprised."

Heaving a sigh of bliss she threw herself on the grey, crackling moss.

Konrad followed her example. Shading their eyes with their hands they lay on their backs and blinked up at the sun which flickered down on them through the sparse fir boughs.

They had both nearly forgotten the squirrel's presence, when a sudden chip sounded close over their heads. They looked up and saw the little fellow scampering up the trunk. Until that moment he had stared at them too frightened to stir.

"There you have it," said Konrad, "if we shoot our human language at them, they'll take good care not to speak to us."

"We're enchanted at any rate," laughed Lilly. "I at least have never in my life been stretched out so comfortably and had the sun shine on me so. Have you?"

"Oh yes," he rejoined. "I recall one time at least quite definitely."

"How? When?" Lilly inquired, all jealousy. She was jealous of every happy moment in his life which she had not created for him.

"Oh, there's not much to tell. It was in Ravello, a rocky nest not far from Amalfi, high over the sea. A perfect fairyland. Full of old, Moorish palaces, partly inhabited, partly in ruins. There are marble courtyards with trellised iron railings, ruined fountains with myrtle and laurel growing around in rank profusion and little white climbing roses covering everything. There was one place in particular which I would have given my life to be able to enter. It had a small, mysterious gallery which stood out against the deep blue sky like a silver web. An iron gate as high as a house separated me from that gallery. Since there was nobody about to see the street Arab escapade—only a few peasant labourers in the olive plantations live there—I actually climbed over that gate one day."

"Glorious!" cried Lilly.

"Yes, I got in. After making a professional inspection of the beautiful, strange motifs, I lay a long time on the warm stone steps, and let the sun shine down on me just as we are doing now under these Brandenburg firs. And—think of it! the little bluish-green lizards that you love so came gliding up slowly, cautiously, and ran straight over me."

"Oh, heavenly!" said Lilly rapturously.

"Lying there that way with the old marble fountain making music in my ears, I fell asleep—a thing one had better not indulge in, because one may get a sunstroke that way even in midwinter. I'm sure I should have, if some tourists hadn't come along and thrown sticks and stones at me. When I awoke I felt dizzy and I saw red. I couldn't dream of climbing over the gate again. The tourists had to fetch the gate key from the sindaco, and to cap the climax I had to appear before him for a hearing—Who are you? Don't you know trespassing in the garden is forbidden? But thank the Lord, he didn't send me to jail, because all the people tapped their heads and said: '*è matto*, he's crazy.'"

"No harm," laughed Lilly. "You got what you wanted; you entered the forbidden garden. Other people have to be content with standing outside the railing."

"A pleasure we shall probably enjoy to-day," he observed, and Lilly choked down her curiosity.

"At any rate," he continued, "it doesn't hurt if one practices standing outside now and then. Heaven knows, the very happiness toward which you crane your neck usually is a forbidden garden."

Lilly looked at him.

What did he mean by that?

Their eyes met in shy understanding.

That hopeful disquiet, which she did not venture to call by its name, quivered through her like a fit of fever.

"Come," she said, jumping to her feet and hurrying on without looking back at him.

The woods grew thinner. They now walked along a thicketed swamp where birches gaily shot up their slender white columns from mossy pediments.

The warm noon air vibrated in wavelets. From somewhere came the sound of a church bell, but no farmyard was visible far or near, and suddenly they struck a cross-road, and did not know which way to go.

"We are called upon to decide," he said, and listened a while in the direction from which the sound of the bell came. Then he turned to the right.

"I wish," he went on, "I wish there were a bell to sound the way for me in life."

Then he told her he was standing at a cross-road. He had been offered a position, which in view

of his youth was not of slight importance. But before accepting it, he had to make sure whether at the same time he could continue with his life-work.

"It must be a very high position, isn't it?" Lilly asked proudly. Had the world felt impelled to make him Minister of Fine Arts, or Emperor of China, she would not have been a bit surprised.

But he hesitated to reply, and finally said:

"I'd rather tell you about it when it's all settled."

She had to be content.

Roofs gleaming red crept over the tops of the bushes. On the edge of the horizon sparkled a lake, nothing more at that distance than a fine silver thread.

"Is that it?" asked Lilly.

"Possibly."

"Oh, don't put on such a mysterious air," she rebuked him teasingly. "Up to now I've been very good and haven't asked a single question. But do at last tell what you have up your sleeve."

"Afterwards, when we're there," he laughed. "I know you. I shouldn't like to make you jealous before the time's ripe."

Oh, if a woman *was* in the case!

Another woman!

She gave no outer signs of her emotion, but as she walked along she felt quite ill, partly from hunger, partly from distress.

The lake in its light blue summer beauty now lay before them with its greyish-green girdle of reeds and its glistening play of light.

Not far from the bank, on an eminence encircled with bushes, stood an inn, a reddish-yellow atrocity, built in that barbarous style for frame houses half-way between a palace and a barn.

But three or four wide-spreading ancient lindens surrounded the inn, and the white benches beneath offered pleasant seats according with Lilly's and Konrad's mood.

To the left the lake stretched into the hazy distance; to the right, beyond the reeds, in the cove, lay a peasant village, with its mossy green thatched roofs and its blunt, weather-beaten spire half hidden in the bushes and reeds.

And nearby, only a few hundred feet away, rose the mighty trees of a park, from the interior of which here and there came a gleam of columns and bridges and white, vine-clad walls.

Probably the "forbidden garden," in front of whose railing she was to stand that day.

How beautiful and how mysterious.

Anglers came up from the lake, red as lobsters and panting with thirst, the sole guests, it seemed, besides Lilly and Konrad. The stream of Sunday excursionists had not yet flowed into that quiet corner.

But the bill of fare offered a dizzying abundance of good things—too bad they had come all at once. The landlady who handed them the card with smiling obsequiousness, was an artful city product.

Konrad wanted Lilly to arrange the menu, but she refused. The thought of the woman in the case oppressed her sorely, and, as through a dark veil, she looked on the laughing world, which willingly threw its early summer treasures at their feet.

"At last we're here," she said sighing. "Now do confess: what sort of a woman is she?"

He burst out laughing.

"So you know there's a woman in the case?"

"What else would make me jealous?"

"She has the right to make you jealous, I must say, I've never seen anything more beautiful in my life. It's a pity she's of marble."

Oh, if that was all.

"I am and always will be a goose," laughed Lilly, and he kissed her hand in apology.

While awaiting the fish they had ordered, he told her the history that led up to their present pilgrimage.

In Rome he had once noticed an antique bust of a woman in an art dealer's show window. The head was badly mutilated, but of such lofty sombre beauty that he kept returning to the window to feast his eyes upon it. One day he found the dealer and a German gentleman engaged in an eager conversation, which, however, never progressed, because the two did not understand each

other. He offered his services as interpreter, and to his dismay learned that his beloved was being bargained for. The German was a baron, courteous and evidently a man of some culture. In defiance of his own feelings Konrad tried his best to arrange the sale, and for his pains received an invitation to view the bust in the baron's park—he was to convince himself that the beautiful head was destined for no unworthy setting.

"Why, then, it's not a forbidden garden after all," cried Lilly, blissfully stretching her arms toward the mysterious green walls. "We have the right to enter it."

But Konrad looked thoughtful.

"It's not so simple as all that. Remember—as what shall I introduce you? You're not my wife. I can't say you're my sister, as you and I pretend, and we're both too young for any other relationship."

A sudden bitterness welled up within her. Again she felt scorned, outlawed, expelled from the community of the virtuous.

"You should have left me at home," she burst out. "I'm nothing but a burden to you."

"Oh, Lilly," he said, "what do I care for all the marble women in the world! I'd rather stand outside with you than be shown the honours of the entire place."

Reconciled and grateful, she stroked his hand hanging at his side.

At this point—at last! the carp was served.

Two hours later they were walking along an endless wall about nine feet high with never a break in it to peep through.

But at the corner of the park to the right the wall came to an end giving place to a high mossy wooden fence, which allowed them a view some distance into the interior.

Ancient plane trees arched over shady nooks with lindens and elms forcing themselves between. Large-leafed vines with great violet eyes draped the open grassy places. In the background on a hillock about which towered sombre spruces stood a small, solemn round temple with Tuscan columns and a gleaming green roof.

"She must be in there," said Konrad. But the temple was empty.

So they continued their search. Not a single opening in the foliage escaped them. Here something gleamed and there and there—a Ceres, a satyr blowing his pipe of Pan. In a cypress thicket they caught a glimpse of a wayside shrine of Our Lady, but the woman's head they were seeking was nowhere to be seen.

They walked on. A stream flowing from within the park crossed the road. An unsightly plank bridge, such as is to be seen on every highway, led across.

But a few hundred feet away, inside the park, another bridge boldly yet gracefully threw its shining white arch over the running water.

"The bridges in Venice look like that," he said.

"That is the way the gods went to Walhalla," she said.

With a sigh they stopped and pictured the delights of crossing that bridge.

Still nothing to be seen of their marble bust.

Beyond the plank bridge, where the village began, the park receded some distance from the road. A row of tall serious Weymouth pines ran along the other side of the fence.

The village street was gay with Sunday life. The sound of a piano and a fiddle came from a dancing hall, interrupted every now and then by the roll of bowling balls.

Lilly and her friend passed without giving heed to these things. Their wishes were still fastened upon the forbidden garden. Each moment increased their longing.

Hidden between the village lindens crouched crumbling stone posts to which the decaying fence pales clung with difficulty.

Here the foliage in the interior was impenetrable to the eye. Ivy and clematis serpentined from trunk to trunk, and lilacs and spiræas grew in rank profusion between.

The lord of the garden seemed to have drawn an inner living hedge about himself and his companions to conceal them in laughing seclusion.

Once more they walked along in vain endeavouring to get a peep into the interior.

Presently they came upon an ancient, three-winged gate, which with its vases and columns, its cracked belfry, and its wrought-iron lace work, was half sunk in blooming acacias.

Here at last they could get a good view of the park.

In sombre solemnity tall pines led straight to the castle. But even here they were unable to obtain a glimpse of the buildings, which probably stood off to one side hidden behind trees and bushes. The only architectural bit their searching eyes discerned was a columned terrace, where cherubs fluttered their snowy white wings.

"Oh, how beautiful!" sighed Lilly, and pressing her face between the iron bars she jestingly whined and begged to be let in.

"That's just the way I stood outside the gate in Ravello. Now you know what it's like."

His words brought to Lilly the realisation that she had long known what "it was like." She was familiar with the feeling. She had often stood in the very same position.

But where, where?

Where had cold iron pressed her cheeks just as now?

Oh, yes. Many and many a time she had stood at the iron grating of the door leading to Mrs. Dehnicke's staircase, that proud, laurel-shaded staircase which her desecrated feet were never to tread.

That, too, was a forbidden garden!

Forbidden gardens everywhere!

"Shouldn't we go?" she asked softly. "It will simply depress us to remain here."

Hand in hand they returned the entire distance they had come, keeping as close as possible to the enclosure and speaking of anything but their hearts' desire.

Nevertheless, their eyes remained fastened on the goal of their aspirations; and the yearning they both felt, though neither of them would express it for fear of hinting reproaches, threw a fairy film of gold over the universe.

Evening came.

Violet shadows lay upon the meadows, the coppery pine trunks glowed like torches. As the sinking sun dipped into the reeds, the lake lost its cool blue silvery sheen and adorned itself with a net of reddish gold. It looked as if it had sportively drawn to itself the fulfilment of all earthly promises.

The two could no longer bear it on land.

Down at the bathing pavilion, where a merry lot of people were splashing about in the evening coolness, there was a boat to be hired for very little.

Konrad took the oars and Lilly seated herself at the tiller.

Water plants plashed lightly against the sides of the boat, and the bow cut through a waving carpet of pollen.

Among this year's tender green reeds stood the yellowish-grey weather-beaten remnants of last year's growth. Dark bulrushes edged the shores, and the water-flag planted its golden tents between.

Over the reeds and bulrushes they could see the massed park trees rising toward the heavens like purple walls.

When Lilly told him to look there, he observed indifferently:

"Oh, no use, it's out of the question."

Nevertheless he continued to cast sidelong glances that way.

Lilly in her slight experience with boats did not know how to manage the tiller, and after trying a while she threw the rope down and spread her white shawl on the bottom of the boat to make a cosy nest for herself.

She lay crouched at Konrad's feet with her back to the seat in the stern, and with her eyes lost in the blue depths she began to plan a different future, some way of saving herself by a desperate leap into the land of the virtuous.

She would give music lessons—her knowledge sufficed for beginners—and with her savings prepare for the stage, for which her talents eminently fitted her—or, better still, take up scientific studies, because she must keep intellectual pace with him. She must be a suitable friend so long as he needed her friendship.

Or—not to wound the sensibilities of others—she would leave Germany, earn her living as a teacher of German, and when he should summon her, return a new, purified being.

Or—oh dear, "or!"

To lie and dream and drink the cup of her present joy to the dregs. Discovery and death—the one involved the other—would come soon enough.

The sun dissolved behind a blood-red curtain. Violet vapours closed down, enveloping things far and near. The entire world seemed to have thinned into light and air. The reeds alone, with their slender black stalks standing out against the evening glow like a dainty railing of wrought iron, retained their corporeal aspect.

The foliage of the park slowly melted into a mass of darkness.

Now the park seemed to be doubly a forbidden garden, filled to the brim with thrills and mysteries, sunk forever in the realm of the unattainable.

As the boat glided slowly along the edge of the reeds a blue cove suddenly opened up, making a wedge-shaped cut into the land on the park side. It seemed to continue inward without end.

For a few moments Konrad remained motionless, his oars suspended. Then he jumped to his feet with an exclamation of joy.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?"

"You remember the stream flowing out on the other side of the park?"

"Certainly."

"It must have flowed in somewhere—eh?"

"Of course."

He pointed to the gleaming tip of the cove.

"There it is."

"You think we shall after all—?"

The thought was too bold for utterance.

"Now, by water, in this boat, we shall cross that whole dark region from one side to the other."

In her rapture she jumped up with a little outcry of delight, and fell upon his neck, naturally, as if they had never exchanged vows and pledges.

The boat gradually slipped into the current and floated between meadows set with willows where the evening mist lay like white swathes. Beyond stood gleaming peasant huts; and fishing nets draped the fences.

Then, at a bend in the stream, a mighty arch of foliage opened up before them.

"O Lord!" cried Lilly.

"Psst! We must keep very quiet now," he said, "else we'll be turned out after all."

He dipped his oars so lightly that the sound might have been taken for the splash of a leaping fish.

He rowed through the gate of leaves under branches joined overhead in a mazy thicket. It was dark as night in this spot, though here and there on the right a gleam of the summer twilight pierced through the foliage.

They also caught a glimpse of lights and heard talk and laughter and the sound of clinking glasses and, intermittently, a chord, as if someone in the midst of conversation carelessly ran his hand over the keys.

Here the trees and bushes were wider apart, and they had an unobstructed view of the castle—a broad, two-storey building. Its ponderous simplicity pointed to the time when the grandees of Brandenburg had not yet possessed a feeling for art. But on the terrace were the cherubs who had greeted them from a distance in the afternoon.

Between their white bodies at a long table in the flickering lamplight sat a chattering, laughing, singing company, apparently drinking in the intoxication of the summer evening with their wine.

"He, too, might be sitting there, if I weren't a mill-stone about his neck," thought Lilly, and she felt as if she ought to beg his pardon.

The current carried the boat on. The banquet scene vanished like the vision of a moment.

Passing that end of the castle in which the kitchen and pantries lay, where ministering spirits ran busily to and fro, they dipped once more into silence and darkness.

To the right of them back of the many-windowed edifice, was a lawn with old statues and ivy-draped urns—to the left a world buried in darkness. A line of lindens, hundreds of years old, bordered the stream and stifled every ray of light in its dark halls.

Perhaps this was where the marble bust was hidden. Lilly peered into every recess, though

furtively, so as to reserve the pleasure of discovery for him.

They now approached the daintily arched bridge they had seen from afar in the daytime.

It did not lead to Walhalla, but from a spiræa bush to a hemp bush, and beneath it slept a pair of swans, who awoke at the stroke of the oars and with outspread wings swam behind the boat begging for bread.

"Swans! The one thing lacking!" Lilly rejoiced softly, and sought in vain for a crumb. She turned to look after the swans and her neck touched his knees.

"May I stay this way?" she asked a little anxiously.

"If you're comfortable," he answered. There was a yielding tone in his voice which ran warm through her body.

She unpinned her hat, and laid it on the back seat. Now she was free to lean her head lightly against him. With sweet alarm she felt his hand quietly stroke her head.

But he seemed taciturn and self-absorbed, as if a burden were weighing upon him which he was not strong enough to shoulder.

And again she felt, as ofttimes, that a veil hung between them, a veil seldom lifted aside, which obscured the true features of his being, no matter how closely her love drew her to him.

"Oh, if only he were gay!"

The park came to an end.

The red evening glow, no longer shadowed by a mass of foliage, shone upon them insistently. The magic spell threatened to be broken. The world took on its ordinary aspect.

"Come, turn," she asked softly.

He rowed back again into the blissful night.

Now he had to strive against the current, and could not avoid the sound of splashing.

"If only they don't catch us," he said.

"Oh, they are too happy," rejoined Lilly, "they wouldn't do anything to a happy person."

"It seems almost like an enchanted castle, but who can tell—it may be a delusion."

"Why?"

"Oh, the most grievous wound may be hidden under powers, and many a man hides himself behind beauty because he has buried his powers."

The doubt displeased Lilly.

"But they should be happy," she exclaimed softly. "Those who can spare so much as they have given us to-day have enough left for themselves."

"Illogical conclusion, darling," he replied. "You can enrich a beggar and still remain as poor as a church-mouse."

"Are *we* beggars?" she asked, raising herself up to him tenderly.

"No, by God, we are *not* beggars," he replied drawing a deep breath.

There was silence for a time. Then it seemed to Lilly something warm and moist fell upon her forehead.

For God's sake! He was crying! Crying with happiness. How had she deserved it—she, Lilly Czepanek—she—?

To hide her own tears she crouched down again. It was in overflowing measure—unendurable. She wanted to sob, cry aloud, kiss his hands. Yet she was forced to clench her fists and stuff her gloves between her teeth, to keep him from seeing what was going on within her. It was a God-send that as they slowly approached the castle again, the sound of a woman's singing reached them. Full ringing tones, which in the ascending notes struck her heart like a lash.

What was she singing? Wasn't it from Tristan? Lilly had never heard the opera, but it could only be from Tristan.

She raised her head questioningly.

"Isolde's *Liebestod*," Konrad whispered in her ear.

He turned the boat toward the shore in the deepest darkness. They must not lose a note.

Up there on the terrace the laughing and talking had ceased. The nightingale alone, in the linden thicket, would not be silenced, and mingled its sweet ecstasy with the exultation in death of the woman who like no other creation of God or man teaches us that the desire not to be is the most exalted affirmation of to be.

Lilly, her whole body quivering, put her hand over her shoulder to grasp his. She had to hold on to him. Otherwise she felt she would sink into the void. She did not grow easier until she felt his warm fingers between hers.

The song ended. The mighty arpeggios of the accompaniment died away. There was no applause. Each of the merry guests had realised his indebtedness to the occasion.

Konrad pressed her hand and withdrew his, and took up the oars again.

The forbidden garden began to disappear.

The reddish dusk of night lay upon the meadows. Not sound far or near. Nevertheless the world seemed filled with the music of harps and ringing songs.

"We haven't *seen* your marble woman," Lilly whispered, stroking his knees, "but I keep thinking that was her voice."

"I, too," he burst out passionately. "And she wasn't singing for the good folk up there, but just for us."

"Oh, if only I could sing it like her," sighed Lilly.

"Try."

She remembered bits here and there, but was unable to gather them into a whole. Besides something else forced its way between, which now gushed up mightier than all else.

With the Song of Songs of the greatest and richest her own poor Song of Songs mingled, undesired, uncalled.

And she sang into the deep silence:

> Tell me, O thou whom my soul loveth,
> Where thou feedest?
> Where lettest thou thy flock rest at noon?
> For why should I appear like a vailed mourner—

She stopped.

"What is that?" he asked. "I don't know it at all."

"It is—my—Song of Songs," she rejoined fetching a deep breath.

Never before had she uttered the name to a human being.

"Your Song of Songs?" he asked, bewildered.

Lilly realised an hour like this would never come again. It was the moment to confide to him the secret of her youth.

"Drop the oars and listen. I will tell you something. It may sound silly and stupid to you, but to me it was always like something sacred."

Without speaking he laid the oars down.

"You must sit next to me," she said, "so I can look at you."

He cast a searching glance in all directions.

The boat had long been quietly drifting again on the mirror-like lake, upon which all the light of the summer night had gathered in scintillating blue and purple spots. Nowhere the slightest sign of danger.

Then he did as she had asked.

They nestled on the boat bottom pressed close against each other with their heads leaning against the bench on which Konrad had been sitting.

And she told her tale.

Told of the legacy her vanished father had left, what power had always emanated from it; how it had completely filled her girlhood years, though later it had acquired a far loftier and more mysterious significance, becoming a symbol of her deeds. When her life sank into chaos and nothingness it remained dumb, often for years. But if her soul began to soar, when her hopes and activities harmonised then all of a sudden it reappeared, and with its soft song drowned the world's evil. It had not been able to guard her against guilt or disgrace, but it had kept her free inwardly and susceptible to the influence of the One who would some day come to her.

And now that he actually had come, she felt that this hour of fulfilment had struck both for her and her Song of Songs. It must now go forth into the world and conquer all hearts and bring purification and upliftment to its creator and herself.

In her enthusiasm she forgot the time and the place and the whole world.

The one thought obsessed her: to throw more of her inward self, of what was most holy to her, at

his feet. But she had said everything, more than she had ever deemed herself likely to tell a living soul, more than she had known of herself up to that hour.

He now held in his hands whatever there was of good and lofty and hopeful still within her. The other—the lazy, the impure, that which had ruined her heart and life—no longer existed. It no longer concerned her.

While speaking, though she would have liked to look at him, she had not dared to; but now that she was finished she ventured to turn toward him.

She saw his eyes resting upon her with a singularly confused and drunken look, such as she had never before seen in him. He usually held his feelings as it were in his clenched fists.

Her heart began to throb, and the hopeful disquiet for which she had no name and no object became so strong that she felt she should have to run to the other end of the boat to keep from stifling at his side.

Then she saw him close his eyes and throw his head back hard against the bench.

"You'll hurt yourself," she whispered. And so far from fleeing him, she laid her arm like a pillow between his neck and the cutting edge of the bench.

His head rested on her bosom, and he breathed heavily.

"Shall I sing some more of it?" she asked, bending over him tenderly.

"Yes, yes, yes," he burst out.

So she sang in a low caressing voice, as if they were lullabies, all those arias and odes which no mortal ear had heard from her lips since the day when her mother's soul had gone down into eternal night.

She sang of the "lily of the valley" and the "rose of Sharon" and the verse in which all the witchery of spring is concentrated:

> For, lo, the winter is past,
> The rain is over and gone;
> The flowers appear on the earth;
> The time of the singing of birds is come,
> And the voice of the turtle is heard in the land;
> The fig putteth forth her green figs,
> And the vines with the tender grape give a good smell.
> Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

She sang more and still more. If she asked him "Enough?" he merely shook his head, and nestled closer.

Once she gave a fleeting glance upward, and noticed they were wedged in among the reeds, and night had completely descended.

But what cared she? Somehow or other they would manage to get home.

There was little more of it to sing. "Set me as a seal upon thy heart" and "How beautiful are thy steps in sandals, O prince's daughter." And then the verse the beginning of which so well suited the day:

> Come, my friend!
> Let us go forth into the field,

But when it came to

> Let us see if the vine have blossomed,
> Whether the young grape have opened,

she could scarcely go on.

> Whether the pomegranates have budded,
> There will I give my caresses unto thee.

She was unable to continue. Her breath began to give out.

"Why don't you sing?" she heard him ask.

A buzzing of bees, a ringing of bells all about.

"Be brave!" her soul cried, "Else you will lose him."

She felt two twitching lips grope for hers.

A swift end to all bravery.

It was long past midnight when they landed. The bathing pavilion stood there dark and deserted; but lights were still shining in the hotel.

Very timidly they rang the bell.

"We always keep a room for belated young married couples," said the obsequious, smiling hostess.

CHAPTER XVI

It would be wide of the truth to aver that no happy star favoured Lilly's ripened love.

In the first place Adele proved to be a circumspect ally, thoroughly accustomed to be uncommunicative and passionately devoted to the cause of Lilly's lover. In the second place Richard, who had gone to his mother in Harzburg that epoch-making Sunday, had remained away the greater part of a week instead of one day. And in the third place, upon visiting her on his return, he was so preoccupied with himself and his own affairs as not to notice in the least Lilly's guilty embarrassed reception of him.

He affected a highly lofty mien and talked through his nose, as always when he pulled his soul together, as it were, and became vividly conscious of having once been a cavalry officer. He even wore his monocle again hanging down over his navy-blue silk waistcoat.

All of which taken in conjunction with the crafty expression with which he blinked his eyes and steadily looked past Lilly and dropped his head on his left shoulder, gave sufficient ground for the welcome assumption that he had delayed the visit to his mother and, instead,—like Lilly herself—had taken a side excursion *à deux* into the blossoming world of spring.

The conjecture, however, proved to be false.

Richard had been in Harzburg the whole time and intended to return the very next day for a longer stay of at least four weeks.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed in alarm.

Lilly, overwhelmed by the veritable tempest of happiness that burst upon her, had reeled and sunk on the arm of a chair.

She instantly collected her wits again and denied that she had been overcome. Nevertheless, he remained full of solicitude, kissed her on her neck again and again, and would not permit her to go to the trouble of pouring out the tea for him. A guilty conscience peeped from every pore of his being.

"Unfortunately," he said, trying to return to his former lofty manner, "unfortunately there's no longer a chance of our taking a trip together. Anyhow—we've gotten too used to each other. Both of us will have to practise getting along without each other. It's highly desirable we should. We certainly should."

His words sounded like familiar music coming from a great, great distance.

"Confess," she said smiling. "What is it this time?"

Out he came with it, stuttering and choking over his words.

An American heiress—of German extraction—millions and millions—not millions of marks, but millions of dollars—very stylish and chic—a wonderful piece of luck—mama in a quiver to have it go through—her parents favourably disposed—she, too, evidently not disinclined. This time or never.

"Congratulate you," said Lilly, giving him a friendly handshake.

He looked at her with large, astonished, and somewhat reproachful eyes.

"Is that all?" he asked.

"Why—what else?"

"How can you remain so cool? Doesn't the thought that your old friend is about to leave you move you in the least? I took you to be more loving, more sympathetic. I certainly did."

"Please remember," said Lilly, "you reproach me the same way each time you make up your mind to marry because I don't want to be a hindrance to you. You always act as if *I* had dismissed you, and not you me."

He burst into expostulations.

"Dismiss—what language you use! You haven't the least idea of what's going on within me—how I struggle and wrestle with myself. Why, I haven't slept for nights thinking what will become of you. But you behave as if it didn't concern you in the least! Altogether you're—frivolous! You have no feelings—now you know it."

While he spoke, pictures of her approaching freedom danced before her eyes—nights of unshackled, glowing love, days full of sweet, vague dreams.

What followed lay as far off as the end of the world.

Smiling good-humouredly, she listened, and never even responded.

"Though your future doesn't seem to worry *you*," he continued to upbraid her, "*I* must give it all the more consideration. I must provide for you, and mama quite agrees with me."

The word "mama" tore her from her world of dreams.

Since the terrific encounter in Richard's office, it had scarcely ever passed their lips. They had employed a thousand circumlocutions and substitutes which they understood and which each appreciated in the other.

Now "mama" suddenly rang in her ears, the symbol of her disgraced existence.

"Oh," she cried, "if she's in it, it's bound to be humiliating to me. I'll tell both of you one thing: take good care not to make a proposition to me about money, or support, or anything of the sort. I'd consider it an outrageous insult, for which you could *never* make amends."

He ran up and down the room wringing his hands.

"What are you talking about again! Quite apart from the fact that I'd be eternally disgraced in the eyes of the world. Woman, don't you know you're ruined if I turn you adrift empty-handed? Don't you know where you'd go to? To the bars and brothels! Don't you know it?"

In blissful absentmindedness Lilly looked past him and his gallant zeal.

"There are other ways," she whispered half to herself.

"What ways?" he cried, "Marriage, forsooth? What decent man would marry you after you've been my mistress for four years?"

"There are other ways than that, too," she repeated still smiling.

She saw a life full of fight and vigour, a tossing hither and thither through storm and stress, a jubilant triumph which led her into the community of those who were as proud and true as *he*.

But all that would come later, much, much later. Why think of it now?

Richard put his own construction upon her words. He fixed his eyes upon her suspiciously, and stopping in front of her, asked with a shudder:

"I say—are you going to do something foolish?"

She burst out laughing. Probably he already saw her beautiful corpse taken from the water and stretched on the bier.

"No, I won't do anything foolish. Certainly not for your sake. And even if I intended to, I'd have the good taste not to threaten you with it."

He drew a deep breath of relief, though by no means quite calmed.

"At any rate," he said, "I greatly dislike your poking here alone. You'll simply get the blues and feel irritated at me. I say, while I'm gone, wouldn't you like to take a little trip to a bath—Ahlbeck, or Schreiberbau, or some other place of the sort, where respectable people go?"

Nothing on the surface but a faint twitch of her eyelids betrayed the laugh of scorn that shook her internally.

"You know," she said, "I don't like to make up to people, and so I'd be all the more alone."

He wrinkled his forehead lost in thought.

"Well—then—" He hesitated and chewed his words as people are wont to do when they dread their own bravery, "—then—it would be best if you—come and stay near—"

"Near—near what?"

"Oh, don't act that way. You know what I mean."

"I do, but I cannot believe it."

"What's so awful about it? I could look after you now and then—or talk over matters—different things."

"And show her to me so as to get my opinion and my blessing—eh?"

"Well and supposing it's so? The way we are to each other—the way we haven't done a thing for years without asking each other's advice, what's so monstrous about it?"

Lilly felt a patronising pity arise within her. She stroked his hands and said:

"Dear friend, I don't think I'd furnish the right sort of assistance to you in your courtship."

Her superior tone increased his ill-humour.

"Goodness gracious! 'Assistance,' 'courtship!' You talk as if you were on the stage. Altogether you're so puffed up—so puffed up! Of course you simply want to revenge yourself on me by making me angry. I must say it's not at all noble of you at such a time."

She laughed and stretched herself. How low it all was! How ridiculous! And how indifferent to her! After all did it concern her?

To be alone—alone with him! There was nothing else in the world beside that.

"Then you don't want to?"

She shook her head, "No."

"Very well."

He prepared to leave in anger, but lacked the strength.

"Lilly."

"Hm?"

"I'd like to avoid any misunderstandings. You seem to think I'm not in earnest this time."

"By no means, Richard. I wish you all possible happiness. But really, with the best of intentions, I can be of no service to you in this affair."

"Of service to me! Of service to me! Who's speaking of service to me? Mama was quite right. If I break off this time, there won't be anything else for me any more. So make it quite clear to yourself. In a few weeks all's over between us."

"So much the better," she came near saying. But she saw the tears in the corners of his eyes, and refrained from hurting him.

Four years lived together lay behind them. He was too tightly tied to her apron strings. She felt she ought not to let him go without her advice and encouragement.

So she spoke to him as to a child. She said his mother was right, praised his project, and counted up all the reasons why it absolutely had to be. In order to calm him as to her own attitude, she recalled how it had always been her ambition to let him feel his freedom and never stand in his way. She also assured him she would cherish friendly sentiments for him until the end of her days.

Finally, on parting, they both wept.

CHAPTER XVII

Now the way was clear. Now she might consecrate the new life and rejoice in it.

July came and scorched the deserted streets.

The denizens of the aristocratic west side who remained in town with no employer to drive them dreamed away idle days behind drawn shades, hovering between the couch and the bathtub.

Lilly did not awaken to real life until evening came, when the world endeavoured to throw off the heat it had absorbed during the day, when dusty yellow vapours rolled on the turbid water of the canal, and beyond the chestnuts, the leaves of which were already beginning to wither, the red glow of the heavens melted into one with the winking lights of the street lamps.

Then she strolled at Konrad's side in the blue twilight of the streets, always alert to escape the observation of acquaintances.

Staid middle-class families promenaded to the beer gardens, love-couples met at the appointed street corners; and among them surged the mass of those whom life has left solitary with shy passionate yearnings, and who hope to steal from smiling chance that for which they no longer dare implore sterner gods. Over the exhausted city hung a sultry haze of secret desire, in which formal restraint and genuine feeling flickered and went out, leaving no sign of ever having been.

How remote those days when Lilly herself wandered about in the same fashion, hoping for the intervention of fate, yet lacking the courage to compel it. And shuddering at dangers she had escaped, she clung closer to Konrad's protecting arm.

She and Konrad always managed to find a secluded nook where gypsy bands played their fiddles, or Tyrolese strummed their dulcimers, or the host himself, some musician come down in the world acted as orchestra leader. In the ivy-hung corners between laurel trees planted in green painted tubs they had little fear of discovery.

Their intercourse had undergone a change.

There were still instructive discourses upon all sorts of subjects and Lilly intently hung upon

Konrad's lips; but her holy ardour for knowledge had cooled down.

That God does not exist, that Fra Lippo Lippi had been a good-for-nothing, that baroque art has it good points, and that a line gone crazy ought to be sent to the madhouse, even if it poses as ultra-modern, these and many more novel, interesting things Lilly had long known. But they no longer evoked discussion.

Often their eyes would meet and linger with a soft yearning smile in them as if that were the most eloquent language in which they could talk to each other. And often Konrad's thoughts went their own way, returning to Lilly only under compulsion. She would then grow melancholy and jealous, and insist on leaving.

She would not feel thoroughly content until he lay comfortably in her arm, on her heart.

The walls were permeated with the day's heat; the curtains threatened suffocation; a veritable sirocco blew through the cracks of the shutters. But Lilly and Konrad suffered no discomfort. The glow accorded with their mood.

It was the greatest disaster for either of them to fall asleep, and thus shamefully curtail the time they spent together. So they agreed that the one who remained conscious longer should rouse the other.

Lilly was invariably the one to remain awake. Konrad was exhausted by his work, and in the morning he could not doze off again after a cup of tea in bed, or in the afternoon rest on the couch. And when he lay there next to her with twitching limbs, like a thoroughbred hunting dog, she felt much too sorry for him to keep her promise.

She would sit up in bed, and never weary of gazing at him in the dim light of the red-shaded candle.

There was always something in his face to study—the strong-willed fold between his brows, deeper than before and still somewhat intimidating; the muscles of his temples incessantly working; and the curling upper lip, the right end of which every now and then twitched as if he were smiling at her in his sleep. He had grown thin. His skin had lost its firmness, and on his cheeks lay shadows which darkened at his jaws. There was a line of suffering about his nostrils. He looked like a young Christ, created just to be adored.

Sometimes while staring at him, she thought:

"If I were to kill him now, run a hat pin through his heart or something of the sort, he would belong to me, to me alone, forever."

Then she would hollow her hand and place it on the left side of his breast and fancy she held his heart and with his heart his love, which she need never more give up.

Once while she bent over him, he awoke with a start.

"What's the matter? Did I do anything to you?" he asked.

"Why?"

"Your expression is so strange, almost as if you were angry with me."

She resolved not to stare at him any more. But she could not resist; she loved him too dearly.

It was horrible when dread seized her that she might lose him. Many a night it attacked her with such awful force that she felt like screaming and raving and tearing her hair. But it would be wrong to rouse him. So she gently laid her head under his shoulder, one arm under his back, the other across his breast, and pressing close against him told herself she had grown into one with him.

Then gradually she grew calmer and could find comfort in tears, or in picturing to herself how happy she would make him, unspeakably happy. She would envelop him in a mantle of love, so soft and thick as to prevent fate's rude blows from reaching him. She would be his muse, would wear an invisible aureole about her head, enkindle the desire within him for a thousand great deeds; she would give him the devoted care of a Sister of Mercy, would learn to cook and make her own dresses. No—rather attend scientific courses at the university, and study music. Oh, she would do many more things, that he should never weary of her.

For all this, of course, she would first have to be free, with relations between her and Richard entirely broken off.

She often thought of Richard also, but without a shadow of blame. She had long forgiven him for having led her to the brink of the abyss.

"Each person acts according to the law of his own being," Konrad had said.

Besides, Richard had once been her saviour.

So far as the outer world was concerned, the new life was to begin as soon as Richard announced his engagement. He had written that his suit was progressing, and by right her free life with Konrad ought already to have commenced, but Lilly did not feel equal to a crisis. She shuddered at all the lies she would continually have to dish up to Konrad, once a change took place in her

household.

She avoided facing the poverty that was bound to come. It was only at night when she had worked herself into a joyous ecstasy on the sleeping man's breast, and her future with him stretched before her in gold and purple, that privation seemed to her the very sum and substance of happiness and plenitude.

At three o'clock in the morning, when the street lamps went out one by one, and the grey of dawn came creeping over the ceiling, Lilly would have to awaken him.

He must not meet any of the tenants of the house. She owed it to his and her own reputation.

While dressing he groped about, drunk with sleep, among Lilly's ivory toilet articles, still resplendent with the seven-pointed coronet, and managed to get himself into shape for a stimulating cup of black coffee at the nearest Vienna café.

For he felt that from Lilly's bed he must go to his desk with all possible speed.

He could not be dissuaded from this madness.

The passionate hours of the night demanded atonement; an idea to which he clung tenaciously, no matter that he spent the early morning hours in vain, wearisome brooding over his papers.

Lilly, on the other hand, fell into a deep sleep, from which Adele roused her at about ten o'clock, when she brought in the breakfast tray, smiling contentedly.

Lilly let Konrad have every other night for himself.

She did not want to suck his lifeblood away. Even so he gave her sufficient cause for worry. His colour was bad, his eyes vacillated, his mood varied abruptly from violent gaiety to vacant-eyed self-absorption.

All that would surely be different when once—what?

To think of nothing, to plan nothing, to wish for nothing. Just to love him and know he was happy.

She spent her days dreaming both pleasant and tremulous dreams. Her intense fervour for mental occupation had departed. Besides, all sorts of new and important things intervened to distract her; especially the need to please him, to hand him daily the draft that intoxicated him and kept him her own.

Hitherto she had taken the beauty of her body as a matter of course, and had paid as little regard to it as to a hidden and useless object. Now she felt she must constantly take thought of the ideal he treasured in his mind, must try to resemble it—she well knew that in reality she approached it a little only when drunken bliss exalted her above herself and the stale and unprofitable flats of her life.

Thus arose an eager cult of her flesh, something she had always despised.

She took care of her body like a woman in a harem, perfumed her baths, manicured her toe nails, lengthened her eyebrows, and powdered her arms and shoulders. Every day she discovered new blemishes, which discouraged her and for which she sought new remedies.

At the same time she was ever haunted by the fear that through sheer attention to her toilet she would acquire the look of a beautiful prostitute. So she locked away her jewellery and dressed very simply. None but the connoisseur could discern how much artistic care had gone into the creation of this faultless simplicity.

When she was alone what troubled her most was jealousy. Not that she suspected him of relations with another woman. He stood too high in her estimation for that. But she was jealous of everything he did. The thought of his desk fairly tortured her. Each hour he spent away from her seemed traitorous to her love, and she thought of his friends with a hostility of which she had never deemed herself capable.

On the evenings she was left alone, she held watch over his room from the opposite side of the street, where she stood pressed in a doorway exactly as formerly in Alte Jakobstrasse.

When his lamp was lighted she was satisfied, but when she saw him come or go at a late hour, she did not sleep the whole night.

He lived a short distance from her in a third-storey room. It was long before he permitted her to call on him.

In the room next to his, he explained, lay a sick woman who had to be kept from the slightest excitement. The sound of a strange voice might aggravate her condition.

While telling this to Lilly he strangely avoided her eyes and she felt that a hundred chances to one he was keeping something from her. But when upon her insistence he admitted her to his room one afternoon she found nothing to confirm her suspicions. She merely had to speak very low; which she had known beforehand.

His room was just an ordinary student's room. It had two windows, a high ceiling, cheap furniture, and no couch and no carpet. But valuable engravings adorned the walls, and the

customary pier-glass was hidden behind an old copy of the Madonna di Foligno, who looked down in serene loftiness upon the poverty of northern philistinism. There were long low bookcases full of books; and more books, for which there was no room on the shelves were piled up high in the corners, protected against dust by pieces of crushed oil-cloth, such as pedlars use for wrapping about their wares.

As was to be expected, the desk was the only article that displayed a certain luxuriousness. Like the pictures, it was Konrad's own property. With its noble carving and broad top, it stood in the centre of the room, solemn as an altar.

Not one woman's picture to be seen on it. Lilly had not given him hers, and evidently others were not deemed worthy of the place of honour.

There was only one photograph, that of an old gentleman, framed with glass, which stood back of the blotting pad and the ink well. A weather-beaten, epicurean face, with fine snow-white hair, and shrewd eyes beneath half-sunken lids, eyes peculiar to old connoisseurs of women.

It was the picture of the uncle who had paid for Konrad's education and supported him.

Lilly felt a dull oppression, as if those eyes were looking her through and through, and needed but a glance to unveil the great secret that she concealed from her lover with a thousand subterfuges.

"I'll be careful never to meet him," she thought.

Konrad took from a drawer his precious treasure, the preliminary work on his great history of human emotions, and showed Lilly the reams of paper closely covered with writing.

This work was his real love, and she, Lilly Czepanek, was nothing but a dark, bloodless shadow, which greedily glided through his nights.

"Put it back again," she said discontentedly, and turned away to take leave.

But even his great work was not enough for Konrad. In addition, he drudged over a number of short articles. As his name become known in professional circles, he received an increasing number of orders, all of which he accepted and tried to fill.

And one day Lilly found out what the important position was of which he had spoken three weeks before on that never-to-be-forgotten excursion.

"I couldn't make up my mind until to-day," said Konrad. "But now I have actually decided to take the position. It is assistant editorship on a magazine. The editor-in-chief called on me himself, and wouldn't let go of me until I said yes. A fascinating fellow. In spite of his great intellectual ability, a man of childlike innocence. And so frank and friendly. You must get to know him immediately, if you don't already."

"What is his name?"

"Dr. Salmoni."

CHAPTER XVIII

No. It came about differently.

Fate did not lay its clutch upon her with such rude hands.

Lilly was spared the disgrace of being caught like a criminal, and by an act of volition was enabled to prove that she was not unworthy of the great passion that had blessed her life.

After the mention of Dr. Salmoni's name Lilly feared to venture out on the street with Konrad. She imagined that each person coming behind them must be the dreaded man, who had once stolen upon her in front of the house on Alte Jakobstrasse and might be following her now as he had then.

In order to save herself this torture she finally told Konrad that a lady of her acquaintance had visited her the day before and had asked with marked emphasis about the slim young man with whom she had always appeared.

The effect of Lilly's lie was terrifying.

Konrad said nothing and ate nothing. He paced up and down the room with a wild, hunted expression, and went away at the very moment when their happiest hours were wont to begin.

The following day light was thrown upon the situation.

Konrad came at twilight, paler than usual, his eyes shining unnaturally.

"Listen, darling," he said, "I spent the night thinking everything over, and now I know what I ought to do. We can't go on this way."

She thought he meant that he must leave her. An icy numbness spread over her body. She looked at him quietly awaiting the death blow.

"Since we belong to each other," he continued, "we have never spoken of your betrothed. That doesn't mean I didn't think of him. And you have been very reticent about his friend, Mr. Dehnicke. All I know is Mr. Dehnicke is now off on a trip and has left you, so to speak, without a guardian."

She forced herself to smile. Why did he prolong the agony?

"I must confess, in the midst of all my happiness, I have always felt that this exploiting of the situation was nothing more nor less than contemptible so far as I myself am concerned. But I am not the one to be considered. The question is: what will become of you? The thing I dreaded from the very first has come to pass: your friends have begun to notice us together. You can't ask one person not to tell another. That's degrading. So your friend will discover everything. He will call you to account, you will be too proud to deny the truth, and the end of the story will be that you will be left alone, utterly unprotected. Because the way things are now, *I* haven't even the right to protect you. The thought of it is sickening."

He jumped up, ran his outspread fingers through his imaginary shock of hair, and tramped up and down.

Lilly felt the blood begin to course through her veins again, and with it life and thought.

The dear, noble, unsuspecting boy!

She came near bursting into laughter. But she refrained herself and said:

"You can be perfectly calm, Konni. Mr. Dehnicke won't find out, and even if he does, he won't believe it. Or if he believes it, he will take good care—"

She could not continue. The great innocent eyes troubled her.

"So you still think he will—?"

Konrad also faltered. He, too, was unable to utter the unspeakable.

Lilly regarded the buttons on her skirt, and said nothing.

"When is Mr. Dehnicke coming home again?" he asked.

"He's not certain. He's gone a-wooing," Lilly replied with a little feeling of triumph. She thought she was saying something which raised her above suspicion in the future—there was still a possibility of suspicion.

"Where is he now?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"I want to speak to him."

Lilly started. She could not believe her ears.

It *could* not be. Either she must have lost her reason or Konrad.

"Don't be afraid," he reassured her. "I know quite well what I owe your reputation. But I should like to find out at last what *he* thinks of your situation. There's a man in the United States whom you are pledged to, yet he doesn't let himself be heard from. He doesn't come for you. He doesn't write. Why doesn't he write? If he's ignorant of your whereabouts, he's perfectly aware that Mr. Dehnicke's business is known in Berlin. You can't be sure he's still alive. At first I tried to explain his silence in various ways. But now I say to myself, he's either dead or as good as dead. And are you to consider yourself bound? Should you make your entire social existence dependent upon a sort of guard of honour, which has nothing more to guard? I'd like to hold all this under Mr. Dehnicke's nose. He'll have to answer me. Don't you think he will?"

"Konrad has less worldly knowledge than is permissible," thought Lilly, pityingly, and replied: "But I don't understand, Konni, what right you have to call a stranger to account."

"That's my affair," he rejoined, tossing his head defiantly. "I must know if he will set you free. I won't brook his playing the slave-master over you."

"And I won't brook your getting yourself into a false position," cried Lilly in reawakened alarm. She already heard blows and pistol shots. "I myself will speak to Mr. Dehnicke. I will free myself, I promise you. But you, if *you* go to him, what will he think of me? At best you will merely succeed in compromising me."

He drew himself up to his full height. His eyes flashed victoriously.

"If a man loves you and wants you to be his wife, why should that compromise you?"

It was hot and murky when these words were spoken. The canary ran about on the sand of his

cage chirping wearily, his wings drooping; the gold fish hung motionless behind their glass walls, and the naked monkey whined in its sleep.

The slimy canal water reflected bluish black clouds; a storm hovered in the atmosphere, and this was the thunder-clap.

Lilly's first sensation was one of surprise—not joyous surprise, indeed not. Then came an unspeakably mournful cry, which no mortal ear heard, though all the more painful in its muteness.

"Too late—a lost chance—nothing to hope for—no more happiness on earth—too late!"

She leaned back on the sofa and studied the ceiling attentively and thoroughly.

He was awaiting his answer.

If she lowered her eyes, she would have to encounter his eyes, which ate into her soul. No salvation from those eyes, no salvation from that which must perforce come.

And he was waiting.

Then she heard her own voice, very clear and very calm, as if Mrs. Jula were speaking in her place, that little artist of life with the iron brow.

"I thought, Konni, you and I had agreed never to marry."

"How can you remind me of it?" he cried violently. "Did I know how things would turn out when I said it? Did I know who you are and what bliss and torture a goddess of a woman like you can bestow on a poor devil? Yes, torture. I must tell you everything to-day. I'm at my wit's end. There's a break in my life. Everything is torn asunder—my work, my thoughts, my belief in you. You want to be my good genius. Instead you're almost my evil genius. Don't be frightened. It's not your fault. I am not reproaching you—only myself, for being so weak. I want to work. I must work. I have assumed a number of *new* duties. I thought if duty came from the outside, I could force myself into the right path. The very reverse has happened. I'm growing stupid just from wrestling with myself. I must bring peace into our lives, else we're both lost. And I can't have peace unless you belong to me *altogether*, unless your bed is next to my bed, and the desk is in the next room, and you're always with me."

"I can move to you in the autumn," Lilly interjected timidly.

"No, nothing of that sort any more. No self-reproaches, no secretiveness. Should I have it on my conscience that each additional day on which you sacrifice yourself, you're drawing nearer to ruin? And it's bound to ruin you. It will cling to you like dirt. And why should we create dirt out of what is most sacred to us? Or am I not good enough to be your life-companion? Do you think you will be too poor as my wife?"

She repudiated the idea with a lively exclamation of scorn.

"I don't know, and I don't need to know, how much you have. I am rich enough now. I get three hundred marks a month from my uncle; Dr. Salmoni pays me four hundred—"

Oh, how she started at the name!

"And I can easily earn another three hundred by writing articles—in all a thousand a month, a general's salary. You may be satisfied."

"Keep quiet," she cried, almost beside herself. "It isn't that."

"Then what is it?"

He planted himself in front of her challengingly. Between his brows were those folds of wrath which cut her like a knife. She ducked her head. Never since the colonel's time had she experienced such fear of a human being.

"Tell me what it is. Apparently you don't love me enough. You still cling to the man who forgot you long ago. You probably say to yourself: 'The stupid boy is good enough for a passing love; he's good enough for whiling the time away. But if he shows any intentions of interfering with my life, I must get rid of him with all possible speed.' Am I not right? Tell me. Be brave! What harm can I do you? Just tell me that I'm nothing but a *pis aller*, the sort of man you wouldn't want as a husband. When I've made a name for myself, then you will be willing to consider marriage, too. Am I not right?—Well, then."

He picked up his hat to go.

"Have pity on me, Konni," she implored. She had glided down from her seat to lay her head on his knees, and now she crouched between the sofa and Konrad's chair, and groped for support.

"I don't need *your* pity, you don't need *mine*," he cried. "Until to-day you've been the noblest thing on earth to me. But I won't suffer myself just to be expunged from your life. Tell me why you don't want to marry me—*one* plausible reason, and I'll never return to the subject again. I promise you."

"Give me until to-morrow," she groaned.

"Why? For what? To-day is as good as to-morrow. I've come to the end of my tether. I can't spend another night of torture."

"I will write to you."

That surprised him.

"What will you write?"

"Whether I may or not. And the reasons and everything."

"During the night I'll manage to find some way out," she thought.

"When will I get the letter?"

"To-morrow morning by the first delivery."

"Very well. I will wait until then. Good-by, Lilly."

When he helped her back on the sofa, and held his hand out in farewell, and she saw his eyes fastened on her with their candid, magnanimous expression, which a lie had never clouded—unsuspicious still—she was suddenly convinced that evasion was no longer possible.

"Truth! Nothing but the truth. Even if it lead to perdition, Konrad must now be told the truth." The thought flooded her soul like a warm, soothing stream.

But she could not tell him the truth face to face. Nobody would have the strength of will for that.

The reaction did not set in until she was left alone. The impulse for self-preservation asserted itself. If Mrs. Jula could do it, she could, too. Mrs. Jula had much worse things to conceal.

Richard, of course, would say nothing; which was the main consideration. Now that he wished to go his own way, it was to his interest for her to vanish decorously from his life. The rest of the "crew" might tattle to their heart's content. Konrad was immune against their poison. The only dangerous person was Dr. Salmoni. But if she went to him soon and begged him, he, too, would maintain silence. He had sufficiently strong motives for hushing his disgraceful attempt upon her. Besides, Mrs. Jula had said: "You must wear a smile on your brow but beneath the smile your brow must be of iron."

Thus Lilly revolved the situation in her mind.

But in the midst of her brooding and planning she was seized with disgust of herself and her intentions, which tore the whole tissue of deceit into ragged bits.

Why, it was sheer folly to think she would always be able to play the false part. If upon the mere mention of Dr. Salmoni's name she dreaded appearing on the street with Konrad, how could she go through a lifetime at his side haunted by that ever-present fear? What repulses and humiliations she would have to undergo whenever Konrad led her into the society in which as his wife she would belong—she, whom the papers had taken up and treated as a rising star in the fashionable demi-monde? And, worst of all, if Konrad should begin to suspect! How he would eat his heart away in shame and abhorrence, he, with his pride and delicate susceptibilities and that unworldly purity which alone accounted for the fact that no surmise as to her real life had ever touched his soul.

What an awaking from a short, torturing dream!

No, she could not do what Mrs. Jula had done.

And she threw far from her the shameful thought with which the stress of the hour had stained her wrestling soul.

An exultant craving for self-annihilation came over her, the desire to tear her breast open and throw her throbbing heart at his feet.

So she sat down and wrote:

> "My dear, sweet Konni:—
>
> I have shamefully deceived you. I am a prostitute, or something not much better. The man to whom I told you I was betrothed is a myth. He was a little good-for-nothing lieutenant. I wickedly broke my marriage vows for his sake, and he never thought of marrying me, but turned me over to his rich friend, who made me his mistress. His mistress I still am. I have been living for years in the world of vice and vulgarity. I am an outlaw from decent society. Hired mistresses and their lovers who pay them form my sole associates. I clung to you, because you in your innocence respected me, and because I, down in the mire, clamoured for respect.
>
> Now you know why I may not be your wife. If you desire my kisses, come. I am not fit for anything else.
>
> Lilly."

It was nearly eleven o'clock. Adele had gone to bed. It occurred to Lilly that she would have to go down to mail the letter herself.

But the storm that had been impending the whole afternoon, was just then giving full vent to its fury. The rain was coming down in sheets, and gusts of wind blew through the open window across Lilly's desk.

Once a shower of drops spattered the paper, at which she was staring with hot, dry eyes. It looked as if tears had fallen upon it while she was writing.

"Very good," she thought.

Then she felt ashamed. The time for farce was ended. But when she started to rewrite the letter, she stopped short with a shudder.

What did those monstrous self-accusations signify? Were they the truth?

Perhaps so in the mouth of a backbiting woman who needs facts about her friend in order to twist them into a crime, or in the mouth of one of those social hangmen who hold a halter in readiness for everybody's past.

For herself, who knew how everything had come about, how from inner need and outer compulsion, from trustfulness and defencelessness, link after link of the chain had been forged which now clanked about her body, a burden of sin—for her there was another, a milder truth, which must win pardon and atonement for her in the eyes of every person who understood.

She tore up the sheet, and began anew. She draughted a sketch, and polished it until it thoroughly satisfied her.

> "My dearly beloved friend:—
>
> She who writes this letter to you is a most unhappy woman, whom you know only slightly, and who had to deceive you until to-day, because what is most sacred to her, her love of you, was at stake.
>
> And now, with these lines, I am losing that love. I am sacrificing it to your happiness, to the divine fire which sanctified my life.
>
> The world has treated me badly. It robbed me of my belief in man, my ideals, my will power; and so deprived me of the right to go through life at your side.
>
> I began my course full of confidence and hope, pure to the core of my being. Each man who stepped into my existence broke off a piece of my virtue.
>
> I raised my eyes in devotion to my aging husband, who promised to be my hero, master, model, and idol. He converted me into a tool of base desires.
>
> Another man came, who was young like myself and had been left without ties like myself, and whom I wished to save while I sought refuge with him. He took me and tasted me. I was a fascinating adventure to him, and in the course of his adventure he went to perdition.
>
> He wrote a treacherous letter to a friend placing me in his care. That friend exploited my spiritual and physical needs for his own advantage, and by a shameful trick made me so dependent upon him that for a long time I lived as his creature while thinking myself free and untouched. Helpless and broken as I was I became his entirely, nor ventured even to feel angry at him, I was so slavishly in his power—until now.
>
> So my destiny was fulfilled. I tried desperately to struggle out of the dull night in which my spirit was enveloped, but nowhere was there a path leading up to the light. With ardour I seized each hand held out to help me, but each thrust me still lower, until my whole being sank into a torpid state of discouragement.
>
> Then you came, my beloved, my saviour, my redeemer! It grew light about me, the world blossomed forth again, the drained sources began to flow afresh, the Song of Songs resounded.
>
> And with pride and rapture I realised that nothing shameful had taken firm root in my character, that the times of ignominy had passed over my head without destroying my inner worth, my desire for purity, my instinct for a great, noble humanity. These had been merely dormant, and you, beloved, awakened them to activity.
>
> Even if I may not be your wife—your wife should be free of stain—I want to be worthy of you, whether by your side or at a distance—wherever you tell me to go.
>
> Long ago I decided to shake off my chains, which, in fact, have been merely external, and with unencumbered limbs climb up to a new life in harmony with the demands of my genuine self. You have pointed the way, and in gratitude I kiss your dear, tender, industrious hands.
>
> Farewell, beloved! If you would chastise me, never come again. If you will and can put up with the love of one who loves you as no other woman on earth will love you, then do not turn me adrift. I have nothing to give you but what I am, though that belongs to you unto death.

Lilly."

She read and reread the letter, and read herself into a state of enthusiasm over it.

Now the truth wore quite a different aspect.

Then suddenly the question arose in her mind:

"*Is* it the truth?"

Had she not luxuriated in choice words? Had she not smuggled in high-flown emotions foreign to her nature? Phrases like "dull night in which my spirit was enveloped" and "tried desperately to struggle" belonged in sentimental novels. They were inapplicable to her life. She had suffered not so much from despair as from boredom and during that "dull night" she had enjoyed herself greatly on many an occasion. Richard, the good fellow to judge by her insinuations, was a rank despot, and she herself a sorry, subjugated victim, whereas in reality she had been able to do or leave undone whatever her caprice dictated.

It *was* the truth, and yet it was not. Just as much and as little as in the first, dreadful letter. Each was correct enough in its way, and many another might have been written equally correct; but the truth, the genuine truth, which penetrated and illumined the whole, would appear in none. That truth she herself did not know, nor did anybody else. That truth vanished with the moment in which an event occurred, and no earthly power could summon it back. All that her words reflected were distorted images varying as her mood varied and as her pen travelled over the paper.

"But I don't want to lie," she cried to herself. "I want to be true to-day."

So she tore up the second letter also.

What now? Should she write a third letter?

It was long past midnight. Her eyes burned. Her temples throbbed with over-excitement, and Konrad was to hear from her by the first mail in the morning. She had promised him.

At this point the full force of what had happened suddenly struck her. She realised that in the last four hours she had been face to face with the danger of losing him at once and forever.

She was beset with an anguish of fear that threatened to rob her of her senses. She cried his name aloud, ran about the apartment, reeled, knocked against the walls, and wanted to throw herself from the window.

She must go to him forthwith. That was the one idea she was capable of grasping. She would have the porter open the front door; she would wake Konrad up, force her way into his room and stay with him that night and forever. No matter what the consequences! It was all the same. Only to rid herself of that dread which burned her body like a living flame.

The storm had subsided, but the rain was falling in a steady downpour. Lilly scarcely took the time to put on a cloak.

In low shoes, without hat or umbrella, she dashed out on the street and splashed through the puddles.

Light was shining from the two third-storey windows.

She clapped her hands and cried:

"Konni, Konni, Konni!"

Again and again.

But the windows were closed. He did not hear her.

She saw his figure glide back and forth like a shadow, from one end of the room to the other, to and fro, to and fro, ceaselessly.

And all the time the rain beat down on her, soaking through her clothes, while the cold wet of the pavement crawled up her legs.

"Konni, Konni," she called louder.

Passersby offered her their umbrellas; others taunted her, and cried, "Konni, Konni."

At last the shadow halted. One of the windows went up.

"Lilly—you?" his voice called, hoarse with fright.

"At last—do come, my sweet Konni," a tipsy man, who had persistently held his umbrella over her, answered in her place.

"For God's sake!"

The light disappeared from the windows, and a few moments later Konrad appeared in the doorway with the front-door key and his lamp in his hand.

The tipsy gentleman said good-by, bowing and scraping.

"Lilly—what has happened? What are you doing here?"

She pressed against the doorpost trembling. She was unable to speak.

"I am with him," was her one thought. "So all's well."

He passed his hand over her clothes.

"Why, you're dripping wet. You're in house slippers. For God's sake, Lilly!"

She wanted to say something, but was ashamed to let him see how her teeth were chattering.

"And I can't even take you to my room. You know why. But I must. If I were to let you go back home again in the state you're in, you might catch your death of cold. We will be very careful—just as we were that time. We can't speak above a whisper. The girl's not out of danger yet. Give me your hand. Come on."

With half-closed eyes she let herself be led up the stairs. Her wet dress flapped against the balusters. She felt she would have to crouch down on one of the steps and lie there until the porter came to sweep the dust and dirt away. But each step only took her nearer to the fate awaiting her up there in the third storey.

Then with bent head she crept along the corridor into his room, where the imprisoned sultriness of the summer day suffocated her.

Konrad pressed her into his desk chair. He drew off the soggy velvet rags from her feet, and brought her dry stockings; and after peeling her wet dress from her body he wrapped her in his great coat and blankets.

She sat there accepting his service without a will of her own. She wanted to taste the delicious sensation of his loving care of her until the last moment.

She had not said a word.

When she had attempted to thank him, he pointed to the door leading to the next room.

"Speak very low," he said, his mouth close to her ear. "The poor thing, it seems, is having a good night for the first time."

Languid pity awoke in Lilly.

But she had to talk.

"What's the matter with her? Tell me," she breathed.

He hesitated.

"My landlady swore me to silence. But you're mine now. You will keep the secret. Her daughter, her one child, ran away four months ago and gave birth to a baby. The mother went to fetch her back home. She's been hovering between life and death for six weeks. She's at last getting better."

"Poor thing," said Lilly. And then the consciousness of her own misery came upon her with redoubled force.

"Konni, Konni," she moaned on his neck. "Now it's all over. I was willing to starve with you, go begging with you. But what's the use? When once you know everything—"

"That can't be so very bad, darling."

"About me. About my life—my past."

With a little jerk he freed himself and sat down opposite her.

The look of questioning and terrified presentiment that congealed his pale face, seeming to turn it into a mask, filled her with fright, such fright as she had never experienced, because it was not on her own behalf; she was afraid of converting her own pain into his pain.

"I wanted to write it to you—just the way it was, but I couldn't. It turned out wrong while I wrote. So I came to you before morning. If you want, I will tell you now—everything—"

She could not continue. She turned her face aside and buried it on the desk.

"Why don't you speak?"

Konrad had quite forgotten the need for quiet, and both of them shrank at the sudden sound of his voice. "She's probably asleep," he said lowering his voice again. "Now tell me! What can it be?"

He breathed heavily under the growing oppression of his soul.

She began to speak. In a whisper, her upper body inclined toward him, she tried to tell him the things for which she had not been able to find words in her own home.

The truth did not come out this time either. She felt it.

Less, much less of it, than her letters would have given him. To distress him with every detail—never! No power in the world could have driven her to that.

Her life became a long list of martyrdoms—a funeral procession draped in black—insults, humiliations, mortifications—an imprisonment without a ray of light or mercy—and all the time a constant struggle for deliverance—a noble withdrawal into herself—a dismal sacrifice for nothing.

She talked and talked.

He listened, with wide-open eyes. But when she uttered the name she had no right to omit, "Dr. Salmoni," he started and shrank back.

Both of them had completely forgotten the sick girl in the next room.

Sometimes Lilly had to wipe tears away, sometimes she grew indignant; now she ventured to glide by difficult points, now she lingered over touching self-reproaches.

"It *is* the truth after all," she said to herself defiantly, yet in fear, as she drew near the end of her narrative.

It was the truth in so far as it was a résumé of the good in her, the truth as it might take shape in his troubled mind, regardless of fact—and this truth, too, had its rights.

Silence ensued.

Her guilty look glided past him and rested on the photograph on the desk, which leered at her with its crafty, worldly eyes, as if to say:

"My child, I know you much better than you do yourself."

Something familiar and confidential lay in them, like a reflection of the merry world which a moment ago had seemed to her the abode of torture.

She did not venture to remove her gaze from those omniscient eyes, which smilingly examined and disrobed her, and killed her last shy hope.

The unbroken silence in the room became a burden.

Suddenly Konrad and Lilly heard a low moan. It came from the next room, where the sick girl lay, who, because of her secret sin, had been wrestling with her poor life for weeks. The next instant the sound was partially stifled, as if she had stuck a handkerchief into her mouth. Then it broke out again all the more violently. Anxious words of comfort mingled with the groans. They came from the mother, who probably slept in the farther room, and had come in to find out the cause of her daughter's outburst of grief.

Konrad's and Lilly's eyes met.

"She heard everything," their look said.

For a brief instant the stranger's unhappiness caused them to forget their own. The great flood of the world's suffering poured over them easing the sting of guilt and drowning their personal pain.

The sobbing in the next room was muffled under pillows.

"My own darling," the comforting voice implored, and each tone swelled with love. "Don't worry. It isn't so bad. We will take the little baby. Even if he doesn't marry you, what difference does it make? Think of it, we have the baby! And then it will smile at you and say mama. You see, it isn't so dreadful."

The sobbing quieted down, and turned into a heavy breathing, the first earnest of peace.

"Oh," thought Lilly, "it must be good to have someone say: 'It's not so dreadful.'"

Nobody would say that to her.

A burning desire to be petted and comforted, like the young sinner next door, arose in her.

"She has her mother," she groaned, bursting into tears, "but whom have I?"

Konrad leaned over and took her hands from her face. His troubled eyes shone with such infinite loving kindness that they seemed not to be of this world.

"Am I not here?" he asked.

"What can you do for me?" she complained. "How can you bear me?"

There were no sounds from the other room any more.

Now the mother also knew that Konrad had a visitor at that late hour.

"Listen," he whispered, his mouth close to her ear again. "We mustn't talk much more. Besides, my head's in a whirl. But there's one thing I see clearly: how ridiculous everything called guilt is when two people love each other, and when one has suffered like you. You have always been a

saint to me, and you shall—continue to be in the future."

"Future," Lilly faltered, starting up anxiously, "what sort of a future?"

He wiped his forehead, yellow and dank with sweat.

"I don't know," he said. "All I know is I can't live without you."

She closed her eyes. She wanted to dream longer.

"To be sure, it cannot be what we wanted." She noticed the hesitating, dragging gait of his speech. "Everything, of course—will have to be different."

"Your life must not be different—it ought not to be different."

"You can't blink facts, darling. Of course, I don't know *where* we will live. But we'll manage to find some spot on the globe where nobody knows us."

Now she understood.

And forgetting herself and the sick girl and everything around she sank down at his feet with a cry and sobbed:

"I don't want you to—you mustn't. You're entirely too young. You don't know the world. You don't know what you're doing. I don't want the sacrifice. I don't want to ruin you. I love you too much for that."

He bent her head back and stroked her hair from her forehead.

If only his eyes had not shone with that suffering loving kindness.

The unhappiness of a lifetime already glowed in them.

"If the question of sacrifice enters," he said, "then *I* must ask a sacrifice of *you*. Will you make it for my sake?"

"Everything, everything! Shall I die? Tell me."

"I want only one thing of you. Come to me as you are. Don't bring a single possession of yours with you. Never return, not once, to your—to that apartment. From this moment on nothing of all that is to be. Will you promise me?"

Lilly battled against violent alarm.

Not to return home! Never to see her dear drawing-room again; never to feed the little canary or Peter—never!

An ugly feeling, that such a sacrifice was rank folly, came and went again, as if a daub of dirt had been flung upon her, and immediately been wiped away. Then she decided hastily, and replied:

"Yes, I promise."

He drew a deep breath.

"Now we will be perfectly quiet," he said. "The patient ought to sleep, and to-morrow morning I'll explain the matter to my landlady."

"But what is to become of your great work?" Lilly asked, self-reproach rising up in her again.

A melancholy smile passed over his face.

"Who knows? That will depend upon my uncle. If he gives his consent, we can live as we please. Everything will be all right."

"But if he doesn't?"

Konrad's right hand, which had been gliding ceaselessly from her forehead to the nape of her neck, for an instant pressed her head painfully as if to fetch strength for the approaching life struggle from closer contact.

"That will be all right, too," he said and smiled again.

A little while later she lay at his side in the narrow bed, the edge of which cut her body. She put her head under his shoulder, and with both arms clasped his body, as always in her distress when she sought protection with him.

But this time she slept, and he kept watch.

CHAPTER XIX

Mrs. Laue was not a little astonished when one day her former tenant, the *grande dame*, appeared at her door in an ill-fitting alpaca suit and a sailor hat, trimmed with a green band, begging for admittance.

The young lady tenant of the year had just been married, and the best room was vacant.

Thus, it came about that Mrs. Laue's red plush furniture once more cast a fiery glow upon Lilly's life.

The photographs of famous mimes smirked upon her patronisingly. And while performing her morning toilet, she was admonished:

> To keep your body clean, be sure
> To have your conscience just as pure.

The way Konrad looked out for her was touching. He instantly drew all his money from the bank, five hundred marks, and himself went to buy an outfit for her, since she could not appear on the street in the garments she had worn when she had come to him.

He had let the salesladies persuade him into buying the absurdest things. Lilly would have split her sides laughing over them, if they had not represented a goodly portion of his money.

The shoddy dress struck her as a temporary masquerade; and nothing in the world would have induced her to wear it outside the house.

Mrs. Laue shook her head dubiously.

"When you moved away from here four years ago, you had the finest gowns and brooches and bracelets and all sorts of things; and now you come back in rags. It seems to me you're on the wrong road, Lilly dear."

Konrad found as little favour in Mrs. Laue's eyes.

"He's too young for you, and not stylish enough. Maybe he has ideal sentiments—if he hadn't he would snap his fingers at you. But I tell you, ideal sentiments always go hand in hand with trouble."

Lilly thought the old woman's chatter abominable. But for lack of something better to do during the daytime—Konrad was busy and could not come until evening—she again took to pasting flowers in Mrs. Laue's company. Occasionally it seemed to her she had never gone away from her.

Lilly had written to Adele the very first day, without, of course, mentioning her address. She told her not to be troubled by her absence, and to attend to the apartment as usual until Mr. Dehnicke's return.

It was more difficult to pen her farewell to her old friend. She said nothing of Konrad. For the present her engagement was to be kept a secret. She gave as the sole cause for her flight her irresistible desire at last to live a different life. She also referred to her wish not to stand in the way of his future, and wound up with cordial words, which robbed separation of its bitterness.

When she read the letter over, she felt a genuine pang, at which she was a bit ashamed.

The days passed.

The new life that had been the dream of her dreams for years had begun, freighted with boundless confidence, such as she had not ventured to hope for in her wildest fancyings.

With her sins washed away, redeemed, reborn, she stepped back into virtuous society at the side of the beloved man, whom only a few days before, it would have been arrogance, sacrilege to wish to possess.

Who would have believed it?

And yet Lilly was unable to attain to perfect enjoyment of her unspeakable happiness.

No matter how often she told herself it was nothing but a transition period, soon to pass, the misery of her old quarters, the poor-peoples' odour, the spiritual mustiness that pervaded the place, bad food, the lack of suitable clothes, money and service, all this worked upon her sufficiently to delude her into the belief that instead of rising to new honours, she was suddenly sinking from splendour and brilliance to a dull, dead level.

No matter that she found fault with herself for this ungrateful frame of mind, the fact was, the feeling was there, and she could not dismiss it.

And how account for it that five years before when she had descended from the genuine heights of life, delicately nurtured, a spoiled darling, accustomed to luxury and attention, such as is granted to few persons in the world, she had scarcely suffered from the wretchedness of these surroundings? In fact, though utterly without prospects, she had felt tolerably secure. But now that the idle comfort of a vapid existence fortunately lay behind her, and her beloved walked by her side ready to throw open the gates to a happiness she had never divined, she was unable to breathe among the red plush chairs. Trifles annoyed her, and she hankered for a bathroom and a hairdresser.

Something must have departed from her during those years. She thought and thought, but failed to discover what it was.

Added to all these troubles was her worry over Konrad's condition.

Whenever her soul conjured up his image, her heart throbbed with mingled sensations—secret pangs of conscience, longings for atonement, reproaches, not to be stilled, of herself and—why conceal it?—of Konrad also.

Her yearning for him no longer had a quality of joyousness; and yet, she was ever expectant of a letter from him by the pneumatic tube.

If he wrote, he said too little; and if he sent no message at all she felt angry, though she well knew he had not a second to spare for her during the day, and was drudging as never before in his life.

He would come at last between eight and nine in the evening; and then loaded with papers and books. He had manuscripts to read, proofs to look over, and letters to answer. He scarcely took time to eat, and while he snatched a few bites, troubled recollections of things he had forgotten during the day kept flashing up in his harassed brain.

There was no thought of amorous nights. As a rule Konrad fell asleep in the midst of work.

As he reclined there in the corner of the sofa, Lilly could appreciate how tired and worn he was. He no longer cared for his person. His clothes hung on him impressed, and in place of the velvety sheen on his cheeks, which had been her delight, she saw dark boils and coarse stubble.

She would have given a great deal to learn what he thought of her in the depths of his soul. But she could extract nothing from him. He remained mute, with glowing eyes, and lips tightly compressed.

Certainly she had no right to doubt him. She knew that he spent every spare minute trying to arrange for their life in the future.

In Buenos Ayres the position of a high school teacher of German was vacant; the same in Caracas; and he could even become a university professor, though of course on the other side of the Atlantic. All he needed to do was present a few letters of recommendation from well-known professors.

Such efforts, however, were necessary only in case his uncle refused his consent to Konrad's marriage with Lilly, and dropped his disobedient heir.

If he said yes, if he furnished the means for their household, they could live aloof from the world wherever they wished, wherever conditions were best adapted for the precious work.

Konrad had immediately written to his uncle about his engagement, and told of Lilly's past in the most touching words. He had not concealed the stains on her life, but he brought out strongly her fine qualities, the virginity of her soul, her nobility, her rich intellectual endowments, the number of her ideal interests.

After he had sent off the letter, he read to Lilly a few passages from the draught of it. It was a bold document of revolutionary ideas.

"I know that *I* and you, too, are raised above the narrow conventions of philistinism, above the merciless judgments of social court-martials, above a Pharisaism which constitutes itself the watchdog of morality, and which with its code of formal, pedantic family relationships knocks to the ground all aspirations for free, high-minded conduct. You have lived in many parts of the world, and you have learned to know how mutable moral laws are everywhere, how hollow the pretence of regarding each as the sole God-ordained dogma, you know the sly, hypocritical paths and by-ways by which one manages to escape their tyranny, and you know that in the province of ethics there is only one thing which commands respect and admiration: the will to *kallokagathia*, to that form of life in which the noblemen of all times combined the beautiful with the good. Yes, beautiful and good. That is what Lilly is, her aspirations, and sufferings."

How glorious!

Who could be dull enough to resist such words?

That is what Lilly said to comfort Konrad when uncertainty as to the immediate future weighed upon him heavily.

Five days passed before the answer came upon which depended the weal or woe of two human beings.

In reading it, Lilly saw the crafty eyes of the photograph turned upon her as if the old man stood there in person.

> "My dear boy:—
>
> I don't understand anything about *kallokagathia* or similar phrases. It's nearly half a century ago, since I ran away from school. But I flatter myself that I can measure things pretty accurately with my eyes, and size people up by their faces, whether striking a bargain or on the Yoshiwara, whether on the various exchanges or at baccarat. Which did not keep me from being fleeced, or my life from being a series of stupidities, especially in regard to women. Once I wanted, whether or no, to bring along a young

Circassian, because her eyebrows met prettily; and once I wanted to marry a little Musme because she massaged my legs so well, etc. I won't say anything of my various attempts to save souls, because everybody goes through that.

However, the god of old rogues and bachelors—perhaps with your classical knowledge you can tell me his name—mercifully kept any of my plans from maturing.

But your case seems to be essentially different. If it's really as you say, if your betrothed is really such a paragon of virtues—the world is full of surprises—and, chief of all, if she does not pose as a repentant Magdalene and bank upon your pity, it will be a pleasure to me to tweak Mr. Respectability's nose and give you my cordial blessing.

But if your intentions bear a certain family resemblance to my own in the past, then pardon me if I refuse to shoulder the responsibility for what you are pleased to call your "future," even with this in view, and if I feel compelled to beg you kindly to break off your connections with me.

In order to settle the matter to the best of my ability, I will be in Berlin day after to-morrow; and I herewith ask you and your betrothed to keep the evening free for your old uncle. As I do not know where you metropolitans dine and drink, I will have to let you know the place of our meeting after I reach Berlin.

Until then,

Yours faithfully,
Uncle Rennschmidt."

For the first time in that gloomy period Lilly saw Konrad's face relax with a smile of relief.

"If that's his attitude, then there's no danger," he said. "He will have to drop his distrust at the very first glance. Who in the world can withstand you? You just have to be a little pleasant to him, and he'll be your adorer."

But Lilly had her private opinion.

Yes, if she had her former wardrobe to choose from, perhaps she might be sure of presenting the appearance she should to his uncle. But in either one of her two ridiculous shop-girl dresses, which she had to pin painstakingly before she could wear them, without jewellery, or the thousand little appurtenances of a fine toilet, from where, in such circumstances, was she to summon the self-confidence that would force the shrewd old woman connoisseur to capitulate?

"I'm afraid I'll have to have some of your money for getting an evening costume," she said hesitatingly.

He acquiesced with pleasure. She was to have whatever she still needed, and a hat with plumes and a lace mantilla, just like the one she had had.

All this for two hundred and sixty marks.

This, the entire sum he had left, was what he handed over to her for her new purchases.

The dear boy, what sort of an idea did he have of fashionable dressing?

After he left she carefully considered ways and means.

While she wore herself out devising methods of patching up some sort of costume, the most glorious dresses hung by the dozens in her old closets, dresses which Konrad had not seen, because he had never gone to any festive gathering with her. The lace mantilla which had cost a small fortune was also there, and goodness knows what else!

But with all her might she cast the temptation from her. She had given him her word of honour.

She might deceive everybody else in the world, but not Konrad.

So she decided to go on a shopping expedition the next morning and see whether she could not ferret out a good garment at Gerson's or Wertheim's in the reduced stock.

But she was known in the shops, and the salespeople had had the experience that despite her economy she always bought nothing but the very best. How they would stare if she appeared at the counter in her tawdry trash.

No, with the best intentions she could not place herself in so distressing a situation.

She pondered a long time, but her thoughts kept returning to those wardrobes where her exquisite treasures reposed, and silently offered a wide choice.

But nowhere a little back door to slip through; nowhere a pretext for lessening the gravity of the offence.

Despite all these vexations, the night passed in caressing dreams, lighted by newly arisen hope.

And as always when Lilly's frame of mind in sleep was healthy, she felt she was being peacefully rocked to the rhythm of familiar melodies. She recognised the "Moonlight Sonata," and Grieg's "Ung Birken," and the motifs of the Rhine Daughters, and mingling with them all the Song of

Songs.

As she was coming out of her sleep in the morning, she still heard: "Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the field."

Suddenly with an exclamation of fright she sat up in bed.

The Song of Songs—the score—her treasure—her legacy—where was it? In the drawing-room secrétaire—buried, forgotten.

Not to have thought of it once!

Now there was no possibility of abiding by her promise. If she had kept her wits about her that momentous night, she would never have given it.

She had been at a loss for a pretext, and here she had a justification.

She did not experience the slightest pangs of conscience. It was a sacred cause that she was upholding.

By eight o'clock she was already on her way to her former home.

The sunny haze of the red August morning floated up to the violet-coloured heavens; sooty drops fell from the yellowing trees, and the wires of the electric trams sang their stormy song.

Lilly joined the group of people at the nearest stopping place, which from minute to minute waxed and dwindled. While waiting for a car to convey her to the distant west side, she looked about in all directions to see whether by chance Konrad was coming down the street.

In the car she sat with a newspaper held close to her face, and on the short path along the canal she slipped from tree to tree like a wild animal seeking cover.

At last she reached her house.

The porter, who was sweeping the front, greeted her with a shout of surprise. The green-grocer smiled a mischievous greeting up to her from his cellar door, and his two urchins, in whose mind Lilly was connected with sweets, hung to her skirt with happy little noises.

All this instantly produced a sensation of returning home.

Adele was still asleep. Why should she not be? She had nothing to do.

When she opened the door, she showed the greatest delight. She even wept great tears, and Lilly suddenly realised what she was losing in her.

Everything shone spick and span in the morning sunlight. Even the flowers had been kept watered.

The canary beat his wings by way of greeting, and Peter wanted to break the bars of his cage to reach Lilly's shoulder.

She did not know to whom or to what to turn first from sheer love, nor what question to ask first.

Three letters and two telegrams lay on the card tray.

The letters were in Richard's writing. The telegrams were directed to Adele and urgently inquired for Lilly's address.

But after sending these missives, Mr. Dehnicke, Adele informed her, had given up his affairs in Harzburg and returned to Berlin. He had inserted advertisements for her in the papers, and came every day at the usual hour to find out if they had met with success. Then he sat on his customary seat, very quiet, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes until the time for returning to his office.

"Did you tell him about Dr. Rennschmidt?"

"What do you think of me, Mrs. Czepanek? Do you suppose I don't know how to look out for my mistress's honour? But the best thing would be if you were to come back and behave as if nothing had happened. That's what all my ladies used to do."

Lilly asked her to fetch from the basement the smaller of the two leather trunks, explaining that she wished to take a few of her old possessions with her.

After Adele had swung herself out of the room sulking, Lilly gathered up Konrad's letters from the secret drawer in which she had hidden them, and then ran hastily to her large wardrobe, from which she pulled out all her dresses and threw them on the bed in order to select whatever might be of use to her.

At last the Song of Songs occurred to her.

She opened the secrétaire.

The score, which had dreamed away its aimless existence for years in the back part of the lowest drawer, had acquired a strange aspect.

The rubber band about it was sticky, and fell to bits when Lilly wanted to undo the roll.

The sheets glided from her hand and flew over the carpet one by one.

There they all lay—the arias and recitatives, the duos and orchestral interludes—mingled and confused, and on top the turtle dove solo for the clarionet, which she had sung with her mother while still a lisping babe.

She looked at the scattered leaves in dismay.

They had turned yellow and mouldy. Many of them were plastered with blood, her own blood, which had squirted from the knife wound her mother had inflicted, and covered large spots with black and reddish brown stains. Some of the stains had been eaten into holes, the work of the mice at Lischnitz.

So there it was—her Song of Songs.

Nevermore any hope. No rock of salvation for the future—no faithful Eckhardt in life's stress, and no guide to golden heights! A mere weather-beaten remnant, worn, though unused, honourable ballast which one drags along for unknown reasons—a light extinguished, a piece of wisdom without sense.

Shrugging her shoulders, she kneeled on the floor, and gathered up the thin rolls hastily, without regard for their order.

"I can arrange them some other time," she thought, though a faint doubt arose within her whether she ever would.

Adele came with the trunk. It had taken her an extraordinary length of time. She replied to Lilly's questions in a confused way, and glanced at the clock furtively.

She opened the trunk lid, and Lilly threw the score on the bottom.

The empty open trunk was like a mouth gaping for fodder. The clothes lay spread on the bed. Her shoes stood next to the washstand. Hats, veils, blouses, lace mantillas, silk petticoats—all waited and seemed to cry:

"Take me along."

For an instant Lilly closed her eyes and groaned, remembering the sacrifice, the only one, he demanded of her.

But it had to be.

Both his and her future depended on it.

"Mrs. Laue will hide them for me, and she can keep them afterwards," she thought.

She made her decision. Blindly she gathered up whatever her hands fell upon—in addition to her dresses the ivory toilet articles with the seven pointed coronet, the triple hand mirror, the powder box, the receipt for her furs in the storage house, and numberless little *objets de luxe*.

She did not forget her jewellery either.

"In case *he* needs some money," she thought.

She sent Adele to order a cab. This time again it was an eternity before she returned.

The porter helped carry the trunk down, and two hat boxes dangled in Adele's free hand.

One more caress of the canary's greyish green wings, one more kiss on the monkey's velvety snout, then the door closed behind her forever.

"Won't you leave an address?"

What a secretive air Adele wore!

"I will write to you, Adele, and sometime, I hope, you will come to me again."

Adele did not respond, but looked down the street expectantly.

A minute later Lilly, glancing from the hansom window as she was being driven along the canal, saw a taxicab whizz past from the opposite direction. In that second she recognised Richard seated inside.

Red as a lobster, his head inclined to one side, he stared ahead of him with wild, searching eyes at the house she had just left.

She hastily told the coachman to turn down a side street. She must not meet Richard until her fate had been decided before the world.

But in a few moments, her heart throbbing, she heard behind her the rattle and clatter that had just died down in the distance. It grew louder and louder.

The yellow wall of the taxicab shot by, turned about suddenly, and stopped. A man's voice called to Lilly's driver, and her cab was also brought to a stop.

Richard was standing close to her, holding the open door in his trembling hand.

"Where are you going?"

His voice shrilled in a feminine falsetto. His Adam's apple rose and fell convulsively over his high collar.

Lilly felt quite calm, quite equal to the situation.

He who had so long been her lord and master now seemed like a poor, helpless shadow.

"If you please, Richard, let me ride on," she said. "I took leave of you in my letter. I just came to fetch a few of my things, and now all's over between us. Why should we go on tormenting each other?"

"Come back!" he hissed.

"Why should I?"

"Come back, I say! You know where your home is. I won't let you stray about in the world any more. Heaven knows what may happen to you. Driver, turn back."

The coachman turned his russet face inquiringly to the lady in the hansom.

"I beg your pardon, Richard. I have the sole say as to this cab—and as to my future life, too. Just as you have had over your own."

"Stuff and nonsense! I suppose you're alluding to the American heiress. She can go to the devil for all I care. That's the way I've felt for some time. But you—*must—come—back. You—must—come—back. You—must—you—must*."

He grasped the hem of her skirt with both hands, as if to drag her from the carriage by her clothes.

"I beg you to come back—I can't sleep—I can't work—I'm so used to you. If I had married, I should have come to you directly after the wedding. Our relationship wouldn't have changed an iota. And everything in your apartment is just as you left it. You saw it. Adele says Peter won't eat, and Adele herself is worried. She says she simply can't do without you. I'll give you a life-long annuity of twenty—by God! thirty thousand marks a year. What's the difference? Mother hasn't anything against it. She sees how I take it. She knows I won't ever marry after all. She'll never do anything to you again. You can come to the office, too. You can use our carriage instead of the hired one. I'll have a telephone put up between your apartment and the stable. And if you want I'll buy an automobile a thousand times finer than this one."

That was the highest trump. No one could outbid an automobile. So he stopped to see the effect. Kneeling on the steps he leaned far into the hansom and stared into her face.

Lilly realised she could not free herself from him, unless he learned the truth.

She felt very sorry for him, but it had to be.

"Listen, Richard! What you offer doesn't count with me anymore. Because I love another man—who wants to give me much more than you."

"What! I'd like to know what sort of a young Vanderbilt he is!" he cried in jealous scorn. "Why, I never knew *that* side of your nature."

"He's not a young Vanderbilt, Richard. On the contrary, he's so poor he doesn't know where he'll get his bread from day to day. But I am engaged to him, and as his affianced I will have to ask you to stand out of my way."

His mouth gaped. His eyes grew large and round. He reeled back against the hindwheels of the taxicab.

"Go on!" Lilly cried to the coachman.

She leaned back in her seat, drawing a deep breath of relief, though with a faint consciousness of guilt, as if she had rid herself of her old lover too lightly.

Throughout the ride she heard back of her the chug-chug of a slow-moving automobile; and when she descended from her hansom, Richard descended from the taxicab, at a slight distance, though near enough for Lilly to catch the look in his eyes.

It was the look of a whipped dog.

As if someone were pursuing her, she ran up the four flights without concerning herself about the trunk. But a little while later the driver came panting up the stairs with it, apparently of his own accord.

When she held out the money to him, he refused it.

The gentleman downstairs, he said, had already paid for everything.

CHAPTER XX

It was the evening of the following day.

The carriage that was taking Lilly to the dreaded meeting stopped in front of the renowned Linden restaurant which has been the resort of elegant folk for years.

Although it was some time since Lilly had been there, she knew every stone of it.

She knew Albert, too, the tall, dignified porter, who stood in the doorway, and put his hand to his braided cap. It was he who had acted as the go-between for her and the handsome hussar of the guards.

With downcast eyes, pressing close to Konrad, she passed by him, hoping he no longer remembered her.

"This is Lilly, uncle."

An old bow-legged gentleman, slightly under medium size in an ill-fitting jacket and crumpled collar, came shambling out of a back room, and held out a broad, fleshy hand, the brown skin of which played loosely over his bones like a large glove.

Lilly threw a timid glance of scrutiny at the all-powerful person, whom she had pictured to herself as a commanding yet complaisant thunderer. In reality he was a tottering, rotund, somewhat common-looking gnome.

When she told herself that her conduct now and during the next hour would decide Konrad's and her own future, the old miserable timidity, which had not troubled her for some time past, began to paralyse her muscles and turned her into a doll, which smiled inanely and could not tell its own name.

But the old uncle also seemed to have lost his power of speech.

He looked her up and down repeatedly and well-nigh forgot to invite her to enter the back room.

As with everything else about the place Lilly was familiar with this back room, its pressed leather walls, its red silk hangings, and the blue oriental rugs over the high-armed sofa.

In the period when Richard was still possessed of the ambition to belong to the aristocracy of high livers, she had spent many a mad hour there late at night with him and his chance friends.

An immaculate waiter helped her off with her brocade jacket and lace mantilla, and looked at her the while as if to say:

"I ought to know you."

Oh, that was a moment of agony.

The uncle, who had not ceased furtively to cast awed yet sullen glances at Lilly, pulled himself together and said:

"Well, let's have a cosy time together, children. Nice and pleasant, eh?"

Lilly inclined her head.

Her gesture was stiff enough apparently to increase the bow-legged old gentleman's respect. He seemed to be at a loss, and tramped about the room, played with the gold knobs which hung as a charm from his watch pocket, and two or three times nodded his solemn appreciation to Konrad.

They seated themselves at the gleaming white table, resplendent with flowers and cut glass.

About the bronze lamp—Lilly remembered it with its claws and slim lily design—hung a veil of violet orchids, which had surely cost an enormous sum.

He knew how to live, the old untidy rogue. One had to admit that.

Lilly saw her reflection in the mirror opposite her seat. It was reassuringly aristocratic.

She had chosen a pleated dress of black Liberty silk with a waist of Chantilly lace, which despite its costliness lay in simple lines of grace about her breast and arms.

Unsuspecting spirits might believe that a similar costume was to be had everywhere from San Francisco to St. Petersburg, from Cape Town to Christiania for two hundred marks.

She had wisely refrained from wearing any jewellery, except the thin gold chain which she was wont to wear next to her skin. It encircled her high collar in maidenly modesty.

She looked like a young noblewoman who has been held in strict seclusion, and who is taking her first look into the great world with shy, inquiring eyes.

His uncle had assigned the seat on her right side to Konrad, and kept the place nearest the door for himself.

The instant he took his seat at table he began to feel somewhat in his element.

He uttered hoarse ejaculations and gave orders and was dissatisfied with everything.

"See here, boy," he said to the waiter, who was placing the *hors-d'œuvres* on the table, "do you call that the right kind of a carafe for port wine? Don't you know that if port wine doesn't sparkle in the carafe, it takes away your thirst?"

The waiter, intimidated by his snarling, wanted to go off in search of another carafe, but Mr. Rennschmidt declared he could not wait, he needed a "starter."

"I'm still a little constrained," he said apologetically. "I'm not accustomed to associating with such beautiful and ungracious ladies."

Lilly felt a prick at her heart.

She met a reproachful look from her lover, which seemed to say:

"You mustn't be so dumb. You must be agreeable to him."

In the same mute language Lilly humbly implored his forgiveness.

"I can't. You speak for me."

In his anxiety Konrad began to converse as if he had been paid for entertaining them. He described the collection of antiques in his uncle's castle on the Rhine, touched upon the competition of the Americans, and, passing on to the subject of art in Italy, discussed the harmful effects of the Lex Pacca, and goodness knows what else.

It was a highly illuminating little discourse, which his uncle seemed to follow with moderate interest, while squinting at Lilly and smacking his lips from time to time over a piece of canned tunny. Then Mr. Rennschmidt said:

"All very true and edifying, my son. But couldn't you also impart some valuable information as to the state of the whiskey in this place?"

Konrad jumped up to pull the bell rope, but his uncle restrained him.

"Stop—stop—stop. This is my affair.... Here's the port for you.... After all a beautiful woman is a beautiful woman, even if she belongs to others. Here's to you, beautiful woman."

That sounded like mockery. Did he wish to make sport of her before repulsing her?

"In fact," he continued, addressing Lilly, "permit me to congratulate you. You've already worked a perceptible change in him. I see he already dances beautifully to your tune, eh?"

Whether or no, she had to say something in reply.

"I don't play tunes, and he doesn't dance," she said, making a mighty effort to pull herself together. "We're not free enough for that."

"Aha, there's one straight from the shoulder for me," he laughed, but his laugh sounded resentful.

"Lilly didn't mean any harm," Konrad interjected, coming to her rescue. "And really, we are not having an easy time of it. If Lilly hadn't helped me every day with her sweet comprehension, I don't think my strength would have held out."

"All very well and good—or—or, or all very deplorable. But your old uncle hasn't gotten even a look from her—as advance payment on our future relationship."

"Oh, if that's all," thought Lilly.

And raising her glass to touch his, she tried to thank him for his having come around with a little coquettish shamefaced smile.

It filled him with evident satisfaction. He twisted his pointed beard and ogled her confidentially with his leering eyes as if to extract from her a sign of secret understanding.

"Thank goodness! Maybe he's not so dreadful after all," she thought. She drew a breath of relief as she felt the chains of her embarrassment loosening a bit.

When the waiter returned, a grave discussion arose between him and Mr. Rennschmidt as to the brands of whiskey the hotel had to offer. It was a long parley and debate, ending in a call for the hotel-keeper himself, who went down into the cellar to hunt up a bottle he thought he must have somewhere with the label of a certain famous house and the date of a certain famous year.

At length Mr. Rennschmidt was ready again to bestow his attention upon his beautiful niece to be.

"I'm a sort of barnswallow. I built my nest of mud and such stuff. I traded in guano, train-oil, Australian blennies, pitch, and other more or less unclean things. So you can't blame me for wishing to recuperate by devoting myself to appetizing objects, such as you, my ungracious lady. All I wish is a little attention in return."

"Oh dear," thought Lilly. "I'll be impertinent for once." So she said: "Mr. Rennschmidt, you know I'm sitting here like a poor, trembling student going up for the examinations. I beg of you"—she raised her clasped hands—"don't play with me like a cat with a mouse."

She had struck the right note.

"Is she opening her mouth at last?" he cried beaming. "And she has a wonderful little snout, Konrad, one of those mice snouts with long teeth, in which the upper lip says to the lower lip, 'If you don't come and kiss, I'll run away.' Isn't it so, Konrad, you stupid fellow, eh?"

Lilly had to laugh heartily, and the *entente cordiale* was finally concluded.

And for a moment Konrad's dear tired face brightened with a smile of reassurance which expanded her heart as with a heaven-sent reward. She loved him so dearly she could have thrown herself at his uncle's feet for his sake. With a rising sense of triumph she thought:

"*Now* he shall see how agreeable I can be to that old horror."

And indeed to make herself agreeable proved to be not so very excessive a task. When she looked at the old man with his round, crumpled roguish face, his darting, sly little grey eyes, and the fine, wavy, snow-white diplomat's wig—it actually was a wig, sharply defined on his forehead and brushed forward into locks over his ears—she felt more and more strongly that he was an old acquaintance with whom she had many a time played pranks and to whom the recollection of those pranks secretly bound her.

Yet, surely, she had never met him before.

Despite his proletarian exterior his assured manner breathed an air of gentlemanliness. And the way he constructed the menu was really wonderful. The sixty-eight-year-old Steinbergerkabinett, which looked like amber-coloured oil when he poured it into the Rhine wine glasses, suited the blue trout as perfectly as if it were its native element. And the next course, the sweetbread patties *à la Montgelas*, was worthy of what had gone before. Neither Richard nor any member of the crew was so skilled in the epicurean art as he.

If only he had not kept tossing off one glass of whiskey after the other.

"My brain has been dulled by long money-making, like a nail hammered on cast-iron," he said in self-justification. "I must whet it every now and then, or else it'll get as dull as the edge of a tombstone."

When the Roman punch was served, a brief but hot discussion arose as to the merits of certain American drinks from which Lilly, with her knowledge of the whole range of beverages, came out with flying colours. She even knew accurately the ingredients of Mr. Rennschmidt's favourite mixture, the "South Sea bowl," a fiery concoction of sherry, cognac, angostura bitters, the yolks of eggs, and Château d'Yquem—in case of emergency Moselle might be used. She ventured to ask, might she not prepare the rare mixture for him after dinner; she could do it so expertly that he would have to admit he had not drunk anything more delicious between Singapore and Melbourne.

Konrad, who had evidently never suspected her talents in this line, listened to her with an astonishment which filled her with pride.

She sent him one furtive look after another, which asked:

"Are you satisfied? Am I pleasant enough to him?"

But he failed somehow to respond. He remained silent and abstracted, and sometimes he seemed to be remote from the company.

"Dream on," she thought blissfully. "*I* will look out for our happiness."

The friendship between her and the old man waxed apace.

By the time the wild duck came and with it the glowing Burgundy, which slipped down their throats like caressing flames, she had already been calling him uncle.

And he for his part, repeatedly declared that he was "totally wrapped up in his dear, dear little Lilly."

So this was the test, the cruel test, from which she had thought there was no concealment, no escape, the test that would bare her, dissect her, and turn her soul inside out.

She could scarcely contain herself when she thought of it.

Yes, yes. There sat that awful danger, whose moneybags held victory or defeat—a little monster grown tame, who stroked her fingers with his horrid wrinkled hands, and fawned on her for a crumb of her favour.

He was really amusing, especially when he told jokes.

What a lot of gossip from the colonies!

She had not heard so many anecdotes in a whole year.

For example there was the story of the German governor, Mr. Von So and So—she had met him once at Uhl's. He went to his post with his suite, consisting of his secretary, his valet, and his cook. Six months afterwards the cook went to him and said: "Governor, it's so and so far." He gave her two thousand marks and said: "But be sure and hold your tongue." Then she went to the

secretary and said: "Mr. Müller, it's so and so far." He gave her three hundred marks and said: "But be sure and hold your tongue." Then she went to the valet and said: "John, it's so and so far. We can get married." Three months afterward the valet went to the governor and said: "Your Excellency, that woman did us all. The brat's a nigger."

And many another story he told of like nature.

She had to hold her sides with laughter.

"Laugh, Konrad, darling, laugh."

He smiled, but his eyes remained serious, and his forehead tense.

When the champagne was brought they drank "fellowship."

It was horrible to kiss those thick, greedy old lips, but their future happiness demanded it.

Konrad, too, was to get a kiss. But he refused it. Worse still, he wanted to prohibit her drinking.

"She isn't careful enough," he muttered. "Please, uncle, don't give her so much. We have never drunk so much."

But they both laughed at him.

"He's always been a country yokel," the old man teased, "and has never known what's good. It's too bad for you to throw yourself away on him, Lilly dear. You ought to take a man like me. Not a booby in corduroy. He's a regular funeral torch."

But on this subject Lilly brooked no teasing.

"You let my little Konni alone, you old fright. You'd better tell your old chestnuts. Come along! Forward, march!"

No, she would not permit a word against her sweet little Konni.

The uncle fell to telling his stories again.

Now they were anecdotes in pigeon-English, that lingo which the Chinese and other interesting personages in the Far East use as a means of communication with the white sahibs. "Tom and Paddy in the Tea House," "The Virtuous Miss Laura in Macao," "The Guide and the Bayadere," each received a good box on the ear.

"But Konni ought not to hear any more of this, uncle. I don't want my Konni to be spoiled for me."

So she put her left ear close to the old gentleman's lips, and made a "whispering cave" with him, as was the wont of members of the "crew" when they flirted too outrageously or misbehaved in other ways.

Anyone who had thought she was tongue-tied or unable to repay like with like would have been sadly mistaken. The general's club jokes suffered from no lack of juiciness, and what she had learned from the "crew" was certainly of no mean parentage.

It was worth while to exert an extra effort for so appreciative an audience as "uncle." But Konrad, the innocent, had to submit to having his ears stuffed with the cotton batting upon which the calville apples had been served.

After the coffee the old man demanded that Lilly make good her promise and prepare the South Sea bowl. He was sure her assertion had been a mere idle boast.

No need to taunt her a second time.

All sorts of bottles were called into requisition, besides the sherry and the angostura, an old sweet Yquem. It was really a pity to put it to such uses, so Mr. Rennschmidt suggested taking a glass or two on the side.

To be sure the eggs broke at the wrong place and spilled over her gown and the carpet. But that made no difference; it only added to the pleasure. At any rate, the dear old uncle was paying for everything.

To compensate, the flame of the alcohol lamp leapt in the air all the more wildly—up to the orchids—up to the sky—it would have delighted her to drink in the tongues of fire the way witches do.

"Your luck, Konni—*our* luck, Konni!"

"Don't drink," she heard his voice. It was harsher than usual, and strange in its severity.

"Country yokel," she laughed, thrusting out her tongue at him.

"Don't drink," the voice admonished a second time. "You are not used to drinking."

She not used to drinking? How dared he say such a thing? That was questioning her honour. Yes, it was questioning her honour.

"How do you know what I'm used to?... I'm used to quite different things. I've sat on this very seat I'm sitting in more than once—more than ten times—and have drunk much, much more."

"Dear heart, think of what you're saying. It isn't true."

His voice once more sounded soft and gentle, as if he were reproving a naughty child.

Such a shame. It was enough to make one cry.

"How can you say it is not true? Do you think I'm a liar? Do you think I'm not familiar with such fashionable places as this? Pshaw! Shall I prove it to you? Very well. I can. I believe you'll find my name on the base of this lamp—Lilly Czepanek—Lilly Czepanek. Just look for it, look for it!"

He started to his feet and fixed his eyes upon the mirror-like surface defaced by a jumble of characters scratched on it.

But he could not find the L. C. for which he was looking. She had to come to his assistance. Not here.—Not there. The letters swam before her eyes. She had to try to catch them like the gold fish in her aquarium.

Aha! There it was. There it was! L. v. M., with the coronet above. For at that time she had still dared to use the prohibited name for an occasional adornment.

"Now you see I was right, Konni. Now you will let me drink, won't you. Here's to you, you sweet little yokel."

He was so struck by this proof that he sank back in his chair and said not a word.

But the uncle and she continued to drink and laugh at him.

When she threw a look into the mirror, she saw as through a billowy haze a red swollen face with rumpled hair under a hat tilted back on the head and two deep flabby furrows running from her mouth to her chin.

This caused her some disquiet. But she had no time to heed her feeling because that unspeakable old uncle had a new joke on the carpet.

"Do you know, Lilly dear, the Chinese way of singing the Lorelei?"

Before she had even heard a syllable she burst out into a wild laugh.

He put one of his bowed legs over the other, pretending it was a Chinese banjo, and played a prelude on the sole of his foot: "Tink-a-tink-a-tink." Then he began in a nasal, croaking, gurgling voice, drawing out his l's endlessly:

> O my belong too much sorry,
> And can me no savy, what kind;
> Have got one olo piccy story
> No won't she go outside my mind.

When he came to the second verse,

> Dat night belang dark and colo,

he tore his wig from his head to heighten the effect; and he now actually looked the very image of an old, nodding "Chinee," with his shiny pate and his bright slanting slits of eyes.

It was a fascinating, an overpowering spectacle.

Never in her life, not even on the professional stage, had she seen a clown's performance so provocative of side-splitting laughter.

She would have died of envy had she not been Lilly Czepanek, the famous impersonator, who when the spirit moved her, needed but to open her mouth to evoke a storm of applause.

Her matchless repertoire had lain fallow too long. But the beautiful Otéro had not yet grown old, Tortajada still set your senses a-whirl with her dancing, and Matchiche had just come into fashion.

Lilly merely had to shove her hat a little further back on her head and lift her black dress—even a Saharet would have had no cause to be ashamed of the silk petticoat she had brought in her trunk—and then off she could go.

And off she went.

Like a whirlwind over the carpet slippery with the yolks of eggs.

"Heigh-ho—olé—olé.

"You must shout olé and clap your hands.

"Olé—é—é!"

The uncle bawled. The floor rocked to and fro in long waves. The lamps and the mirror danced along. All hell seemed to be let loose.

"Do shout, Konni,—olé—don't be so downcast. Olé."

"Uncle, you have this on *your* conscience!"

What did he mean by that?

Why did he burst into sobs?

Why was he standing there white as chalk?

"Olé—Olé—é—é—é."

CHAPTER XXI

It was nearly noon when Lilly woke in a glow of happiness.

The uncle won over—the last obstacle removed—the future lying before her, a land of blossoms and golden fruits.

What a farce and a lark the dreaded examination had been! What a jumping-jack, what a buffoon he was, that keen, penetrating man of the world, who had probably ground women's destinies as he would munch betel nuts.

When she tried to review the events of the evening before, and arrange them in sequence, it came to her with a slight sense of oppression that at the end everything had resolved itself into a fog, shot with light and echoing with song and laughter, just as had happened yonder—in that other life, when she had romped wildly with Richard and the "crew."

She could not puzzle out how she had mounted the steps and reached her room.

As the fog lifted a little, she saw peering out of it a pale, set face, with an expression of pained surprise; she heard an outcry that sounded like a sob or a groan, and saw herself sobbing next to someone who was kneeling, who pushed her away with his hands.

Had that happened?

Had she dreamt it?

Why, she had sung and danced so beautifully, she had disclosed her greatest talents. Could they by any possibility have displeased him? Had she gone too far in her self-abandonment?

Her anxiety waxed.

She jumped out of bed and dressed herself, possessed by one thought: "To go to him!"

At twelve o'clock the door-bell rang.

It was, it must be he!

But when she hurried to the door to throw herself into his arms with a cry of relief, she found, not him, but his uncle, who stood twirling his hat in his horrid fingers like a petitioner, and looked up at her with an oily, wry smile, most obnoxious to her.

"Is the examination to begin again?" The question rose in her mind. "Or is it just going to begin?"

Her welcome died on her lips.

Without speaking she let him in. She experienced a sickish sensation of vacancy and incorporeality, as if she might melt through the wall into her room.

The old gentleman did not wait for her to open the door to the "best room," but opened it himself, and walked in, as if he were an old acquaintance.

"Where is Konrad?"

"Konrad?" With his little finger he scratched the silk band of his wig. "Oh, thereby hangs a tale." He drew out his watch with the clinking gold chain, and studied the dial. "It is just ten minutes after twelve. I suppose by now he's on his way to the station. Yes, he must be."

"Is—he—going—away?" she asked, her breath beginning to fail.

"Yes, yes, he's going to take a trip. Yes, last night—hm—last night we talked it over. So now he's going to take a little trip."

"That's absurd," she thought. "How can he go away without me?" But she checked herself, and entering into the game, asked with apparent nonchalance, "Where's he off to so suddenly?"

"Oh, just a little trip. Not worth talking about. A favourable opening presented itself. There happened to be a double cabin vacant on the steamer leaving from—thingumbob—well, never mind from where—outside cabin, you know—on the promenade deck—the best situation, you know—the water doesn't splash in and there's plenty of air—and air's what you always want, especially during those four days on the Red Sea."

Then it was true. Her suspicions on awakening were being verified more swiftly than she had

thought they would be. It was only the beginning of the test of her character and intentions.

"What do people do in the Red Sea, uncle?" she asked with her most innocent smile.

"What do people do in the Red Sea, child? Four thousand years ago the ancient Hebrews probably asked the same question. And everybody still asks it when he melts into perspiration there. But that's the only way of going to India. And I want to go back to India once again. I'm tired of trotting about on red brick pavements. So I persuaded him to come along for a little while —you know he's overworked; you'll admit that. I think it's the best thing to do in such cases, you see."

Lilly felt a lump in her throat, as if all the gold knobs on his watch chain were choking her.

"Rather a poor joke," she thought, "but goodness knows what he means by it."

Whether she would or no, she had to keep up the game.

"Konrad ought to have been polite enough to come and say good-by," she replied, pouting a bit, as if he were about to start off on a trip to Dresden or Potsdam.

"Why, he wanted to, child; of course he did. But I said to him: 'You see, my boy,' I said, 'it always means such dreadful excitement. It's enough to give you an apoplectic stroke.' He agreed, and asked me to arrange matters with you."

"Well then, let us arrange matters," she answered with the condescending smile that the farce, whatever its nature, merited.

"He is probably down below in a cab waiting for a signal," she thought.

The old gentleman put his stylish Panama beside him on the floor, leaned his short body back against Mrs. Laue's plush upholstery, and tried to assume an expression of sympathy and grief.

The old clown!

"If it were my affair, little one," he began, "I frankly confess I've gone crazy over you. Wrapped up, as I said yesterday. I know women from one end of the world to the other, and it is as clear as cocoanut oil to me: you're first rate stuff. You're fine as silk. But there are people who take themselves seriously and have great illusions, don't you know? People utterly without an idea that a human being is a human being, people who think they're something extra, and want life to dish up extra tit-bits to them. Oh, those people, I tell you, those people! That's the way the great disappointments come about—and reproaches—and despair—and tearing out your hair. He came near giving me a thrashing last night."

"Whom are you talking about?" Lilly asked, growing more and more fearful.

"As if I had led you into overshooting the mark! No, indeed. Nothing of the sort. I don't do such things. I don't set man-traps. And I told him so ten times over. But the misfortune is, we understood each other too well. We both belong to the same business. We're like two old shipmates."

"What do you mean by 'we both'? You and I?" Lilly asked with frigid astonishment in her tone.

"Yes, you and I, my child. Don't fall overboard. You and I. To be sure, you're a splendid beauty of twenty-five and I'm an old fool of sixty. But you and I have gone through the same mill. What need to explain to you at length? Have you ever searched for diamonds? I don't mean at a jeweller's—that you probably have. Well, a diamond lies in hard rock, in funnels, in so-called blue ground. If you come upon a blue ground funnel, you can imagine what it's like. There you squat. I went digging for diamonds once—with twenty men—day and night—for weeks and weeks. The blue ground was there, oh, indeed, it was, but the diamonds had been washed away. Do you see what I'm driving at? The fine ground is still in both of us, but what actually makes it fine, the devil has already extracted."

"Why are you saying all this to me?" Lilly asked. Tears were rising to her eyes from sheer perplexity, because what he said could not possibly have anything to do with the great test.

"I'll tell you, little girl. There are people who think there's no going back on their word. They have to swallow whatever they once put into their mouths. They won't spit it out even if it is a strychnine pill. Now *I*, on the other hand, think that nobody need consciously plunge into misfortune. Neither you nor he. And since it's best to wash the wool directly on the sheep's body, I came to you to make a little proposition. You see, here's a check book You're familiar with check books, I'm sure. On the right side are printed ciphers from five hundred up to—you can see for yourself. All the ciphers that make the amount higher than the sum written on the check, are cut off to keep little swindlers from cheating a man out of a hundred thousand marks with one stroke of the pen. Now look. This check is dated and signed. All that's missing is the sum, because I should never permit myself to offer you a certain amount. I leave it to you to specify what you think you need for a decent living in the future."

He tore a check from the book and laid it on the table in front of her.

"Thank heaven," thought Lilly, "all my tremours were needless."

It was a clumsy trap. Even a blind man must see that his procedure was nothing more than a test

of her disinterestedness.

So, instead of throwing the old man out of doors—which she should have and would have done, had he proffered the check in all seriousness—she smiled and took the check from the table, and methodically tore it into bits, and with the middle finger of her right hand flicked one little pile of them after the other into his face.

He jerked about uneasily in his chair.

"Permit me," he said, "permit me—"

"By no means—I will *not* permit such vile jokes, uncle."

"But you are rejecting a fortune, child. Consider—we've torn you from your moorings. We've thrown you, as it were, on the street. Upon us rests the responsibility of seeing to it that you are not driven to ruin. And if you think that by accepting the check you are lowering yourself in Konrad's eyes, I can swear to you he doesn't know a thing about it. And he never will, I'll swear to that also."

She merely smiled.

His little blinking eyes turned bright and staring. Suddenly there was a cold threat in their look.

"Or—perhaps you intend to hold the boy to his promise and mean to twist his pledge into a halter about his neck? Is that the sort you are—eh?"

"No, I'm not that sort."

Her smile flitted past him and went to meet her beloved, who must soon, very soon, come storming up the stairs. Surely he could not endure waiting down there in the cab so long.

"His word is in his own keeping. He never gave me a pledge. Even if he wanted to, I should never have accepted it. And even if what you said is true, he could go on his trip quite calmly—and return quite calmly. I would never attempt to meet him or reach him by letter, or remind him of what he is to me and will continue to be as long as I live. But I know it is *not* true. He loves me, and I love him. And take care, uncle, not to play such low tricks with his future wife as to offer blank checks and the like. If I were to tell him about it, you'd all of a sudden find you're a lonely old man who can leave his money to a cat and dog asylum."

Now he must see what a blunder he had committed. His mistake annoyed him so that he jumped from his seat with a muttered "Pshaw!" and tramped about the room playing with his watch charm, and murmuring two or three times something like "a hangman's job."

But she probably misunderstood him.

Finally he seemed to have reached a decision.

He stopped close to her, laid his disgusting hands on her shoulders, and said:

"Listen, my dear, sweet little girl. We can't part without arriving at a conclusion. If I weren't such a cursed mangy old pariah-dog, and if over and above this, I didn't have to be considerate of the boy's feelings, the matter would be perfectly simple. I should say: 'Little one, if you want to, come let's go to the nearest magistrate. But hurry, I haven't much time to lose.' Don't stare at me so. Yes, that's what I mean—with *me*—with me. You wouldn't need to regret it either. As for Konrad, see here, you must really say so to yourself—it won't do—we shouldn't hit it off—it would be harnessing before and aft. Because he is a rising man. He wants to climb to the top. He is still blessed with faith and you no longer possess it. Too early in life you tumbled into the great meat-chopping machine, which finally converts us all into complacent wormy mush. You yourself wouldn't feel happy. You wouldn't be able to keep pace. You would lie on him a lifeless cargo, and be conscious of it, too. I'm not laying so much stress on last night's eye-opener. It's not the appearance of a coast line that counts. It doesn't matter whether it's covered with palms or sand. The important thing is the interior. And in the interior I see steppes—scorched—waste-land—no birds flying across it—a desert where confidence will not strike root. Crawl into whatever shelter life offers you, little one. Cling to those who brought you to the pass you are in. But let the boy go. He's not meant for you. Be frank, didn't you say so to yourself long ago?"

So that's what it was!

No test—

The end. The end.

Lilly stared into space. She seemed to hear a tread dying away—a step lower, another step, another step, and another—growing fainter—ever fainter—as when Konrad had slipped away from her at dawn.

But this time they would never return!

She felt a slight gnawing disenchantment creep about her heart—nothing more. The worst would come later, she knew from of old.

Then she saw herself dancing and yodeling and telling hoggish jokes with her hat tilted to one side and her petticoats raised to her knees—a drunken wench.

She of the "lofty spirit" and "head divine,"—a drunken wench, not a whit better.

Now she knew why he had stood there white as chalk, why that sob of distress had burst from his lips.

And the feeling that poured over her in that second like a stream of boiling water was compounded as much of pity for Konrad as of shame of herself.

"How does he bear it?" she faltered.

"You can imagine how," he replied, "but I think I can pull him through it."

"Uncle—I didn't *mean* to!" she cried with a great sob.

"I know, child, I know. He told me everything."

For an instant wounded pride flared up within her. She stopped, picked up a few of the scattered bits of paper, and held them out to him in the hollow of her hand.

"And you dared to offer me this?"

"Why, what was I to do, child? And what *will* I do with you?"

"Bah!"

She struck at him with both hands; but the next instant threw her arms about his neck, and wept on his shoulder. That was the place perhaps on which Konrad's tearful face had also rested the night before.

Mr. Rennschmidt began to speak again. He made various proposals for her future. He would help her begin a new life, would give her the means for cultivating her great talent for the stage.

But she shook her head at each of his suggestions.

"Too late, uncle. Waste-land, you yourself said, where confidence will not strike root. I might aspire to music-hall fame. But to be quite frank, that wouldn't pay me."

"The damned curs!" he hissed.

"What curs?"

"You know."

She reflected as to whom he could possibly mean.

"There was really only one," she observed. "Oh, yes, and another—and then one more. And later there were two besides, but they don't count."

"It seems to me that's quite enough, little girl."

He stroked her cheeks, smiling kindly, and she did not find his fingers so disgusting.

She even had to smile in response, though she fell directly to crying again.

Mr. Rennschmidt prepared to take leave. She clung to his shoulder; she did not want to let him go. He was the last bridge that joined her departing vessel with the land of happiness.

"What message shall I take to him?" he asked.

She drew herself up. Her eyes widened. She wanted to pour out all her grief. Her squandered love sought for words which would carry it to him purged and sanctified.

But she found none.

She looked about the room as if help must come from some quarter. The pictures of the ancient actors smiled upon her. Those who had once been so eloquent had become dumb, dumb as her own soul. The framed lamp shade greeted her as if the future she had to pass at Mrs. Laue's side was greeting her.

"I don't know what to say," she faltered. Then something occurred to her after all. "Please ask him—please ask him—why he himself didn't come to say good-by. I know him. He is not a coward."

Mr. Rennschmidt made his queerest face.

"Since you're so remarkably sensible, child, I'll tell you. Of *course* he wanted to come and say good-by. I even told him I'd try to drag you to the station."

Without an instant's reflection she made a dash for her hat.

"Stop!"

He had laid his hand on her arm.

The little fat figure grew taller.

"You will *not* go."

"What! Konni is waiting for me—Konni wants to speak to me—and I am *not* to go?"

"You—*will—not—go,* I tell you. If you're the brave girl I took you to be, you will not nullify the sacrifice you're making. You can reckon upon it, if he sees you again, you'll both remain hanging on each other."

Her hat slipped from her hand.

"Then—tell him—I'll love him—forever—forever—he'll be my last thought on earth—and—and—I don't know what else to say."

He left the room without a word.

Then she collapsed.

CHAPTER XXII

The world went its way, calmly, gaily, busily, as if nothing had occurred, as if no lost happiness were tossing about on the sea of life, disappearing farther and farther in the distance; as if no human being had been thrown into a corner to crouch there and stare at the ground helplessly with dimmed eyes.

Mrs. Laue was pasting pressed flowers; the fried potatoes were sizzling in fat, the lamp in the hall was smoking, and the poor people's odour greeted all who entered its realm.

Lilly did not cry her heart out of her body as when she had been expelled from Lischnitz; she did not sink into a state of apathetic brooding, nor wrestle desperately with fate.

All she felt was a dim void stretching endlessly before her, broken now and again by a sharp outcry like that of an animal bereft of its mate; a sense of faint-hearted acquiescence, a consciousness of inevitable imprisonment, of a fearful descent into dark depths, of a dismal death, lacking strength and dignity.

Between the present and the future, the sort of future that beckoned to her from every street, rose the railing of the bridge she had tried to climb after seeing "Rosmersholm." And when she stared into space with tearless eyes, she saw far below the black, purple-patched water rolling idly along, and heard the iron rail clink under her sole.

This clinking became stronger, and turned into an accompaniment of everything that came and went during the uneventful days.

It drilled her brain, hammered at her temples, and tingled in every pore of her body.

There was a text to the miserable melody.

The text was: "To die!"

Well, then, to die!

What could be simpler? And what more compelling?

But not to-day. To-morrow perchance, or day after to-morrow.

Something might still happen. A letter might arrive, or even he himself. Or if neither of these contingencies came to pass—who could tell what miracle fate held in readiness for the morrow?

To let hour after hour of one additional day pass in the same melancholy monotony.

One evening, a week after Konrad's sudden departure, it happened that Mrs. Laue entered the best room at an unusual time with an emphatic manner, and said: "Now, Lilly dear, you cannot go on the same way. If you were to cry, I shouldn't say anything. But *this* way you'll never come back to reason. There's only one sane and natural thing for you to do, return to your Mr. Dehnicke. If he had an inkling of how things are with you, he would have come to fetch you long ago. So you'll either sit right down and write him a nice letter, or to-morrow morning I'll give up my work and go to see him in his office. I'll get my expenses back."

Lilly felt violently impelled to drive the old woman out of the room, but she had grown too discouraged to do more than turn away in impotent repugnance.

"I haven't much time, I must say," continued Mrs. Laue. "I have to complete the dozen before going to bed. But you can make up your mind to one thing: if he's not here by ten o'clock to-morrow morning, he'll come at twelve at the very latest, because by that time I myself will have gone for him."

Lilly laughed sadly in scorn. So that was the way the miracle looked which fate held in readiness for the morrow.

Should she submit all over again to a man's puny supremacy? Crawl back into the cowardly comfort of perfumed imprisonment? Vegetate among inane festivities, in a sort of doze, or walk the streets when driven by disgust and boredom?

She would not have the force to resist the next day when he came. She knew it well. Richard needed merely to look at her once with that whipped-dog expression which was entirely new to her in him. The very thought of it filled her with humiliating softness. Something was already stirring within her that would compel her to throw her arms about his neck and cry on his shoulder.

It was really not worth while to bide the morrow for so pitiful a reward.

So—she would die—that very day!

That very day.

It came to her like a cup of intoxication.

With clasped hands she ran about the room weeping, rejoicing.

She would be a heroine like Isolde, a martyr to her love.

And the railing of the bridge was waiting. How it would quiver and hum when she climbed on it.

Then the buzzing in her head grew louder. The air was filled with a medley of tones. The walls re-echoed with the refrain—the noise on the streets, the mighty roar of the city—everything sang:

"Die—die—die."

She tore off her gown and dressed to go out.

At first she thought of wearing one of her two ill-fitting dresses, because they had come from Konrad, but she could not prevail upon herself to do so.

"Die in beauty," Hedda Gabler had said.

"Oh, if only I had his picture," thought Lilly, "so that I could take one last look at his eyes."

But all she had from him were his letters and a few poems. They were to accompany her on her last walk.

They were lying at the bottom of the leather trunk which was still hidden in Mrs. Laue's hole of a room, although the need for concealment was past.

When she rummaged for the little packages among the contents of the trunk she came by chance upon the old score of the Song of Songs.

She tenderly regarded the yellow stained roll.

She was no longer angry with her Song of Songs or scorned it, as she had on that unfortunate morning when she had gone to her former home to break her promise to Konrad.

Once again it became a dear, valuable possession, though neither a monitor, nor worker of miracles, nor a sanctuary. It still was an old remnant, but one to be kissed and petted and cried over, because a part of her own life clung to it.

And some of her blood also.

There were the dark stains.

On the day of her going forth they had fallen upon it and on the day of her coming home, the deep waters would wash them away.

Then her mind glided past the score back into the hazy past.

Mists seemed to be lifting and curtains to be drawn aside, and her way seemed to lie behind her like a sharply defined band.

She had been weak. And stupid. And had never considered her own interests. Every man that had entered her life had done with her what he would. She had never closed the doors of her soul, never shown her teeth, never given free play to the power of her beauty; but had always been ready to serve others, to love them, and make the best of everything.

As thanks she had been persecuted and beaten and dragged in the mud her life long. Even the one man who had esteemed her had gone away without saying good-by.

"But," she thought, "I have never hated a single one of them, and I have always had the right to regard myself as above the common, however I have suffered. However I have sinned. And the end was a heaven-sent gift."

Did it not seem as if this Song of Songs, which lay there debased, stained, decayed, like her own life, had in truth hovered over her, blessing her and granting her absolution from her sins, just as in her early dreams and just as in her rhapsodies to Konrad during that hour of blissful self-surrender?

"Yes, you shall come along!" she said. "You shall die when I die."

She carefully rolled and wrapped up the crumbling sheets.

Then she found the letters in the trunk, read them once, and several times again—but she did not

understand what she was reading.

It was nearly twelve o'clock when she softly closed the tall door behind her.

Mrs. Laue was still asleep.

Nobody met her on the stairs, and she managed to leave the house without being seen.

Since her flight to Konrad she had not been alone on the street at midnight.

The two long rows of house fronts dipped in garish light—the trolley poles sparking and flashing between—silent, shadowy figures—it was all as if she were looking upon it for the first time.

An oppressive fear beset her.

Her legs felt numb as if wooden stilts had been screwed to them upon which she must hasten on without hesitating or stopping, whether she would or no. And her heels rapped on the pavement, carrying her on, irresistibly nearer and nearer to her goal.

At the approach of each passerby she was impelled to hide herself, in the belief that her appearance betrayed her intentions.

So she chose dark side streets which were being paved and where withering linden trees scattered rain drops.

Her way led past long rows of brick buildings inhospitably set behind dark garden walls, past barns and factories.

And her heels kept rapping: "Tap—tap—tap," as if she were wearing a pedometer which accurately registered every inch shortening her course.

She began to think of roundabout ways of reaching her bridge.

But she cast the temptation from her.

"If it were done, 'twere well it were done quickly," she had read somewhere.

Forward with clenched teeth!

The Engelbecken lay dark and deserted. Yellow lights glinted on the invisible waters.

"It would be easier here," she thought, breathless from the oppression at her heart, and stepped nearer, on the grassy slope.

But she recoiled with a shudder.

It had to be the bridge on the northwest side—fate had willed it so.

It was still a great distance off, about an hour's walk.

She came to livelier streets.

The lamps in front of the dance halls, where fallen women revelled, sent their garish beams out into the night like tentacles.

On, on she must go!

From the open doors of a basement café was wafted a hot garlic-laden vapour.

What smelled like that?

Oh, yes! The little sausages Mrs. Redlich had given her son as a farewell dinner.

Directly in front of her a hose as thick as her arm spurted a cleansing stream over the pavement.

What had she heard hiss and gurgle along the ground like that?

Oh, yes! It had sounded just like that when old Haberland had watered the lawn, with the copper sprinkler.

Suddenly the idea shot through her brain: "None of this is true. I am lying in bed between the bookcases of the circulating library, and the lamp I took from the bracket is smoking back of me,—and it is all in the book I am reading on the sly after Mrs. Asmussen's dose of medicine has happily worked."

The city noises swelled and called her back to life.

She had reached the heart of the city, the vortex of Berlin's unwearying night life.

She passed the Spittelmarkt. Leipziger Strasse unrolled before her, a stupendous scene, with its endless chain of street lamps. A silvery mist enveloped it, or, rather, it resembled a gay picture lightly covered by a layer of mould, dotted with the lights of cafés and cabarets glimmering red.

The numb feeling in Lilly's legs increased. She moved them without realising that she was

moving them.

She felt nothing but the throbbing of her heart, which shook her whole body like the vibrations of a mill.

On Friedrichstrasse the people thronged as in the daytime.

Young men rejoicing in the chase followed close upon the heels of their laughing quarry.

The lamplight shone on the silk stockings of damsels as they tripped along.

"Those who have once been completely submerged in this world," thought Lilly, with a shudder of envy, "no longer trouble themselves with questions of honour and death."

Alas, beyond that brilliant whirl came quiet and darkness again, in whose shelter a person may die as he will.

And her heels kept beating: "Tap—tap—tap." She could hear them even in all that noise.

"Couldn't I go to some café?" she asked herself. "What harm if some one were to see me? I should gain a paltry quarter of an hour."

Lights—mirrors—upholstery—curling blue cigarette smoke—a tingling in her parched throat.

Once—once again! Not a quarter of an hour—a *whole* hour—and still longer if she wished it—a poor bit of life which would do nobody any harm.

But she could find no justification for such cowardice and she did not want to be ashamed of herself at the very last.

So on—on.

The laughing crowds of the Kranzlerecke fell behind—the dagger-like lights no longer pricked her.

Lilly scarcely knew where she was going.

She had probably reached one of the quieter cross streets that lead to the northwest side.

The middle of the empty street was dotted with glistening puddles. The pluvial autumn wind came sweeping along between the rows of houses. The dark windows coldly reflected the light of the street lamps. Everything about her seemed lifeless, extinct. Only at rare intervals a phantom glided by, and the cats sped from hiding place to hiding place.

Shivering, Lilly pressed the score closer under her arm.

She passed a florist's shop, where the blinds of the show window had not been drawn. Glancing at her reflection, she was startled to see the prickly foliage of laurels and cypresses.

What had gleamed like that?

Oh, yes! The Clytie that dreamily smiled down from the proud staircase of the house of Liebert & Dehnicke.

Now Lilly Czepanek would never mount those laurel-lined stairs in triumph, nor even crawl to look upon them a repentant sinner.

She reached a bridge.

She crossed it quickly.

That other bridge luring her on lay in remoter solitude, in darker silence.

"You have too much love in you," some one had once said. "All three kinds: love of the heart, love of the senses, love springing from pity. One of them everybody must have. Two are dangerous. All three lead to ruin."

Who had that been?

Oh, yes! Her first flame, the poor consumptive teacher who had lectured to the Selecta on the history of art, and whom she and Rosalie Katz had helped to send to the promised land, the land she herself had never entered.

He had spoken of blue olive vapours—the sea blackened by the breath of the sirocco—and shining meadows of asphodel.

"What kind of meadows could they be—meadows of asphodel?"

How fantastic the foreign word sounded and how full of promise.

But her heels said: "Tap—tap—tap," and the railing of the bridge called to her.

A man spoke to her. Wouldn't she—?

She shook him off like a worm.

She had been given another warning, also with three parts to it.

By whom?

Oh, yes! Mr. Pieper.

She suddenly heard the sententious admonition, in his very words and tone of voice, as if he had uttered it the day before:

"First, exchange no superfluous glances; second, demand no superfluous rendering of accounts; third, make no superfluous confessions."

"If I had not exchanged superfluous glances, I should have seen my promised land. If I had not superfluously demanded the rendering of an account, I should never have been expelled from Lischnitz. And if I had not made superfluous confessions—"

What then?

"Konni, Konni," she moaned. Her yearning welled up hot and painful, and forced her revolving thoughts from her mind.

She walked on reeling.

More streets disappeared in the fog, interrupted at one place by a grass plot with a hedge about it.

What sort of meadows could they be—meadows of asphodel?

Suddenly she stood at the bridge.

Like a thief in the night it loomed up in the darkness of the wide, silent place, where the lights of thousands of street lamps dwindled into tiny sparks.

A pale-faced full moon shone somewhere in the black sky. It was the illuminated clock of a railway station, the body of which was swallowed by the darkness.

Half-past one o'clock.

Lilly saw everything as through a spotted veil.

She was going to turn the corner of the wall. Instead, paralysed by horror, she sank down against it, her heart throbbing powerfully.

"After all I am not going to do it," she said to herself.

"Yet—I will," she answered.

She tried to go on—straight ahead—on the bridge, where the rail awaited her maliciously. But her legs refused to carry her.

The singing in her ears rose to a roar. She stood on the dark, solitary bank wavering.

She took the score in both hands, tore at it, and tried to crumple it into a ball. But it did not give way. Her Song of Songs was stronger than she.

Suddenly her feet moved of themselves, and carried her on—on—whether she willed it or not, past the lamps at the entrance to the rail awaiting her.

Now her fingers grasped the iron top of the railing.

All she could see of the water below was a dark, slimy shimmer. Not even the lamps were reflected in it.

Now, one leap—and the thing was done.

"Yes, I'll do it, I'll do it," a voice within her called.

But she had to send the Song of Songs ahead. It would be a hindrance to her as she climbed over.

She threw it—a bit of white flitted by—a splash below—sharp and distinct, which made her tingle all over like a slap in the face.

When she heard the sound, she knew she would never do it.

No! Lilly Czepanek was not a heroine; she was not martyr to her love; she was no Isolde, who finds the strongest affirmation of herself in the desire not to be.

She was nothing but a poor thing who had been crushed and exploited, and would drag along through life as best she could.

At the same time she began to array all the possibilities of a livelihood remaining open to her.

She would *not* return to the old life of dissipation. That was certain. No matter how much Richard's whipped-dog look might plead and beg.

Anything else would do.

To be sure, she had been completely robbed of her desire to work, and it seemed very doubtful whether it would ever come back to her again.

But after all: something would present itself which would enable her to live in peace and virtue.

Millions of human beings ask for nothing better and call it "happiness!"

She sent one more searching look at the lazy waters, in which the Song of Songs had just disappeared.

Then she turned and went back.

In the spring of the next year the business world of Berlin was surprised to read in the papers that Mr. Richard Dehnicke, senior member of the old, well-known firm of Liebert & Dehnicke, manufacturers of art bronzes, had married the much-talked-of beauty, Lilly Czepanek, and had gone to Italy to live there temporarily.

Those who knew her were not surprised.

She had always been a dangerous woman, they said.

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