

ANDREJS UPITS

OUTSIDE PARADISE AND OTHER STORIES



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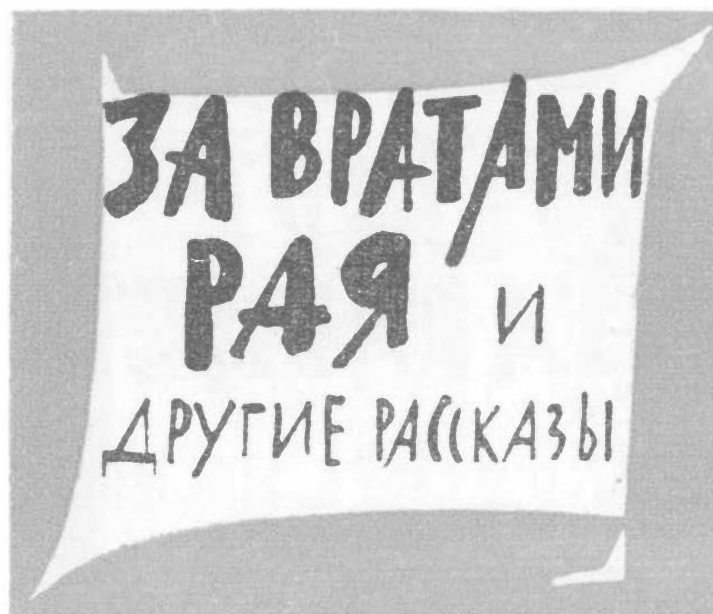
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АНДРЕЙ УПТИТ



ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
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The little house in which the Laicene photographer Mikelis Maigais had his workshop stood in the very market-place. Its windows looked out over the muddy, unpaved square framed with garbage heaps and centred about a water-pump that was protected by a ramshackle wooden shed. On market day, peasant carts from Kurzeme, laden with curds, and groats, and live piglets, would range themselves just outside the photographer's windows. And there was one particular cart heaped high with cracknels over which their owner would sometimes tread heedless of his boots, offering his goods in a tireless, creaking voice. One of the shafts stood propped against the vehicle, and from its top dangled some strings of cracknels for everybody in the market-place to see. Hunks of pinkish meat, hung up and strung up, and piles of carrots and unripe cabbages glistened all round. The squealing of piglets, the cackling and quacking and gagging of hens, ducks and geese filled the air. Everywhere people were scurrying about, quarrelling

noisily. And now and then in the midst of all this commotion, a cloud of grey dust would rise slowly and calmly, remain hovering for a while above the grey and green roofs, envelop the strings of cracknels dangling from the shaft, and gently settle again.

On these days Mikelis Maigais never showed himself at the window. He was disgusted with the filth of the market-place, with the hunks of raw meat, the dust, the unbearable stench, the plump farmers' wives whose sunburnt faces shone like ruddy autumn apples in the sun. From early morning he would withdraw to the only window facing the yard, nervously straining his ear for any unwelcome footfall, his sensitive nose anticipating the odour of herring, pickled cucumbers, and piglets.

"Phew! How prosaic and ugly this world is!"

Through the window, or rather, half-window that looked out upon the yard he could see the river flowing right past his house. Sluggishly, noiselessly it glided by like a broad stream of molten lead. Sometimes a battered kettle or some other discarded kitchen utensil would float by near the bank. Just opposite, on the far bank, loomed a steep barren hill crowned with an old, gnarled lime-tree. All day long a flock of geese swam about in the water below—little glittering white dots against the grey background of the river bank. Sometimes a solitary carter would strain up the hill, raising a yellowish cloud of dust that trailed reluctantly after him.

Maigais felt lonely, and hot, and bored. . . .

Usually he would sit in the other room by the table dozing or, if he stayed awake, gazing at the photographs that were arrayed before him. But this morning he did not even glance at them and just sat there, his eyes riveted on the opposite bank where a little to one side the estate park sloped down to the water's edge. Now and

then something white would gleam among the green foliage of trees and bushes. Then Maigais' moustache would quiver, his lips would twitch, and a strange light would flit across his face.

He was waiting for midday, when he was to cross over to the estate to take some photographs. That gleaming white object, he knew, was the young mistress there. Perhaps, consumed with impatience, she was looking out for him. . . . Mikelis Maigais went hot in every limb at this thought. The big toes of both his feet grew numb, his scalp tingled as though touched by a hard brush, and the hair on his head moved and fluttered as though ruffled by a breeze. Leaping to his feet he paced twice up and down the room, then dropped back into his chair, cupped his head in the palms of his hands and turned his inflamed eyes upon the water, dazzled by the reflected glitter of the sun that grew brighter every minute.

It was three days now since Mikelis Maigais had been summoned to the estate to take pictures. For three days now he had been sitting by this very window, his look fixed upon the green park on the other side. At night he could find no sleep because of the dreams that haunted him, and if he did drop off for a moment, he saw visions of the young mistress in her white dress, with roses in her hair. To put it in a nutshell, Mikelis Maigais was in love.

The first symptoms of the disease had appeared as far back as five years ago, when Maigais had only just settled down in Laicene, and the young Miss still wore short skirts and climbed the apple-trees in the park together with the boys. But at that time it was no more than a faint glimmer of emotion. The fire of true love had sprung up since that foolish incident with Long-haired Dore.

Dore was the daughter of a local farmer and had come to Maigais one day to have her picture taken. God knows why Maigais had taken a liking to her, but he did. He saw full well that she was lean and lanky, with mousy hair, and a slight cast in her left eye, but he liked her, and that was all there was to it. So on the following Sunday he bought a pound of sweets and half a pound of chocolates and, putting the sweets in his breast pocket, and the chocolates in his trouser pocket and pulling two strands of hair across his forehead from under his slouch hat, ventured out to the dancing floor nearby, which for some unknown reason was called "the hill." But in vain had he trodden the muddy road, and in vain had he spent half a ruble on sweets and chocolates. Before he reached the cord enclosing the dancing floor, he stopped rooted to the ground and remained thus transfixed for more than half an hour gazing in front of him. What was it he saw? His eye had at once fallen on the very lady of his choice. Standing on a hillock she towered up like a maypole, a head and shoulders taller than everybody else, and she was eating a pastry that she had taken from a huge tin tray, whereon lay plenty of similar delicacies, in addition to three bottles of fruit water, a chunk of the famous Laicene sausage, a glass with a chipped brim, and a knife with half a handle. All this rested upon the hands of a farm lad with a bushy black moustache and an impressive tuft beneath his lower lip. Another lad was racing across the dancing floor, his tongue hanging out, with a bottle in either hand, and two under each arm, while a third young man was standing at the buffet, rummaging his pockets for something, and casting desperate glances at the young lady on the hill. And she was smiling an all-embracing smile, smiling at the one whose pastry she was eating, and at the one who was trotting along with the bottles, and at the one who was darting looks at her from the

buffet, and at everybody else into the bargain. It was then that Mikelis Maigais understood in a flash the true nature of Longhaired Dore's love. Like a broad and shallow stream it flowed along taking in anybody who happened to be in its course. And presently Maigais turned on his heels and sat down under an alder bush on a damp knoll, and wept eating his own sweets and chocolates.

Ever since that day he had had a hatred of all peasant girls with their swarthy complexions, and large coarse hands, and idiotic attire. And his love of the young lady from the estate grew more ardent accordingly. At every encounter he would greet her and in her smile find confirmation of the fact that his love was not unrewarded. Only women of the upper classes, he believed, possessed that innate sense of beauty that manifests itself in the perfect fit of clothes, in their hair style, deportment, and smile. None but the daughters of the gentry could appreciate Spielhagen's and Ebers' novels, and the poetry of the decadents, and enjoy the subtle delight which springs from the magnetic attraction between two hearts. Moreover, these young ladies knew the song about the two royal children, and were apt to elope with their beloved....

"Sie mußten beide sterben, sie hatten sich viel zu lieb," he recited, with ^{both} tears welling in his eyes.

Yes, he could see, as though it were painted on a canvas before him, all that was going to happen during his visit to the estate. The landowner's family would group themselves outside the arbour—"he," and his lady, and "she," and all the rest of them. "He" would turn a severe eye on the photographer—his one good eye, while the glass eye went straying somewhere beyond the roof of the barn. And he would sense a secret between his daughter and that man, a secret between his offspring of knightly descent and the Laicene photographer! What

a scandal! But he, Maigais, would pretend never to suspect the old man's anger. He would leave his camera and approach the group with a bow, then turn the young lady's little face towards the light, lift up her chin, and his eyes would delve into hers.... Ah! He leaped up and dashed twice across the room. One look would be enough. They would both understand. It would hold all their mutual feelings, it would intimate where they were going to meet in the morning, and where at night, and how, if need be, they would elope—whether along the Daugava River by boat, or by railway to America or Paris, or to Janiški in a Lithuanian van....

Somebody was fumbling with the door that led into the market-place. If there was anything he could not have endured at that moment, it was to be interrupted in his romantic day-dreams. He snatched up his camera and other implements and rushed headlong to where the boat stood moored at the river bank. The boatman, whom he had hired well in advance, was sitting on a stone by the river, biting reluctantly into a huge chunk of the greyish kind of loaf they called "white bread" in this locality. Maigais shouted to him as he hurried towards him. The man slowly pushed his bread into his pocket, glanced at his own shadow, and trudged heavily down the stony bank.

"You're early," he growled blowing out his moustache.

"Come on, get going!" Maigais urged him, seating himself in the boat with his camera wedged between his knees.

Slowly, as though testing them, the boatman dipped first one oar into the water, then the other, pulled them out again, and, screwing up his eyes, watched the silver drops trickle back into the river. Then he took his seat, shifted himself into position, spat on his palms and

slowly began to row. Almost imperceptibly, the boat slid away from the bank.

Maigais gritted his teeth with exasperation. He lurched forward in a grotesque curve as if thus to accelerate the unbearably slow progress of the boat. But the boatman blinked lazily at him through eyes screwed up either against the glaring sun, or for some other reason, and stared as though set on counting the dots on the young gentleman's fashionable tie. And Maigais realized that he could no more hurry this man than hasten the course of the grey, slow-moving river that was rolling past like molten lead. Not a breath of wind, not a ripple. A raft was floating at a snail's pace along the opposite bank. At one end sat a little Polish peasant wrapped in a little fur-coat, barefooted, bare-headed, swaying as he moved his huge, creaking pole. A pair of small, bleary eyes gazed from his red face with an expression of despair at his futile job, for the grey river kept slowly turning the raft bankwards. And from a little straw shelter on the raft came at regular intervals a deep, hoarse voice: "Left... left."

Maigais buried his head in his hands and looked back at Laicene. The receding stony bank was sinking lower and lower, the little houses of the little town seemed to dwindle and flatten into it. Neither the dirt of the town, nor its stench could be felt at this distance. The grey and green roofs gleamed vaguely in the sunshine. A sultry, heavy weariness had settled upon the whole world, out of which Longhaired Dore would occasionally rear her lean figure with her mousy hair, and with a broad smirk on her tight-lipped mouth.

Maigais jumped ashore before the boat had touched land, and with a "Wait!" to the boatman trotted uphill along the park enclosure. The scramble up the steep slope added to his excitement, took his breath away, and the sweat came pouring down his brow. When he

had passed through the gate between the gardener's house and the ice-cellar that led into the yard, he stopped for a moment to catch his breath, and to straighten his necktie. Then he mopped the sweat off his face, arranged a strand of hair on his forehead and staggered up the path that led to the large front door of the manor house.

A huge shaggy dog leaped over the fence, its ugly jaw drooping, its slimy tongue lolling out, and sniffed at Maigais and his camera. Then, indifferently and almost reluctantly, as though performing a distasteful duty, it calmly bit into the photographer's leg just below the knee, and with equal indifference proceeded to chase the hens across the yard.

The owner of the estate, reclining in a wicker chair on the verandah, was reading the *Düna-Zeitung* about the rules of rabbit hunting. Startled by the chase, he raised his head angrily. Apparently, he took Maigais with his camera for a hurdy-gurdy man, for he waved his newspaper at him as though to drive away a fly and cried in an irritated voice:

"No, no! Please, don't make a noise!"

Whereupon he completely disappeared behind his paper. Maigais summoned up all his courage, cleared his throat and took a few steps towards the verandah.

"Excuse me, Sir, but I have been asked to... I have come at your special request..."

"Whose request?"

Maigais began to explain himself, keeping one eye on the windows, and the other on the hedges—would he catch the white gleam of a dress? But he did not. She must have hidden herself, poor girl, overcome with joy and shame.

At last the estate owner understood, nodded his head to indicate the fact, put aside his newspaper and descended the verandah steps.

"Have you a good camera?" he asked eyeing Maigais suspiciously.

"Excellent. The latest model!" Maigais rejoined and peering into the depth of the park, he unwittingly raised himself on tiptoe. Following his eyes, the estate owner lifted his head, and as his look fell upon a bird nailed to the trunk of a maple-tree, he explained:

"An owl. Shot it yesterday morning. It had carried off three chickens. How long have you been doing photography?"

"My fifth year now."

"Hm. . . well, mind you make a good job of it. I don't like slipshod work!"

"You needn't worry, Sir. You will be satisfied."

"Hm. . . Come on."

He led the way along the path in the direction of the stables and outhouses. As he watched the estate owner strutting along and thought of the surprise he had in store for him, Maigais began to feel calm again and his heart grew lighter.

But where was he leading him? Was he going to have a family picture taken in front of the stables? Maigais chuckled at the idea, but thought it unbecoming to ask questions. He no longer looked out for the young lady, for he felt sure that a pair of glowing brown eyes was turned upon him from somewhere behind a lilac or acacia bush, and a pale face was flushing with uncontrollable emotion.

Trees and bushes, bushes and hedges—no end to the verdure in this park. Sometimes the bend of a path would gleam white among it, only to lose itself again, or the corner of a wall or a roof would peep through the foliage, and at once withdraw. A voice or a foot-fall would rise close by, and subside again into the gentle murmur that absorbed all other sounds. But the familiar odour of stables and cowsheds was growing

more pungent and stifling every minute, making Maigais cough.

At last they came to a small square, enclosed by the back walls of stables and cowsheds, with bushes in-between. A thin layer of last year's straw was spread on the ground, which was covered with puddles of sour-smelling greenish-brown dung. Something fluffy stirred and whimpered outside a kennel or pig-sty.

Maigais gave all this a casual glance and held his nose, unable to bear the stench that flowed in upon him abundantly from every direction. He still could not understand why he had been brought here.

"Well, get ready," said the estate owner. "Hm... I'd better ask her Ladyship and the young lady to come."

He left Maigais standing camera in hand, dreaming for the umpteenth time his cherished dream from beginning to end, from the moment when their eyes met, and till the elopement at night in a boat along the moonlit river. Ah... His arms stretched forward. What was the sweltering heat that beat down upon this world compared to the fire burning in his heart!

"Ready?" came the estate owner's harsh voice.

Maigais spun round as though stung, and for all the stifling heat of the day remained frozen to the spot. A few steps behind him, at the top of the path, shone two parasols, one red with a black handle, and the other white with a sparkling nickel-plated handle and silver tassels. From underneath the red parasol showed a state-ly form clad in grey, and from under the white one something even more dazzling white, slender and graceful, with a large bunch of flowers at the top. Both faces were concealed behind handkerchiefs which the two ladies were pressing to their noses.

So dumbfounded was Maigais that he could only doff his hat and stand open-mouthed. Thus he stood gaping and never noticed that a large fly on its way from the

cowshed had alighted right in the middle of his forehead.

The estate owner frowned with an air of contempt.

"Come on, hurry," came from under the white parasol.

Maigais felt the earth swaying dangerously under his feet. What did it mean? Did she, too, want him to hurry? She must feel giddy in his presence. Where were they going to group themselves? What was he to photograph?

"I suppose we ought to pull them up closer." The estate owner looked at the photographer, and the photographer stared back at him.

A moment elapsed, and the estate owner shrugged his shoulders, walked up to the kennel-or pig-sty-and dragged out one after the other a black and unbelievably gaunt bitch and four filthy pups.

"All right like this? But do get going, what are you gaping for? Or do you want to settle the pay first? I am in the habit of paying the full charges. A few years ago I had myself photographed together with this bitch—she had two pups then—and I paid five rubles, and gave another half into the bargain. So there's no need for you to worry. But you've got to make a good job of it. I like workmanship. . . . Lady, *ruhig!*"

"Papa, what's he dithering for! Can't he hurry up?" came an aristocratically petulant voice from the white parasol, and another, from the red one, echoed:

"Ach, hurry!"

Suddenly everything went black before his eyes, and through this blackness flashed strange fiery lines. Unconscious of his movements he began to set his camera with fumbling fingers. But everything he touched dropped from his hands. A scene from a circus show kept revolving in his mind: a clown spending half an hour doing ridiculous things with an American quick-pho-

tography camera. He half expected to hear an outburst of laughter and applause....

"Hurry up, won't you?" The estate owner's patience snapped. "This smell is enough to kill you."

"One moment...."

"She's a rare breed," said the estate owner, pointing to where the bitch was crouching, her head drooping ruefully over the pups that were rolling about her whimpering. "I paid fifty rubles for her. We get three or four pups every year."

The bitch rose to her feet, limped up to her litter and started licking them.

"Quick, now," the estate owner urged. "She'll walk off."

Maigais lifted the shade off his camera and in a few seconds replaced it again. Then he dived under the black screen as though to see whether it was all right. But he knew full well that his picture would show the four pups and their mother's tail....

"Well?" The estate owner asked impatiently. "All right?"

"Fine!" came a graveyard voice from under the black cloth.

He almost upset his camera as he extracted his head from under the screen. He staggered past it, pale and bathed in sweat.

"Pooh, what a dreary creature!" said the young lady in an undertone, but loud enough for him to hear.

Both parasols disappeared behind the bushes....

The boatman was still sitting on a stone on the river bank munching his bread. He caught sight of Maigais, sweeping downhill like a whirlwind, brandishing his camera and shaking it so that everything rattled and clattered inside, heading straight for the water. The boatman squinted at the water, then at Maigais, nodded

and slowly took another bite. He screwed up his eyes and looked at the sun, and apparently decided that it was just the right time of day for a swim.

But the photographer was not going to jump into the river this time. At the very water's edge he swerved to one side and stumbled into the boat.

"Get along, quick!" he groaned as he slumped down on the seat.

"Uh-huh, I s'ppose I'd better...." He moved lazily to his place and spit on his palms.

"Hurry!" Maigais roared.

The man blinked at him with unconcealed curiosity.

Maigais lost all control over his actions. His fist shot up as though for a blow.

"Now, now..." the boatman growled and something flashed up in his eyes that was more than curiosity.

And all the way his eyes would turn upon Maigais and he would growl:

"Now, now...."

Laicene came nearer. Above its roofs and chimneys hovered Longhaired Dore's gaunt face smirking at Maigais. It gave him the feeling a person might have if he were made to lie down in a shallow, tepid duck-pond whose surface was covered with slimy green waterweeds below which the water was swarming with all kinds of creatures, with and without tails.

Once in his room he flung down his camera so that it rolled tinkling and clattering into one corner. He did not, he could not and would not believe it that he was again to live in this stuffy, semi-dark room deprived of his beautiful romantic dream.

How could he live without it?

He bounded out of the house, tore his exhibition plate off the wall and dashed it to the ground so that the glass broke to smithereens. Back in his room he smashed his one and only flower pot with its half-withered glox-

inia; smashed a couple of framed photographs; was about to smash the little mirror, but catching a glimpse of his face in it suddenly checked himself overcome with shame. After he had been sitting for half an hour, he slowly rose to his feet, collected the fragments of glass from the floor, then pulled out his purse and began to count and calculate. And when he had been doing this for a long time, he finally buried his head in his hands and heaved a deep sigh. He was seventy kopeks short of the sum he needed to mend all the damage he had wrought.

And so he would live and mend, mend and live....

1902



The gentlefolk on the Apare estate are still asleep. . . .

It is late on a Sunday winter morning. The dawn rises slowly and the grey curtain of twilight falls apart behind the snow-clad trees of the park.

It snowed steadily all last night, and now not only the trees in the park, but all the roofs, the yard, the palings, the frozen surface of the water butt by the well, everything is covered with a thick layer of soft, feathery snow. Everything has changed. The roof of the manor house seems to sag under its heavy burden. The ivy-twined balcony has turned into a giant snow-drift. The well-sweep has donned a white hat with a drooping brim.

From somewhere just beyond the park comes the sound of a horse-collar creaking against shafts and the crunch-

ing of runners on the soft clammy snow. Three startled crows shoot up cawing into the sky, then return to their perch in the tree-tops, sending snow plopping to the ground.

The sky is overcast—a solid bluish grey with not a chink of light. A fine mist descends from the clouds slowly enveloping the snow-clad earth. By and by the surface of the snow grows damp, and lumps of it fall heavily from every protruding object. Little drops begin to trickle from the roof.

The gentlefolk are still asleep.

The long building of the servants' quarters behind the outhouses and stables is beginning to stir into life. A cough and a loud yawn. Somebody blows his nose. Something white shows in the dirty little window-pane. Then comes the sound of an axe chopping wood. The stoves are being lit, and presently a little white cloud of smoke floats from the snow-swathed chimney.

The rickety, soot-blackened door creaks open. A man in shirt-sleeves and underpants pokes his head out and draws it back at once. Outside the house the heap of garbage and offal, and the yellow splotches in front of each of the four doors have disappeared. Everything is clean and sparkling white.

The noises of day rise gradually. Children whimper, women raise their voices. A resounding slap announces that the servants' quarters have started on their daily course. For a moment or two the rough, booming voice of a man hushes everything into silence, but presently the noise strikes up again in countless variations.

Two doors swing open simultaneously, and a woman appears in each with a yoke over her shoulder. Balancing it with one hand, she lifts her bespattered skirt with the other and wades towards the well. The snow is up to her knees, her bare legs get wet, her slippers scoop up the snow and slip off her feet.

A crowd of children bursts out of the house, their dirty little faces crinkled with sleep, barelegged, some bare-headed, some naked but for their vests. Laughing and jostling each other they fling themselves headlong into the snow-drift, their legs flicking in the air. Others leap in upright, sinking up to their necks. The snow whirls above them. Their shrieks, and sobs and laughter are drowned in scolding and more sobs as the women pounce upon them. Winter joys....

Meanwhile, the fusty air of night mingled with the odour of warmed-up cabbage comes streaming out of the servants' rooms into the yard. In one room they are frying meat. Little tongues of flame lick the sizzling greasy pan, pungent bluish smoke oozes through the cracks in a smashed window-pane plastered with wet strips of paper.

Though there is no telling whether the sun has risen or not, it has grown quite light by now. Light enough to see the sooty, mildewed, crazy, cracked and crumbling walls of the servants' house, and the piles of garbage and gnawed bones scattered about it.

But the gentlefolk are still asleep.

Not a stir of life comes from the large manor house. Little drops of water trickle from the roof leaving a narrow dotted line in the snow beneath it. But in the adjoining kitchen outhouse the servant girls are up and about. Having turned out their boy-friends, they are brushing their hair and washing, while they share their night's adventures in subdued whispers so as not to disturb the gentlefolk, who behind numerous doors and shutters and double curtains are still deep in heavy slumber.

After breakfast the women go out to attend to the cattle. The children run outside into the yard. But the men gather one by one in the coachman's large and empty room.

This room is a relic of the times of serf-ownership. The crude stone walls are as crumbled on the inside as they are outside. The ceiling is supported by heavy beams, the pounded floor is hard and hollowed out with long usage. The room has only two small quarter-paned windows leaving it in permanent semi-darkness, so that the children are afraid to enter it alone at night. Deal boards run along the walls, supported by wooden props, and in front of them stand rough deal tables. Nothing has ever been changed in this room since the days when the serfs used to gather here; and as you peer into its dimness you seem to see on the tables their coarse, tattered grey bundles, and the yellow *pastalas* fastened with greenish-grey hempen strings worn by those who used to spread the dung and reap the barley; and looming in the corner the red and green hazel or willow rods, ready for use upon their backs. . . .

Yet now the servants of the Apare estate hasten into this room, their faces set and solemn, and seat themselves at the tables in groups of four, two on either side. The tops of the tables are scored and scribbled over with charcoal. Half the floor is littered with ash and cigarette ends, indicating that the men were busy here last night—it being a Saturday—till after midnight, and have now come to carry on all through Sunday. While their wives, having finished with the cattle, take up their texts or hymn books, or quarrel somewhere in a corner in subdued Sunday voices, the men sit down to their game of cards in the coachman's room.

Sixteen men, in four groups of four, toil at their game. Two groups play without stakes, the other two for matches. Each time they fling down the soiled, greasy, sweat-stained cards they wave their hands with appropriate ejaculations. The piece of coal grates on the table, marking the winnings and losses. They quarrel, and swear, and shout, and laugh.

Opposite the door and playing for matches sit Vilcin, Plauka, Lielais, and Bader.

Vilcin, a round little man with black hair, a black fluffy little beard, and brown eyes, sits as stiff and upright as though he had been commanded to this seat, his eyes bent on his cards as if trying to elicit from them God knows what important secret. His round, featureless, lifeless face bears a permanent expression of utter indifference, and his brown eyes an invariably tearful look. Taciturn at the best of times, he has grown even more so during the last three weeks since his wife died leaving him alone with two little children on his hands. He is wearing nothing but a waistcoat over a coarse linen shirt, which he has not changed since his wife's funeral and which has by now become as black as a chaff sack. He plays his cards recklessly, losing more often than not, and each time pulling a handful of matches from his trouser pocket to pay his forfeit. His little daughter sits at his side clutching the corner of his waistcoat with both her hands and whimpering. She only stops for a moment when her father turns towards her to wipe her wet nose with his shirt-sleeve.

Next to him sits Plauka, all huddled up over the table, his cards clasped in one hand. His eyes follow angrily his partners' every move, and no sooner does he notice anything wrong, than he bangs down his fist, swearing and ruffling his full red beard. Whenever his look falls on Bader opposite him his thick lips curl into an ugly smirk.

There is something between these two, some secret that makes the one smirk maliciously, and the other writhe under his look. Bader is a widower with no children or relatives. He has been living on the Apare estate for almost eight years. Dry, and wizened, and gnarled like the branch of a birch-tree with bony hands and large sunken eyes that shift restlessly when he is dis-

turbed. Nothing escapes him, everything agitates him, his tongue moves ceaselessly, his hands twitch, and every now and again a fit of coughing drives the blood to his face and sets his whole frame shaking and twisting. The floor behind him is splotched with white spittle. For eighteen months he had been slowly dying of consumption, which Mother Velkis calls stomach cough and treats with valerian herbs and grated ram's horns.

The fourth player, Lielais* should have by rights been called the Little. He is so small and frail that looking at him from behind you would never take him for a grown man. Only his beard and drooping fair moustache bespeak his age. He sits humped and twisted to one side. Once, when he was driving the threshing machine, the horses balked and raced downhill pulling Lielais under the wheels, injuring his backbone and crushing his left shoulder. And now he looks lopsided and even smaller. He speaks rapidly and with a stutter and every time he moves he seems to be dodging a blow. All his life he has lived on the estate and is now considered a candidate for the office of foreman, for the present foreman Lapa is about to quit.

Meanwhile, however, Lapa is still with them, in the second group of players who are playing for matches. He has just seized the whole pack of cards and slapped it down on the table so forcibly that they scatter all over it and halfway across the room, and all players start up turning their heads towards him. To crown the effect, Lapa bangs his fist on the table.

"To hell with it!" he cries. "You can lose the shirt off your back if you go on like this!"

And jumping up from his seat he begins to pace the room with huge strides. Even in his fury Lapa never quite loses his foreman's dignity. His manner, everything

* *Lielais* is the Latvian for the big one.—*Tr.*

about him, the very buttons of his coat indicate that his wages are five rubles more than those of the others, and that it is he and no other to whom the honour falls to kiss his lordship's sleeve morning and night in the name of all the servants.

"The shirt off your back, that's what I say!" he roars brandishing his fists as though he were threatening somebody. He has lost two boxes of matches since the previous night, two boxes that cost as many kopeks. It is not that Lapa is angry at his partners—he is angry at himself, at his life, and perhaps at something more than that. He cannot make it out properly himself, yet his anger rises to his throat until he feels that his collar is strangling him.

The three others of his party stare thoughtfully and guiltily at the piles of matches on the table. They would gladly return Lapa his share, but they realize that it is neither the loss nor they themselves that have brought about his fury. They shift uneasily in their chairs avoiding each other's eyes.

"What's the good of it all," Lapa continues waving his arms. "No matter how you play, if you're in for it, you're in for it. It's enough to drive a fellow crazy!"

"Your loss is another man's gain," Plauka puts in slyly. He is the only one to keep a cool head.

"Governess!" he cries, slapping down his queen of spades imperturbably.

"Gain, indeed!" Lapa snaps. "Today you win, and tomorrow you lose. And that's how it goes. On and on. And in the end we've all lost, and nobody has won."

"True, true," the others murmur, most of them with their eyes on Lapa.

"Her Ladyship!" Plauka plays his queen of diamonds.

"Damn it all, what are we making fools of ourselves for, anyway?"

A question is reflected in every face.

Vilcin sits goggle-eyed, he has completely forgotten that he is playing cards.

"The Baron!" Plauka flings down his king and nudges Vilcin in the ribs. "Wake up!"

"Baron!" Lapa mocks. "I bet you'd crawl away under the table if you saw the baron come in here in person. But when it's just a matter of wagging your tongue, then you're smart!"

"Foreman!" Plauka shouts slapping down his knave.

But Lapa is not listening. He is pacing the room again with long strides.

"What's the good of all this gambling.... We go on all night, without sleep.... Then we're tired and groggy. The overseer gets mad with us and we're sore and snappish. A pack of trouble to us, that's what it is...."

"Dad, I'm thirsty," Vilcin's little girl whimpers.

"Damn our lives.... You fag yourself out, all for nothing," Lapa goes on. "Like kids in a snow-drift, rolling about on one spot and getting nowhere."

"True," an old man sighs.

The more the others murmur in admiration, the more does Lapa revert to his old self—the foreman of the Apare estate. Casting aside his tentative reflections he lets his foreman's dignity blossom forth.

"That's the way you live, all of you. No idea of what it's all about or what you get out of it. No sense. You're just like so many cattle!"

This is going a little too far for the others.

"You'd better mind what you say!" come several angry voices. "You may speak once too often and get it in the neck!"

And when Lapa opens his mouth again somebody shouts at him: "Shut your trap! Who d'you think you are? Get on with the game. Sit down, will you?"

Lapa obeys with the look of one who has made a

nuisance of himself in public and is ashamed of himself, ashamed of his behaviour, ashamed to say he is sorry. He stares at his cards, his head bent low, his lips twisted spitefully.

"Dad, I want some bread," cries Vilcin's little girl.

Outside, the coachman is grooming the horses, keeping an ear open for the hum of voices inside: his face is puckered and angry. He would have liked to be there too, but he has no time. He has orders to harness the horses and take the baron to the Paleja estate. All he can do is curse furiously under his breath—just his coachman's luck. The well-fed, glossy black stallions shuffle and fidget impatiently, and sometimes he has to use the whip with the plaited leather handle leaning in the corner close at hand.

But the Apare gentlefolk are still asleep. Ah, no, they are just beginning to wake. A servant girl is opening the shutters, careful to keep her eyes on the gable end of the roof opposite, because the baron is strutting about in the room in his night attire—or is it without?—taking not the slightest notice of the servant girl at the window.

This morning the baron takes a long time over his toilet, a very long time indeed. He is going to the Paleja estate to beg the hand of its spinster mistress and hence applies every art of cosmetics and perfumery to render his person as attractive as possible. By no means an easy task!

The baron is in his forty-eighth year, but looks at least sixty. It is hard to be a baron. The strain of high life has aged him prematurely, dried him like a bone, wizened his lanky frame, stiffened his long legs that ache in every joint, set his hands and his bald head shaking. Only his belly forms a gentle protuberance on his lean body.

Old and feeble though he is, the Apare baron must marry. It is a question of honour. The Apare estate is in debt to its very chimney-pots. And its tenant farmers as much in debt as the estate. But the mistress of the Paleja estate, on the other hand, has more money and chattels than she can use.

The baron washes in warm water from a porcelain bowl, cleans his nails, then with a soft tooth brush rubs the few remaining black stumps in his mouth. He spends a long time in front of the mirror oiling and brushing his sparse grey hair and carefully pulling it across the huge shiny bald patch on his head. Having at last donned his most expensive suit and a silk necktie into which he fastens a diamond pin, he hobbles into the dining room.

The little bells on the trappings tinkle as the coachman drives up under the balcony, but the baron takes no heed of it. He slumps down heavily at the dining table and slowly sips his cup of black coffee. The table is cluttered with porcelain plates and silver trays laden with the choicest tit-bits, but he does not as much as glance at them. Even the coffee has given him a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach and seems to press against his diaphragm. The heavy curtains covering the dining room windows are only slightly drawn. The grey twilight of the room and its deep silence depress him. He leaves the table and shuffles across the bedroom into his study.

From there the two young gentlemen, the baron's relatives and guests, can be heard washing and dressing noisily, but the baron is not listening.

There is a dull feeling in his head, as though his brain were overwrought, and all the strength sapped from his limbs, due no doubt to the ache in his bones, so sensitive to every change of weather.

He sits himself down at the writing desk, which is

littered with innumerable expensive and unnecessary knick-knacks, rests his bald and shaking head on the palms of his hands, and gazes at the Paleja estate mistress' photograph in its magnificent foreign-made frame.

A dry, sallow face stares back at him, with a long sharp nose and hair curled into tight little locks. Even in the photograph one can see the thick layer of make-up on the cheek-bones. The countenance reveals an ardent, impetuous disposition. The eyes hold that specifically aristocratic look of forbidding pride. There is but one quality missing, and that is beauty.

Yet the baron is firmly resolved to marry her, and there can be no two minds about it. Circumstances have taken such a turn, and he has learnt enough in his lifetime to distinguish between inevitable circumstances and such that one can still oppose. Besides, he is too old to bid for beauty, too old, too ugly, and too poor!

Instinctively his shaking hand pushes the photograph to one side. What beauties he has known in his lifetime, when he himself was handsome, and proud, and rich. When he was chasing after some fantastic happiness, grasping it with both his hands. When with every breath he would inhale all the richness life can afford—and imagine that all the joys of the world were part of him. But what has become of it all? Where has it gone, the heritage of his youth? He ranges over the pages of his past, year upon year, day upon day, and there is emptiness at the end of it all. Aching bones, premature age, weariness of life.

His life appears to him as a whirlpool with no visible, no reasonable aim or destination. Emptiness and coldness enwrap him. Why apply make-up, and oil, and pretence, what's the use of living? Yet live he must, live he must. He cannot do otherwise.

He walks up to the window and looks out. Though

why he does so, or what he sees, would be more than he could tell. All his actions are subconscious.

The fog has grown denser outside. Heavy drops continue to trickle from the roof. Evening seems to have forestalled the noon. He can see the coachman's windows from where he stands, and behind them the servants playing cards. Sometimes the hum of their voices reaches him. The glossy, well-fed black stallions fidget and shuffle, the bells on their trappings tinkle.

The baron does not care. He sees nothing, hears nothing.

Suddenly, there are hurried footsteps outside the door. A timid knock. The door opens, and a servant appears, his hair plastered with oil.

"Excuse me, Sir. . . . The forester to see you."

With an effort, the baron tears himself from his thoughts.

"What's that? Who? The forester?"

"The forester, Sir. . . ."

"Where? What does he want?"

"He's in the kitchen, Sir. There's a hare, he says. . . ."

"A what?"

"A hare, Sir. The forester's seen it."

The baron's grey eyes light up, a glow of animation comes to his face.

"Where? Where does he say it is?"

"I don't know, Sir. The forester's in the kitchen. Shall I call him in?"

"Of course, go on, hurry!"

He turns away from the window and walks across the room. A hare. . . . A hare. At last something that has nothing to do with past or future, with life in general. To sling your rifle over your shoulder, and wander through fields and forests, through brushwood and snowdrifts, leaving behind you, in the twilight, all your unfinished thoughts. Day has broken for him at last! He

realizes that life holds no other aim than to enjoy oneself, casting aside cumbersome thoughts about past or future. A hare... The old huntsman wakes in him. His frozen blood begins to thaw and run through his veins. His hands still shake, but with excitement instead of the feebleness of old age. For the first time in his life the baron hurries forward to meet his forester.

"A hare, they say?"

The forester stoops low to kiss the baron's sleeve, fawning and squirming. "Yes.... I saw it with my own eyes. It ought to be in the young pine grove now."

"What do you mean—ought to be? Didn't you see it?"

"I saw the tracks, Sir.... Leading into the thicket. I walked all round it to make sure it hasn't escaped."

"And it's a hare, you say?"

"A hare, Sir, truly, Sir...." His face is beaming with pride and joy. The *Apare* thicket has been heavily cut, and there are very few hares left in it, especially since the two young gentlemen have been staying with the baron.

"Well, there's nothing to it, we'll have to get up a meet, eh?"

"Certainly, Sir, that we must."

"Hounds and beaters, eh?"

"Of course, Sir, hounds and beaters, certainly. But the snow's deep now, you'll be up to your neck in the drifts...."

"Pish! Drifts indeed! And what if they're up to the roof, what of it?"

"I see, Sir. Shall I get the beaters together?"

"Get the beaters, and see to the pack!" The baron has suddenly shaken off twenty years. The house resounds with slamming doors, and scurrying footsteps, and agitated voices.

In the coachman's room, the forester's appearance produces a similar commotion. The gamblers spring to their

feet, scattering the cards all over the table and the spattered floor. They crowd about the forester: who? how? where? A hare.... A meet.... The faces light up with animation and joy. Bader stretches himself drawing a deep breath, as though casting off a heavy burden.

They throng into the yard. Women appear in every door, some with ladles in their hands, others with hymn books. Some have half their hair plaited, and half hanging loose. Children get into everybody's way, shrieking, jostling, fighting. Scolding and sobs mix into the general hurly-burly of sounds.

The kennel-boy appears round the corner with his pack of hounds—large and small, black and brown, and speckled. They bark, and whine, straining at their leashes, sometimes dragging the boy headlong to the ground. The whole Apare estate seems to shake and tremble with this tumult of barking, and shrieking, and whining.

A hare! A hare!

The overseer, and the gardener, and the carpenter, and the dairyman have shouldered their guns and large fringed hunters' satchels and joined the beaters waiting for the baron and the two young gentlemen to come out.

Presently they appear at the bottom door, guns slung across shoulders, satchels tied round their necks. The baron is wearing the same expensive suit, and silk necktie with diamond pin, underneath his huntsman's cloak.

The coachman swings round on his seat, utterly bewildered:

"What am I to do, Sir?"

"Nothing!" he snaps back furiously. "You're to unharness the horses. We aren't going anywhere."

They throng up the forest path towards the hill. The huntsmen take the lead, the beaters make up the rear. They have been joined by a crowd of young lads all agog.

Vilcin has fallen behind the others. Tugging at his waistcoat with both her hands, his little girl won't let him cross the threshold.

"Dad, hungry," she whimpers.

First he gently tries to disengage himself. Then, his anger mounting, he wrenches off the frozen blue little fists and gives the child a violent push that sends her to the floor.

"Let go, you little wretch! Clinging like a limpet day and night. Can't move a step."

The girl sits stockstill gazing speechlessly at her father. When she sees him hurry out, still scolding her, her eyes widen. Frozen with fear, she stares into the grey fog outside, unable even to cry.

Vilcin overtakes Bader, who struggles uphill coughing heavily. The others are a good distance ahead.

"Step on it, lad, step on it!" Vilcin urges as he passes by, but the other's answer is choked in a fit of coughing.

While the seven huntsmen remain this side of the forest, the beaters and the kennel-boy skirt it to start their chase from the far edge. The forester goes with them to make sure they start in proper order. It is not easy to deal with such a crowd. They must start their hue and cry all at once, lest the hare is warned too early and slips away. The men keep shifting too excited to stand still. When they are finally spaced out the forester fires the signal shot. Howling, and yelling, and whistling, and clapping their hands, they rush forward. The dogs yelp and strain at their leashes dragging the boy behind them through the snow. Twigs snap and crackle, the snow comes tumbling down from the branches.

The beaters start out in leaps and bounds, overtaking each other as though their prey were sure to be just behind the first bushes and each were afraid the other

might get there before him. Plauka drags back Bader, who for all his cough has contrived to dart past him and on to his trail. His red beard fluttering, his eyes flashing through their long matted lashes, his arms outstretched, he has quite forgotten that it is a hare he is after, and not something great and important.

"Tally-ho!" the lads shout, whistling and clapping their hands.

By and by, the hubbub of noises abates. The pine grove is a good verst long, thickly overgrown with juni-per and bramble, and very wet. The men's feet stick in the deep, loose snow, they are soon soaked through and weary. Nothing remains of the forester's carefully spaced line. They run at random, criss-crossing or following each other's trails. But they all keep moving.

Who remembers that all they have to do is chase a hare to the edge of the wood? They feel called upon to perform a great and important task, and tear madly through brushwood and snow-drifts across ditches and bogs and mires. Their feet sink, their breath chokes, their blood mounts, their eyes burn, their minds are blurred but for the one thought: "We must keep running!"

The hunters hear the snapping of twigs, the splashing of mud, the snow plopping from the branches. They clutch their guns—now, any moment now!

"Tally-ho!" yell the excited lads.

There emerges on the fringe of the forest—one of the beaters, and stands stockstill, stupefied, dazed, with gaping mouth. He has caught nothing.

"Tally-ho! Tally-ho!"

It will, it must come!

But it doesn't.

One by one, the beaters emerge from the thicket, long-faced and baffled. No one has caught a thing, and their disappointment, fatigue, and bewilderment are writ-

ten all over their faces. Their feet are wet and filthy, their *pastalas* strings broken, their faces scratched, their clothes tattered. They are angry and ashamed because of this breath-taking, futile scamper, angry with that vile, cunning, artful little beast.

"Damn that creature!" Plauka curses under his breath.

"Running like an idiot!" says Lapa, "and he... and you..." he breaks off suddenly, his hand shooting up to his head: his hat is gone.

"Blast!" he roars, turning back to the brushwood and peering into the thicket.

The huntsmen and beaters argue vehemently where the hare might have got to, they squabble, and quarrel, and bargain.

The forester comes dashing up breathlessly to where the gentlemen are standing.

"Gone," he gasps, flapping his arms apologetically, his voice weak and hoarse with despair.

"Where?" the baron demands severely.

The forester seems to dwindle before him.

"Gone!"

"Yes, gone, but where?"

"Over there..." the forester waves his arm.

"Are you sure?"

"Aye, the tracks ... and I saw something moving over there on the hill."

"Was it big?"

"Couldn't say.... Yes, big, of course... Shall we go there?"

"I should think so! You don't expect him to come here, do you?"

As the huntsmen and beaters are about to go, there is a sudden snapping of branches near the edge of the forest. They snatch their guns off their shoulders and cock the triggers, the beaters back away. All eyes flare up with impatience.

The brushwood moves apart, the baron just manages to check his finger on the trigger as Bader appears, hatless, his head drooping on his chest, his muffler fluttering in the wind, one coat pocket ripped open and flapping against his knee. He is splashed from head to foot with mud and bog water; his eyes are bloodshot and bulging for want of breath. Blue veins have sprung up on his face, his eyes glowed darkly in their deep sockets. He stops dead as he comes upon the men and looks about him sheepishly.

Suppressed laughter ripples through the crowd.

"Send him ahead," somebody cries, "he'll catch it. He can catch it single-handed."

"He'll catch it, of course he will."

"Had a good swim, eh?" somebody else asks.

Bader presses his hand against his side.

"I fell. . . I'm a bit. . . ."

There is another burst of laughter as Bader, pressing his hand against his chest, shaking and writhing, breaks into a fit of coughing.

They wade towards the hill on the pastures, over the shrub-grown fields that cover about five or six square versts. The huntsmen cross over to the far side, and the beaters are again lined up soaking wet, shivering with cold, cursing furiously at that cunning creature.

Meanwhile, it is preparing for rain. The fog rapidly grows denser, it looks as though clumps of grey clouds were descending from the sky, almost touching the wet snow. Twilight is drawing in, though it is only just after midday. The snow-clad knolly fields and bumpy pasture grounds look gloomy. Large drops fall with a melancholy splash from the snow-covered branches of the bushes, leaving yellow hollows in the snow. Crows are cawing in the distance.

Presently, the long expected signal shot is sounded,

and the beaters hurl themselves into the brushwood again.

"Tally-ho! Tally-ho!" the lads shout. The dogs have broken loose and are tearing like mad through the bushes, yelping, and yapping, and barking. Sometimes a leash gets entangled in a branch, the dog rears itself on its hind legs, gives a writhe, a yap, falls back, rolls over, and remains lying there strangled, its eyes glassy, its tongue lolling out.

The beaters are exhausted, they have lost their bearings, but they keep dashing forward all in a heap. None wants to fall behind and miss again what he failed to get last time.

All at once a shot resounds somewhere ahead, followed by another, and yet another—four reports in all. The dogs bark loudly, sensing a prey, the beaters yell.

"Tally-ho! Hurrah!"

On reaching the fringe of the wood they see the hunters standing in a cluster waving their arms and arguing heatedly, their eyes turned to the river. Towards the shrub-grown banks runs the trail of a hare marked with stains of blood here and there. So it's wounded, if nothing else, the dangerous beast!

The sight of blood fills the tired huntsmen and beaters with new vigour and zeal.

The signal horn is sounded, but its jarring tones are muffled in the thick fog and fail to recall the dogs. Bader's persistent rasping cough is hardly distinguishable from the barking.

They are chasing the hare along the river bank. The hunters take their stand on either side of it, in chess-board pattern, frozen, vexed, ready to set their teeth into their victim.

Sometimes one of them spots it and fires a shot, but misses.

The fog grows rapidly denser and wetter. A fine drizzle sets in. The evening drags wearily across the snow-covered expanses. The men move ghost-like and noiseless about the steep banks of the river.

Plauka is too tired to take another step down the slope. He struggles wearily through the downtrodden brushwood, leaning heavily on a stick. His eyes are fixed on the snow. His boiling anger has receded into some remote corner of his heart, which is heavy and depressed and gloomy.

Suddenly he notices a slight movement at his feet. He starts, his eyes widen, his breath stops. Right there in front of him the wounded, bleeding creature is rolling about in the snow.

All his pent-up fury and bitterness blazes out again. His knobbly stick swishes up into the air and comes down heavily once, and again, and again. The tiny, tormented creature coils up into a ball, and two large shiny eyes, stiff with anguish, turn upon Plauka. Plauka seizes it by its hind legs and hits it against his stick. Then looks again at the little thing that moves no more, and lets it drop into the snow as though it had scorched his fingers. A strange sensation fills his heart—something like pity and shame. He rubs his hands and face with snow and calls the hunters and beaters.

Panting, breathless, with tattered clothes, and scratched faces, spattered with dirt, frozen stiff, they all come running and gather in a half-circle around him.

"The last shot was mine," the baron pronounces solemnly picking up the hare by its hind legs, and at once letting it drop again.

There it lies, that terrible, exasperating, spiteful beast, shot in the side, with broken legs, and a fractured skull.

Instinctively the men edge away from the tiny body that lies moveless in a blood-red patch of snow. They

feel that again they have run in vain, without getting their prize, or escaping what they were out to escape, and again the old unanswered question forces itself upon them.

It is raining now in a fine, dreary, steady drizzle. Darkness falls rapidly. Like some giant bird spreading its wings from one end of the sky to the other it slowly descends upon the earth. Now the tips of its black wings are touching the men. They merge into a solid mass, dark and drab. From the distance comes the barking of dogs. They are still after their quarry.

1903



The late junior clerk of the pagast carefully shifted the clod of earth so as not to damage the pale wild rose that had blossomed forth on his grave among the couch-grass and weeds, and heaved himself out into the open. First he gave his bones a proper stretch—they were all that remained by now of his tall, gaunt frame and were bent and twisted with two years of immobility. Then with a hearty yawn, he perched himself astride his crooked cross to bask in the moonshine. Through the bushes of the churchyard gleamed the smooth, yellowish-white bones of skeletons cowering phlegmatic and motionless on their crosses or graves. A few of the younger and more frolicsome ones had strolled down to the willow-trees along the edge of the road to scare the passers-by.

A nightingale burst into song. The junior clerk started from his thoughts and shook himself.

"Blast that bird!" he growled drawing the wasted bone of his forearm across his brow, on which large beads of sweat had gathered in the heat of the moon.

"Won't let you have your peace day or night. I'd throt-
tle it!"

And his long finger bones curled in anticipa-
tion. But the nightingale, as though conscious of its mistake, fell silent. The junior clerk sat motionless, warming himself in the moonshine and thinking thoughts that were as long as eternity. But after a little while he heard a grating noise beside him, as though somebody, in turning his head, were rubbing his neck against a modern stand-up collar. Looking round furiously he perceived his neighbour, the late overseer of the estate, sitting with his hands folded on his knee-caps. His yellowish-grey shinbones shone dimly among the nettles and thistles that grew where some thirty or forty years back his grave had been dug. The overseer nodded to him, baring his teeth by way of a smile.

"Good evening!" he said, moving his head, and the clerk realized that it was the overseer's upper vertebrae that produced the grating noise. "You've done wisely to come out into the open. A young chap like you wants a breath of fresh air. And the moon's ever so warm tonight."

With an angry snort for an answer the junior clerk pushed aside the clod of earth and slipped back into his grave. He had never been able to abide that neighbour of his. A clerk is a person of some education, and the overseer's old-fashioned turns of speech and his chattiness exasperated him and prevented him from thinking. However, it seemed particularly dark, and dank, and cold in the grave that night, and sleep would not come to him, and he could not put out of his mind the warm moonlight outside. So before long he crawled forth again. The phlegmatic overseer was still sitting in the same position dozing, but awoke the moment the clerk appeared.

"That's right, that's more sensible," he nodded, his neck creaking again. "Plenty of time to sleep. Now in the summer-time there's no end to the day. You might just as well sit yourself down, son, you can't get rid of me."

The junior clerk sat down moodily.

"I don't know what's biting you. In your lifetime you'd bustle about, grudging yourself a night's rest and driving others all the time, and now that you're dead you still can't leave a fellow alone."

The overseer gave a sneeze for joy on hearing his taciturn neighbour say a word, but hiding his feelings, he asked in an indifferent tone of voice:

"What have I done to you?"

"Why, you won't leave me alone! You talk, and talk, and won't let me think."

"What in God's name are you thinking about?"

"That's not for you to understand. It's no good talking to you of such things."

"What things?"

"Bah!" the clerk retorted. "Well, I'll tell you. I'm thinking... I'm thinking... But no, what's the use of telling a dolt like you."

"Go on, tell me, I won't leave you in peace till you do."

"You see, I started thinking about it on the very first night after they buried me here. But I'm afraid I may not think it out to the end. Not enough time!"

"Must be a terribly long thought," the overseer put in with a suspicion of mockery in his reedy voice. Then he gave another sneeze, for recently—some five years back, on New Year's Eve—he had caught cold while haunting the outhouses of his old estate.

"It is longer than eternity itself, this thought of mine," the junior clerk went on, ignoring the overseer. "It covers all the twenty-two years of my life, day upon

day, hour upon hour, every single minute. One minute of my past life needs two years of thought if not more, for the less I thought then, the longer must I think now. I used to believe that one day had nothing in common with the next. Each came along with its own troubles and worries. Now I see how wrong I was. One moment catches on to the next, like the links in a chain. Thoughts on one thing lead to thoughts on the next, and the next, and merge with it, and so on and on, forever joining and inter-linking and spreading out like a vast net. Each moment is the effect of the preceding one, nay, of thousands of them, and in its turn the cause of thousands to follow. And never does a man stand by himself in life; he is linked with others by innumerable ties, and thus thoughts about one's own self expand into thoughts about mankind. It is a tangle that has neither beginning nor end. I can't make up my mind whether I ought to start my long thought with my birth or with my death, or with the Day of Creation... Some even say the beginning lies far beyond that Day... What a mess! But I've got to think it all out and comprehend the life I've lived, down to the last moment. The whole trouble is that a junior clerk hasn't much of an education. If I'd studied logic, I should have long since found a system for classifying and examining every moment and every instant, and then I'd soon get straight with this damnable long thought of mine. As it is...

He broke off suddenly with a sidelong glance at the overseer, for it seemed to him that he had heard him laugh. But the cunning rascal had turned his head aside pretending to be watching Trine Siksnene, who was just riding off on a spade over the tops of the graveyard bushes to pay a visit to her former neighbours.

"And for two years now I've been pondering on this system, but you always come butting in and interrupting me...."

He gulped down his final word angrily, for now he heard distinctly and beyond a shadow of doubt that the overseer was chuckling. Hurt to the quick, he was about to slink back into his grave when the overseer said appeasingly:

"Come, come, don't get into a huff. I didn't really mean to laugh, it just came of itself."

"But you're a terrible fool all the same, and you'll always be one," the clerk said sulkily.

"That may be so, of course. But let me tell you one thing: you aren't any cleverer yourself."

The junior clerk measured his neighbour with a withering look.

"You think just because I said a junior clerk didn't have much of an education you can stick your nose up. A fellow may have little education, yet as long as he thinks...."

"He's a fool and that's the truth!" And the overseer spat.

The clerk almost choked with indignation. But while he was still wondering whether or not he should withdraw to his grave again, the overseer had resumed.

"Yes, that's the truth, and the cleverest person is the one who doesn't think at all, the cleverest and the happiest of all, because all the trouble in the world begins when man starts thinking. I know people curse and spit at my memory, but those were happy days when I was alive. There was no need for anyone to think, my stick made everything plain and simple. Everyone knew exactly when he was to get up, and what he was to do, and why he'd deserved a hiding.... But have you ever heard of people appreciating their benefactors? Never in your life... Look what's growing on

my grave! Though I prefer this to a grave that's as bare as though the chickens had been over it pecking, still it's as clear a proof of human ingratitude as ever there was. If I hadn't flogged them and driven them the way I did, a good many might have turned to thinking and reasoning. And they'd have hanged themselves just the way you did."

"Are you suggesting I hanged myself because I thought?"

"I certainly am. If you hadn't, you'd have been alive to this day, and maybe married to your Julina Melder by now."

"D'you... d'you think it would have been better?"

"I don't think at all. Can't remember when I thought last. But you would never have hanged yourself, and that's as sure as eggs are eggs. Come, now, tell me why did you do it?"

"I thought..."

"Exactly! Didn't I say so?"

"I thought," said the junior clerk raising his voice, "if she chooses to fool around with others, I'm not going to stand for it. And so I thought and thought, until I had it. I said to myself, for me it's a flea-bite, ten minutes' work, but she-she'll suffer qualms of conscience for the rest of her days. People will point their fingers at her. 'There goes Julina Melder,' they'll say, 'the one who drove a fellow to his grave!' And they'll run from her as though she were a leper. She'll be left an old maid. That's the terrible revenge I thought up for her."

"Well, and did it work?"

"Why shouldn't it work? Of course it did."

"Have you seen Julina since?"

"I haven't... Felt sort of awkward. She might say first you go and hang yourself, and then you come dangling after me."

"Stuff and nonsense! Go and see her one night in her sleep. Don't believe anything before you've seen with your own eyes. And above all, don't think, don't think, I tell you. Just watch and see."

"But if I think right from the beginning... It seems to me it couldn't possibly... Ah, if only I had a system..."

"It seems to you, yeah... And to me it seems you'd have done wiser not to hang yourself. But what's the good of arguing here. Go along one night and have a look, and then you'll know. I'm getting kind of sleepy. Must go and stretch my bones. You staying here? All right, good night to you. Mind you don't catch cold."

The overseer yawned and slipped into his grave, leaving the junior clerk to his thoughts.

"Hm..." he muttered blowing his nose, "when you listen to him it sounds as though he were right. But surely I didn't hang myself for nothing! Surely Julina is tortured by pangs of conscience! No, it isn't like the old days when the overseer's stick was the be all and end all. This time you're barking up the wrong tree, you old sceptic! What does he know, anyway, of meditation, and associations, and consequences, and conclusions..."

As for his past life, the junior clerk was not decided on any one point; but with regard to his death and its effects his mind was firmly made up. He was not going to start doubting it now. Julina Melder was suffering more than human flesh could endure. She would live like a leper in a desert till the day she died. For if not... but no, why stop to think about it?

And again he bent his mind upon his system. However, he was soon interrupted by the strains of a concertina rising from the valley below. He winced, and listened.

The local people were a sensible lot, so they had arranged a dancing floor for open-air dances at the very foot of the churchyard hill. Those resting there, they

said, ought to hear more cheery sounds than the hissing of the grass snake and the ticking of the death-watch beetle in their mouldering crosses. That particular summer they were enjoying themselves for all they were worth. Every other Sunday there would be the shrilling of concertinas and squeals of girlish laughter in the thick brushwood. And some, having enjoyed themselves to the full below, would climb up the hill to relax on the graveyard benches, or to carry on with their romancing there.

Three girls were climbing the narrow track. As the junior clerk contemplated them it struck him that a new fashion had come in during the two years of his absence from this world. At the time when he hanged himself the sleeves of women's blouses were puffed at the shoulder, but now they were tight at the top and broadened out enormously at the wrist. The clerk spat with disgust. How unbecoming.

The girls were passing by the very edge of his grave. He looked and looked, and suddenly slapped his frontal bone. The one with the widest sleeves was no other than Julina Melder! Was it possible? Why did the other two keep so close to her, instead of shunning her? Far from it, they seemed engaged in a most intimate conversation. It could not be true! His eyes must be playing a trick on him. He rubbed the sleep out of them and gazed again.

It was, indeed, Julina Melder in person, and there could be no two ways about it. The same supple figure, the same chestnut hair, the same perky eyes and round face. And there was something new about that face that he could not define, something that rendered it even more beautiful than it used to be. During the two long years of sleep he had often pictured her in his dreams, and always her face had been drawn and worn and wasted with shame, pricks of conscience, self-reproach,

and contrition. But this Julina was plumper and lovelier even than the one for whose sake he had hanged himself two years ago.

Meanwhile, the girls were almost stepping on his grave. Some nights they would carefully avoid the mounds, but tonight they just walked across the churchyard as though it were no different from a potato field.

"Isn't this where the junior clerk is buried?" one of them lisped sucking a sweet, and motioned with her foot in the direction where he was crouching.

"The junior clerk? What junior clerk?" Julina asked and folded her lips back into a neat little bow, for the strenuous climb had forced them apart.

"The one who hanged himself two years ago."

"Hanged himself? Why?"

"I don't know, people say he'd got too close to the money safe. The senior had left the key in the lock. He knew it would be Siberia for him, so he hanged himself. I seem to remember it was here they buried him."

"Wasn't it nearer the gate?"

"No, no, right here, next to old Mother Graudiniete."

"Maybe, I wasn't at the funeral... Tell me, did that rich Rauska really ask about me? You're not kidding?"

"God's truth, dear. He looked for you everywhere, but you weren't there."

"Must have been just when I'd slipped away with Pricis Saiškis."

"That's right, you were with Pricis. I heard you giggle, but I didn't say anything to him. He comes up to me, dear—we've known each other for ages—and he says, 'Listen, Grietel! Which one's Julina Melder? I'm a stranger here, I don't know her!' So I say, 'She isn't here now, but I'll show her to you when she comes.' 'All right,' he says, 'mind you do. I'm going to the bar now to call three dozen...' So he gives me a pinch in the thigh and goes off. He's a real scream, that Rauska."

Julina had blushed like a poppy blossom. She turned her face away from her friends and began to fumble with the clasp of her belt.

"What did he want to see me for, I wonder?"

The other two giggled meaningly.

"I wonder, indeed..."

More he could not hear. The girls had gone quite a distance ahead, and he did not want to follow them. To tell the truth, he was too shaken to move even if he had wanted to. And this was the Julina for whose sake he had hanged himself. "Junior clerk? What junior clerk? ... Why did he hang himself. . . the money safe. . . Siberia. . ." The words rang in his ears. She did not even know where he was buried. Or why he had hanged himself. So they had not found the note he had pushed into the cleft branch of the pine-tree. It could not be, he must go and make sure.

Rising to his feet, he stretched his legs, lifted himself several yards off the ground and started wading through the thin mist that floated over the meadow reaching to the very pine grove to which he now directed his steps. It was heavy going. His feet sank into the icy wet while his body was scorched by the moon. By the time he had reached the grove he was bathed in sweat.

The pine grove had changed during these two years. The moonbeams could not penetrate it, and it was very dark inside. Unable to see his way he blundered about for quite a time before he came upon the tree he was looking for. There it was at last, with one thick branch sticking out at one side, some seven feet from the ground, and another, shorter one, close by, its end broken off and cleft. And—he could not believe his eyes—but there was a scrap of paper, half disintegrated and spongy, yet unmistakably his own note.

He slunk home, his bones limp and drooping. Had it been worth shinning up seven feet of a thick branchless pine trunk to reach the first branch, dragging behind him a length of heavy rope? Exhausting himself, ripping his new pair of trousers, and grazing his nose? Had it been worth hanging himself, with Julina never getting to know the reason?

He called to mind everything he had intended to achieve by his death. Hopes built on sand! Wishes gone to the winds simply because the drowsy shepherd boy who had cut him off the branch had not bothered to lift his eyes to where in the cleft branch above a slip of paper made everything as clear as daylight. It almost looked as though the overseer was right—it had not been worth hanging himself. But he would not admit such a thing, it would be too shameful, too idiotic.

It could not be that the carelessness of a sleepy lad should have thwarted all his plans. How could such grand intentions go to the winds for so ridiculous a reason? For if he had put his note in his pocket the effect would have been quite different. Would not the enormous tragedy of his death counterbalance a trivial miscalculation on his part? Facts seemed to point to that, but he would not believe even facts. Some other truth must be lurking behind it all, a truth that such trifling incidents were powerless to change. But how to get at it? And how, on the basis of it, to comprehend and explain every chance incident of his life, and string them up like beads on a chain of logic? Ah, if only he had studied logic more thoroughly, then the system he was groping for would have long since been within his grasp.

And having returned to his cross and perched himself upon it, he redoubled his efforts to get at the system without which all his thinking was to no avail.

Soon, however, he was interrupted again. Two lads were coming uphill, both rather tipsy. Their cigarette

ends were glowing in the dark like two stars, sometimes moving close to each other, then drifting a long way apart. When they were almost level with him, the junior clerk recognized one of them as Rauska, known far and wide as a handsome rich fellow, owner of a small estate, and a successful woman hunter, to whom the hearts of every girl, rich or poor, warmed readily. Now Rauska was tottering from grave to grave, and if the clerk had not been careful to jerk himself to one side he would have been pushed off his cross.

"Did you say they'd gone uphill-Julina and all?" Rauska mumbled with a faltering tongue.

"I'm telling you, that's the way they went, your old sweetheart, and Julina, and another one. I say, what's come over you tonight that you're so crazy to see that Julina?"

"I want to see her, that's all there is to it. People say she's a beauty if ever there was one on this earth."

"Pshaw!" the other even spat with contempt. "A natty bit of stuff, and no more. I wouldn't give a kopek for her beauty."

"Ah, don't talk like that. They say there was a junior clerk who even hanged himself all because of her."

"Clever chap, that Rauska," thought the clerk, looking at him almost with gratitude.

"Never heard of it," the other lad grumbled. "Couldn't imagine a goof who would go and hang himself for a wench like her!"

"Well, that's what people say. It was the senior clerk himself who told me—he ought to know."

"Ah, the senior clerk," the junior said to himself, "of course he ought to know it had nothing to do with any money safe!"

"And ever since he told me I've been wanting to see her," Rauska was saying. "I wondered what she might be like if she could drive a chap to suicide. Can't be just an ordinary pretty face."

"Rubbish, I tell you," the other persisted obstinately. "Look, here they come. The one in the middle, with the fluffy hair."

The same three girls were walking up the path towards the men. They were looking straight ahead and seemed to see nothing around. But the clerk noticed how Julina's eyes danced towards Rauska, how her cheeks glowed, how she suddenly dropped her handkerchief and bent down slowly to pick it up, so that Rauska could admire her lithe and shapely form. It never occurred to her that these charms were lost on him in the dark of night.

Long after the girls had vanished down the slope of the hill Rauska stood blinking his eyes. Then he wiped his lips with the back of his hand and murmured:

"Ah, that one's certainly worth it. He wasn't such a fool, that junior clerk."

The unexpected praise bucked the clerk up so much, and filled him with so sweet a sensation that all thought left his mind for quite a long while.

Suddenly he saw a couple strolling uphill, this time a man and a woman. She walking with a proud and measured stride, he wriggling and bending in every limb so vigorously that he seemed in danger of putting his spine out of joint. And so many clever and sensible words flowed from his tongue, and in so velvety a voice that it might have been anybody but the drunken Rauska of a quarter of an hour ago. And the woman was inclining her head so demurely and smiling so graciously that it might have been anybody but the temperamental Julina Melder....

The junior clerk gazed until the two were swallowed up by the thick bushes. Then he shook himself so that all his bones rattled. No, it was not true, he would not believe his eyes. Had he not known for certain that he himself was an apparition he would have taken them for one. Everything was running just counter to his calcula-

tions. Perhaps his thinking apparatus had turned topsy-turvy with two years of sleep? Or had his vision been perverted during his lifetime—his vision and his understanding? Was Julina Melder going to turn even his death to good account? What had allured Rauska, that rich and notorious young man, to these parts? What had given Julina such fame? The mere fact and nothing else that some junior clerk had hanged himself for her sake!

Overcome with rage he burst into bitter laughter, until the tears sprang to his eyes. Then he clenched the few teeth that still stuck in his jaws and hissed through them: "No! No, no!" Some minutes elapsed, and he raised his head, glowering at the bushes where Rauska and Julina had disappeared and repeated half spitefully, half despairingly: "No, no! . . . No, no, no!"

There was a rustle of branches, and the couple emerged again. Now the tables had turned. Rauska had relapsed into his habitual self-assured slouch, one hand carelessly thrust into his trouser pocket, and the other on Julina's waist. Julina, on the other hand, was leaning against his shoulder, craning her neck to peer into his eyes.

How had Rauska managed it so easily? It seemed unbelievable. He remembered what anguish he himself had suffered before he had summoned the courage merely to cross the dancing floor and invite her for a polka. . . . And this one had his hand about her waist in less than no time!

The junior clerk had always been exceedingly vain. Otherwise he might have realized the difference between himself and that rich hero of women's hearts. He pressed his hands against his skull so as not to hear the unbearably sweet whispers that floated in the wake of Rauska and Julina as they walked away down the hill.

Meanwhile the overseer had poked his head out of his grave and was watching his neighbour. All mockery and mirth had gone from his face.

"You still here?" he ventured mildly. "I've had a good sleep, and I'd have slept some more if it weren't for my cold. I keep sneezing, and then I've got to sit up and blow my nose."

And clapping his hand over his nose he emitted a sound like the blast of a huge trumpet. So heartily did he sneeze that tears burst from his eyes.

"Pooh," he sighed, "stop racking your brain, son. You'd better put all thoughts out of your mind and lay your head down. Sleep's sweet and sound in the small hours, as his Lordship used to say. Or have you thought of something?"

Ashamed to confess, the junior clerk snapped:

"If I haven't yet, I will!" But his voice had lost a lot of its assurance, and closing his ears again with his palms, he turned his back on his chatty neighbour.

The overseer contemplated him for a while, then shook his head and heaved a deep sigh. He was good at heart and felt sincerely sorry for his young neighbour.

"He'll do himself in completely, poor bloke," he muttered creeping back to his resting place. "What a shame it isn't like in good old times! A sound hiding would have soon cured him of all this thinking."

"He'll deceive her, that Rauska. He'll seduce her and drop her. He certainly won't marry her," the clerk said to comfort himself. And in his despair this new fancy appeared so beautiful and soothing to him that he began to adapt everything else to it. He felt sure now that he had hanged himself so that Julina might gain fame through his suicide, and this fame might reach Rauska, and Rauska should come and seduce her, and then desert her. That would make her see what's what. Of course Rauska would not be such a fool as to marry her! Never in his life!

But some weeks later the junior clerk was to witness that Rauska was such a fool after all. A long wedding

procession drove up the hill right past the churchyard. Julina Melder was sitting in her carriage, her white veil adorned with myrtle sprays falling like a white cloud of mist about her shoulders. Her face was beaming with happiness and pride, and all eyes were upon her in admiration of her beauty and her good fortune. There certainly was plenty to envy and admire: a little estate of her own, a two-storey house with five rooms, a piano, upholstered furniture, and an outhouse made of bricks, thirty milch cows, five horses—who could count all her wealth!

But the one who had brought about all this happiness was cowering on his grave as pale as ashes, his hands pressed against his ears as he gazed stupidly at the yellow sand. He made several futile efforts to think out why everything had worked towards this end. The true cause of his suicide had been known to one person only—the senior clerk, yet it was precisely he who had caused Julina's stroke of luck. Was such absurdity, such incongruity with all the laws of logic, really possible? That very night, abandoning his thoughts, he went to see Rauska's estate.

Ah, it was indeed an enviable sight! You would go a long way to find such wealth. Julina had every reason to stick up her little nose now. And thanks to whom? To him, to his suicide that had been intended to be a constant reproach to her, an insatiable worm gnawing forever at her heart, something that should have brought about her destruction and downfall. Why was life so incalculable, so crazy! Ah, the smarting irony of his own doings! And he felt deeply ashamed of his whole life, his suicide, his eternal thinking; ashamed of having aspired to understand and explain all this absurd muddle. He would not dare to show himself to the overseer.

On their first night Rauska and his young bride did not close an eye. On the second, no sooner had Julina

dropped off to sleep than the junior clerk appeared before her. Silently squatting at the foot of her bed he gazed at her. His eyes were dilated to the utmost, as though he were trying to peer into her very heart and find in it some hidden secret. Julina woke with a shriek. "What's the matter?" Rauska muttered drowsily.

"The junior clerk..." she faltered, pulling the blanket over her head.

"Where? What clerk?" Rauska growled and, bending over her, groped along the other edge of the bed.

"The one who hanged himself... I thought..."

"Pooh, nonsense! Never think. Just go to sleep."

Julina obediently turned over on her other side and fell asleep.

1905



1. WHIRLWIND

It is the eve of the wedding.

On the round, gravel-strewn space in front of the porch of the Irbes mansion a drunken stable boy is trying hard to check the fat, glossy black horses. Restive and fidgety, they bite at their polished bits and shake their heads so violently that the gilded rings on their brass trappings jingle and glitter in the white shaft of light that falls from the window. The lad calms the excited animals. Winding the ends of the bridle about his wrists, he strains back with all his weight, looking from one of the eight brilliantly lit windows of the house to the other.

The owner of the Irbes estate, Meyer, and his future son-in-law, the chemist Zommer, step out of the house on to the porch. For all his bulky frame, Meyer swings himself up on the driver's seat with the agility of a youth and snatches the reins. The lad reels back on to the lawn amid the lush grass sprinkled with blue blossoms and

fenced in with barbed wire that twists among the broad-leaved bushes. At any other time Meyer would have flown into a rage at the boy's clumsiness, but tonight he just breaks into a hearty guffaw.

Zommer, equally drunk, tries to scramble up on the seat beside him, but Meyer laughingly kicks him off.

"Leave it, you'll only tumble down again. Get inside the carriage and mind you hold tight. Tonight I'm going to show you some driving!"

Zommer obeys, muttering something incomprehensible.

Mrs. Meyer and her daughter Ella appear on the porch.

"Oh, Karlis!" Mrs. Meyer cries dismayed. "What are you up to?"

Meyer only laughs. "A drive.... Just a little drive! I'm going to drive till the wind whistles in our ears. Heigh-ho!"

Zommer lolls back jauntily against the soft upholstering of his seat and turns his face to his fiancée with a wry drunken smile. She is not looking at him. Suddenly the horses baulk. Meyer curbs them with an experienced hand, slashing at their wet backs with the leather reins. The animals submit, quivering.

Ella comes down the steps of the porch.

"This is really very unreasonable," she says wearily. "You're in such a state, Arnold, both you and papa.... It's dark, you can't see the road—anything may happen."

"Never fear, love!" Zommer gives her a wink. "I shan't die before tomorrow night, that I shan't!"

For a moment Meyer manages to get the better of his intoxication and answers his wife with gentlemanly courtesy:

"Don't worry, it's nothing to our horses, those three or four miles to the forestry and back."

He lashes at the horses and pulls the reins so tight that their teeth grind on the bits. Then he slackens them again, and the animals charge forward like the whirlwind.

"Adieu, sweetheart, wait for me!" Zommer cries, and, doffing his hat, tries to wave to her. But he is too drunk to control his stiff fingers, and a gust of wind snatches it from them and trundles it off like a hoop in front of the porch. Straining forward anxiously, Mrs. Meyer watches them sweep like the wind towards the square brick columns on either side of the garden gate. The next moment the carriage has disappeared into the darkness of the maple drive beyond. Mrs. Meyer draws herself up straight and heaves a sigh. She picks up her future son-in-law's hat, shakes the dust off it and throws a troubled look at Ella.

"Look here, my girl," she begins, and stops. "Ella, don't let it surprise you. They're all like that, there isn't one man who is different. When they get drunk they forget themselves." Again she glances furtively at Ella, but the girl's face does not bear that ironical, spiteful smile that at times exasperates her mother to tears, even to hysterics. Ella stands in the twilight, her head bent, her arms hanging lifeless down her sides, her whole attitude expressing weariness and boredom.

"Listen, Ella," she whispers in her daughter's ear as she turns to go back into the house. "Don't let our visitors notice anything. They're such common women, you know, they might easily start gossiping about us."

Outside the door she pauses for a moment to put on her habitual sweetly benign expression before entering.

Three women are sitting in the room: the estate manager's wife and the forester's wife—both as well-fed, flabby-cheeked, and fat-necked as Mrs. Meyer; and a third lady who differs from the first two in that her face is gaunt and dry, with a long humped nose, and also because she is generally addressed as "madam" and not "my lady" by the workers.

The moment Mrs. Meyer and her daughter appear in the doorway the three faces assume the same benign expression as that of their hostess lest the latter should sus-

pect their malicious criticism of the vulgarity of their host and his drunkard of a son-in-law.

Mrs. Meyer and Ella sit down with their guests. The three ladies incline towards their hostess. Their smiles, their looks, their every movement seem to say: we are too refined, too well-bred, too highly educated, too lady-like to have noticed anything common or objectionable. We never saw our host drink with his son-in-law glass upon glass till they had more than was good for them, we never heard the cynical half-utterances they exchanged even in the presence of ladies. And Mrs. Meyer smiles back at them, and her smile says: "You know full well that you are nothing but common old gossips, who ought to feel honoured when invited to my house, but I am not letting you feel it. Nothing in my face will betray my boredom, though I am indeed sick and tired of you and you have been keeping me all day from preparing for tomorrow's festivities. . . ."

Only Ella stands aloof in this curious interplay of feminine emotions. Her hands are languidly folded in her lap, her head rests against the soft back of her chair, her eyes are half-closed. In her loose white garment, with her pale face, classically regular features, dark eye-brows delicately curved above her lowered lids, and her luxurious dark brown hair, she is like a budding aster among frost-nipped dahlias.

"You'll catch cold, child," says Mrs. Meyer, and a note of deep unaffected tenderness quivers in her voice. She rises and carefully closes the door that has been left ajar.

Ella only raises her eye-lids and flashes a glance at her mother through her thick lashes. Her eyes at that moment have the depth of a fathomless well that holds a ray of the midday sun. She does not want to talk. She is infinitely tired, and realizes that her weariness is not so much physical as spiritual. Her soul slumbers, as it were, like a tired little bird, drooping its wings.

"We ought to be going," the forester's wife says, making a little movement as though to rise and smiling.

"Yes, it is time we went," the estate manager's wife agrees.

"Hm-m," the third lady clears her throat, smiles too and shifts on her chair.

"But I beg you!" cries Mrs. Meyer, not only her face, but her whole body expressing resolute protest. "We must have some tea, and then... and besides... you must wait for the men to come home. You can go back with the same horses.... They've gone for a little drive—I mean to say, I sent them to the forester's...."

Mrs. Meyer smiles at the forester's wife, and the forester's wife smiles back at Mrs. Meyer, so sweetly, almost caressingly, and they nod at each other, and the other ladies nod too, in time with them.

"Oh, well, if you really insist..." says the forester's wife. "We might stay just a little. But don't let us disturb you, Mrs. Meyer, surely, you have got so much work on your hands before tomorrow. We'll just sit here quietly. Don't let us disturb you...."

"Oh, not at all!" Mrs. Meyer waves her hands at her, conscious of how sincere and convincing her gesture looks. "What on earth makes you think that! Good heavens, you're such dear, such rare guests! Besides, I have nothing more to worry about, everything is done and ready. Ah, but last week... all last week!" And Mrs. Meyer flaps her arms outlining something enormous and heavy in the air.

"Ah! Ah!" echo her guests sympathetically and understandingly. "Don't we know it! It isn't like one of those peasant weddings, where you just kill a pig, and make a ton of wheat flans, and open a barrel of beer—and there's an end of it! Och, ha-ha, ha!"

The comparison between tomorrow's wedding and a peasant one is so preposterous that for a while all four ladies laugh heartily—not too loudly, of course, and remem-

bering to press their handkerchiefs to their lips at the appropriate moments.

"Why, certainly, madam," says the gaunt lady raising her eyes to the ceiling. "We must never fail to keep up our cultural standards... at weddings too. But if I may venture to say so, you ought not to have invited the baron, madam."

Mrs. Meyer opens her eyes very wide.

"But my dear, why on earth not?"

"Because he is not really one of us. He's of a different class... a higher class. He always keeps aloof from our circle. So proud, you know...."

"I don't know about others." Mrs. Meyer gives a proud little toss of the head. "But he has always been exceedingly cordial towards us. Why, he is almost godfather to Ella. Surely, you don't mean to say that the baron's presence would not add immensely to the dignity of the wedding ceremony."

"But that dignity will not make a favourable impression on the other wedding guests, who are all his inferiors in one way or the other."

The hostess is stung.

"I beg your pardon, but as long as the Irbes estate is our very own, I don't quite see why we should feel inferior to the baron. He has been our guest many a time, but never has he let us feel that we were once his tenants."

"He is too well-bred for that.... But he certainly hasn't forgotten. He has a good memory."

A delicate flush breaks through the distinguished pallor of Mrs. Meyer's complexion and through her smiling calm. Her contemptuous eyes scan the gaunt frame of her visitor.

"You seem to be forgetting, my dear, that we do not have to shrink from the baron as some humble inn-keepers or saddlers do. Ah—there certainly is a difference...."

The estate manager's wife and the forester's wife shift

uneasily in their seats. Heaven forbid a scene! Anything but that. A scene would be worse than a fire. With gracious smiles they try to quench the flame that has sprung up so suddenly and unexpectedly.

"Hm-ha-hem!" the forester's wife gives a little cough, her smile indicating that she regards this little clash as a harmless jest.

"Hm-ha-hem!" the estate manager's wife echoes her, fumbling for words. "Ah, well. . . . Such is life. . . . And how is your beautiful Sebastian, my dear Mrs. Meyer?"

Sebastian is an old, grey, grizzled, obese pug-dog who, heaven knows why, holds a place of honour at the Irbes estate. He spends his day waddling listlessly and wheezily over Ella's flower-beds, and wallowing in the garbage heap in the corner of the yard, or else he betakes himself to the ditch to nibble at the carcass of a calf that has been lying there for the best part of a year. But at night he sleeps alongside the mistress underneath her plush blankets.

At the mention of Sebastian Mrs. Meyer's eyes light up with a genial smile. This is, indeed, a topic of conversation at once more innocent and more pleasant than the baron and his relations with people of other classes—more pleasant and more important, too. . . .

"Thank you for asking," she replies with animation. "Poor little beast, he isn't well at all. He got over his cold all right, but now we have trouble with him again!"

"Oh, my dear! You don't say!" The estate manager's wife clasps her hands in dismay.

"Oh dear!" the forester's wife heaves a sympathetic sigh.

"It's the second week now—it was a week last Thursday that he started a kind of—a sort of itch. . . . Poor dear, his whole back is sore!"

"Oh, the darling little treasure!" The estate manager's wife breathes, pursing her lips into a neat little circle. "How ever did it happen?"

"I don't know, really, but I think it is all due to that

chill he had. Zommer says we've been overfeeding him, but that is all nonsense. Why, it breaks my heart to watch him eat, he hardly touches his food. As I was saying, my dear, it is simply terrible that we don't have a proper veterinary surgeon here. It is simple enough to cure a human being, but what can a poor dumb little animal like him say for himself? I asked Zommer to get me some medicine for him, and would you believe it? He brought some filthy, smelling carbolic acid! And he knows full well how attached I am to the little creature! We added some eau-de-Cologne to take that beastly smell away, but it is horrid all the same, and it stings him so. . . . Poor Sebastian, he whimpers at the very sight of the bottle. . . ."

"Poor dear!" the ladies sigh.

Suddenly, all four heads turn to Ella: did she laugh? You cannot tell from her face. The long lashes that have drooped over her eyes again flutter suspiciously, and the corners of her mouth twitch mischievously, that is all.

Mrs. Meyer rises and goes to the bedroom. She returns after a while carrying some object swathed in a large woollen shawl as cautiously and warily as a maid might carry a hot joint. The bundle is emitting wheezy sounds; it is the sick Sebastian groaning.

Mrs. Meyer spreads the shawl on the floor and stands Sebastian on it, a grey, grizzly, crinkly pug. Sebastian's legs are too feeble to hold him and he flops down on the floor. He blinks his white eyes uneasily, as though afraid to discover the dangerous bottle with carbolic acid, but is soon reassured. He looks nowhere, sees nobody, cares for nothing; he just sits waiting to be carried back to the bedroom. His creased and furrowed muzzle expresses utter listlessness, surfeit, dire boredom, convinced indifference to life.

The ladies bring up their chairs and bend over Sebastian. There is heartfelt compassion in their faces, with a tinge of curiosity.

"You poor little thing!" says the estate manager's wife, in a quivering voice.

"You darling little sufferer..." mutters the forester's wife stroking the patient's head.

With a painful effort, Sebastian lifts his eye-lids and you can clearly read in his eyes: "I am, indeed, a poor sufferer, but why, why should I have to endure all this?"

Mrs. Meyer puts her arm about the patient's neck and asks him in a woeful voice:

"Won't you tell me what the matter is with you?"

They spend a good half hour lamenting over the pug and fondling him, then one by one they resume their seats, each heaving a sigh as she does so. Sebastian is lying prostrate on his stomach, fast asleep.

"The men aren't back yet," Mrs. Meyer says turning a troubled look at the dark window, as though she might see something there. And forgetting her dignity she moves closer to her guests and, with a worried glance at Ella, gives vent to her anxiety.

"I'm afraid for them!" she whispers. "The night is dark, it is a winding road, and the ditches are full of water—they're so deep now... and the horses were so wild..."

"Don't worry yourself, my dear," the estate manager's wife puts a pudgy hand on Mrs. Meyer's. "Mr. Meyer is the finest driver in the district."

"True, but you... you may have noticed, they were both a little bit... It doesn't need much for an accident to occur..."

"It isn't as though they were driving for the first time," the estate manager's wife puts in soothingly.

Mrs. Meyer casts another glance at her slumbering daughter and drops her voice to a whisper.

"You cannot imagine what I have sometimes been through with his recklessness. There is a streak of peasant blood in him, his mother is said to have been a peasant—hence this occasional coarse, unforgivable foolhardiness.

The first year after our wedding—I'll not forget that day as long as I live—we drove across the lake to the Duki, over thin ice...."

Mrs. Meyer closes her eyes, shuddering.

"On all sides it kept crackling as though someone were walking barefoot through hemp stalks. Then it would suddenly snap and I would hear the ice cracking on either side of us. I stared round, but all I could see was a white mist or cloud, glittering and shifting, and now and then I would hear the whistling breath from the horses' nostrils. The same kind of horses as we have now.... At the edge, where the reeds begin, the ice did break, but we managed to rush across over the loose slabs. We drove like the whirlwind, we were across in seven or eight minutes...."

The ladies smile discreetly. They are much intrigued by the story, but do not quite know what attitude to take in the face of such unwonted candour, so they keep silent.

"I was laid up for a whole week after that," Mrs. Meyer goes on. With a quick glance at her daughter she moves up even closer and continues even quieter:

"Heaven forbid that I may ever go through anything like that again.... And yet.... I felt something more than fear. It was as though a kind of giddiness had swept away all reason. I felt myself light as a snow-flake caught up in the whirlwind, all my will, all my strength had flown from me, and there was but one feeling in me: I wished that dreadful, yet beautiful moment might last, that the power that had seized me and was bearing me away in its hot embrace might hold me for ever. That my feet might never again touch the cold, damp earth...."

Mrs. Meyer comes to her senses and stops abruptly. How could she have let herself go like that! She throws a troubled look at her daughter, then wraps Sebastian in the shawl again and takes him back to the bedroom. The ladies hastily fumble for their handkerchiefs and put them

to their noses, exchanging glances. Mrs. Meyer's story has been most interesting.

Through her lowered eye-lids Ella can see everything that is going on in the room, and she hears every word that is spoken. This is a special trick of hers—to see without looking, and hear without appearing to listen. Many a time has she thus noticed glances that would never have shown themselves to her otherwise.

Nothing she has seen has been of any interest to her. She is sick to death of this ailing dog, and these boring lady visitors with their furtive smirks. She feels as though for ages she has seen nothing but this wearisome life that is swamped in idleness, petty intrigues and stupidity. But suddenly she harks and wonders. Her mother's narrative has stirred some strange, great and powerful emotion within her. The room and everything in it disappears from her view. She sees the vast surface of the lake thinly covered with bluish ice, the snow-covered hoary blanket across the sleigh, little white flames of fire flashing from the horses' hoofs through a cloud of steam. Little balls of snow shooting past her in the whistling whirlwind, fir-trees marking the road, the shrub-grown bank of the lake. The Irbes estate, the podgy lady visitors with their stealthy smirks, the pug-dog and the bottle of carbolic acid that smells of eau-de-Cologne are far behind. The reed-brimmed bank of the lake, the black jagged outline of the forest beyond it lie ahead. The whirlwind brushes past her ever swifter, her heart is pounding, her cheeks burning with the frost and with breath-taking, paralysing rapture. . . . She starts and opens her eyes, sensing the searching looks from four pairs of eyes upon her.

"Is anything the matter with you?" her mother asks anxiously. "Your cheeks are all afire—you're not ill, are you?" She puts a damp hand on Ella's forehead. But Ella rudely pushes it away.

"It's nothing. . ."

The ladies deem it their duty to manifest their concern, but are checked by a strange look from Ella.

"Take a pill, child," Mrs. Meyer is about to hurry to her medicine bottles, of which she always keeps a good supply, including the latest panacea that soothes the nerves and multiplies the blood. But at that very moment Mr. Meyer and Zommer arrive, bringing with them the forester.

Cries of excitement, greetings, jests and laughter on all sides. But they die down soon enough, everybody relapsing into respectable self-restraint. Ella's unseemly agitation also subsides.

They sit down to supper. The table provides a foretaste of tomorrow's festivities, and the anticipation of it is reflected on every face. Ella handles her knife and fork with weary, cautious movements, carefully avoiding the slightest clatter. Her head feels heavy, her mind blurred, and as tired as it has been throughout the day. Every little noise, every loud spoken word reverberates in her with almost physical pain. But she sees and hears everything.

At the far end of the table sit her father and the forester, emptying their plates a little too rapidly. If she turns her head a little to the left her eyes fall on an equally fat smooth face and bald head, and a pair of humid blue eyes that turn to her now and then with an obliging smile, while two thick-fingered hands pass her a glass, or a napkin, or the bread basket. Zommer is exceedingly obliging and attentive to his fiancée. But she takes little notice of that. She is wondering which of these three men looks older and uglier. Her father is rather more agreeable and dear to her, that is all she can say.

There is plenty of conversation. The men go out of their way to be witty and brilliant, the ladies—to be serious and demure. Only Mrs. Meyer's eyes follow anxiously the movement of every spoon, and every time a dark stain shows on the snow-white table cloth, her lips give a

nervous twitch, and little red patches appear above her cheek-bones.

Ella slowly slides into a kind of oblivion. Her hands continue to move mechanically, she sees and hears everything about her, but as though through a fog or a chink in a wall, as though she herself had nothing to do with it. Yet she knows that everything is pivoted upon her, and squeezing her like a contracting rubber ring. She feels as though she has been living in a twilight, for a long time, and would continue living thus day upon day, for years on end. This life is lapping about her like a shallow stream, and a heavy damp hand seems to be pressing on her head, bending it lower and lower. Something wakes within her, and grows, and rises. Her blood rushes to her cheeks again, her heart begins to throb, her eyes sparkle.

Mrs. Meyer again throws a frightened look at her daughter.

"Ella, child, what is it?" she asks quietly, and all eyes turn upon the girl. She gives a start as though pricked by a needle.

Her eyes open and droop again.

"You haven't caught cold, have you?"

No answer. All eyes are upon her with a mixed expression of curiosity and concern.

"What's on your mind, child?"

Ella's mouth twitches convulsively, and a sudden incoherent flow of words, whispered with suppressed passion, springs from her lips:

"Horse-shoes flashing through clouds of steam. . . . Snow flitting past me. . . . The whirlwind whistling in my ears. My heart beats . . . my face is burning. . . ."

She comes to herself, draws the palm of her hand across her face, and rises to her feet. But for the flush on her cheeks and the dancing little flames half concealed behind the long dark lashes of her eyes, her face has regained its cold, indifferent composure.

"It is rather close in this room, I feel a little faint," she says calmly, smiling with only her lips. "If you will excuse me, I shall take a turn in the garden."

Swaying a little, she turns and makes for the door leading into the garden.

"Shall I come with you, sweetheart?" Zommer hastens to put in with a rueful look at the new bottle of rum that has just appeared on the table.

"No!" she snaps from the door, then adds with more self-possession: "I beg you, don't let it disturb you, stay where you are. I won't be long."

The white figure disappears behind the door, taking with it, as it were, half the light of the room. The embarrassed ladies clatter their spoons, nibble at their napkins and stare down at the table cloth. Mrs. Meyer leans back in her chair to hide her own uneasiness. But soon the bottle of rum has its effect. The gentlemen clink their glasses, and Mr. Meyer resumes enthusiastically:

"This breed of dog has remarkable power of acclimatization. If you take the more frail, decorative creatures, like our Sebastian..."

"This climate of ours could kill a German ox," the forester bangs his fist on the table. "We don't do a thing to drain those vast swamps that contaminate the air. Our culture..."

The ladies join in the conversation on tenacious breeds of dogs, and the sickly Sebastian, in a common effort to forget the unpleasant episode.

Ella paces slowly up and down the smooth gravel paths of the garden, her cheeks burning even in the coolness of night, her eyes now freely flashing their formerly suppressed fire. The top button of her dress has come undone, leaving her neck open. The cool garden air caresses her burning limbs. Subconsciously her hands pull the narrow strip of bright red ribbon out of her hair, letting it tumble in soft brown waves upon her neck and shoulders.

Streaks of pale light from the window reach out across the garden. For a brief moment they fall upon the girl's gleaming white figure, and as though ashamed of their own comparative pallor they quickly withdraw into the shady bushes, slowly fading beyond the willows. The night wind, like an infatuated boy, timidly runs his hand through the brown locks, flicking a little whisp over her forehead, but hastily smoothing it back again, then presses his gentle lips against the white neck, and hides behind the lilac bush whence he wafts the fragrance of poppy blossoms towards her.

The myriads of flowers in the garden are in full bloom. Every beam of light scintillates with their colours where it falls upon them. The dwarf palm-trees on their stone pedestals slowly sway their fans to and fro, their slender green fingers forever tending towards the intangible. The green lichen-covered surface of the semi-circular cemented pond ripples gently now and again. Fragrance and silence everywhere... And peace...

If you look over the tops of the blossoming bushes and flower-beds the garden paths remain invisible. White and gravel strewn, they lattice the garden like white stitching on a flowered green cloth. Her white-clad feet glide almost inaudible over them. The shrubs bordering the path offer their soft leaves to her. She lets them slide through her fingers. She picks a blossom at random here and there, smells at it, presses it to her lips, then plucks it to pieces and tramples it into the gravel.

At the other end of the garden by the pruned hedge she halts and leaning against it, her hands clasped behind her, looks back in the direction of the house. An almost imperceptible shimmer reaches her from the windows. Fragrance and silence... And peace...

But there is neither silence nor peace inside her. Everything is in a turmoil, like a surging sea, and in their passionate, incomprehensible tongue, the breakers are luring

her away on to their greenish-brown, froth-crested backs. As she listens to their roar Ella feels herself abandoned to the power of her mounting unrest. A strange hot passion sweeps through her whole being. Nervous and uncertain, she retraces her steps.

From where she is now she can hear the drunken voices of the labourers carried from the yard outside the servants' house, and the sounds of a concertina and of dancing. Whether it is the chilliness in the air, or something else, but she suddenly feels little ripples of shivers running through her. . . . She stops to listen.

She does not ask herself why this shouting, these coarse enjoyments draw and tug at her, away from that shallow, muddy life of hers, from the silent, fragrant peace. Her fingers clutch nervously.

Suddenly she notices the figure of a man. He is standing on the broadest path that leads straight to the porch, smoothing out the gravel. Ella looks close and recognizes him. It is Smilga, who does a gardener's job on the Irbes estate, though not employed as one.

Almost every day they meet in the garden. Every summer Smilga orders new kinds of flowers, and every day he potters around among them arranging everything according to Ella's liking. It moves her to think how wonderfully he devines her wishes, how well he knows her tastes. Sometimes she intercepts his furtive look, and a hot wave runs through her body, making her wish she could spend days on end close to this vigorous, impetuous lad.

He is the only sober worker on the Irbes estate that night. He is wearing his usual old coat patched up at the sleeves and the broad-brimmed straw hat that overshadows his deeply tanned face with its straight nose and thick moustaches. He has noticed Ella some time ago and does not even lift his head at her approach. His powerful arms drive the rake across the gravel path. Crunch. . .

crunch! The smoothly polished iron prongs bite angrily into the white gravel, flicking little pebbles to Ella's feet. When her little hand takes hold of the rake, Smilga stops still but does not raise his head.

"It's you, Smilga. . . . What are you doing, at this hour?"

"Got to smooth it out, so it's nice and even for tomorrow."

Ella can detect something smothered and suppressed in his voice. She lets her hand slide until it touches his. He starts as though stung.

"It's a lie!" she laughs. "You wanted to meet me."

He winces, hurt in his pride, and lets go of the rake. It drops to the ground.

"It's your wedding tomorrow . . . your last day here," he begins, painfully drawing in his breath.

"It is. But we shall think of tomorrow when it comes. Tonight we'll enjoy ourselves."

"They seem to be enjoying themselves all right." And he nods at the house whence Mr. Meyer's and the forester's voices rise louder and louder.

"Oh, those? That's always been the same, and always will be. But tonight it's we who are going to be gay. We!"

The lad lifts his head, and everything that sounded faint and smothered in his voice bursts forth from his look. But then he spitefully puckers his brow.

"There's no gaiety for you and me! You're a highborn lady, and I'm a gardener. You're a bride, and I. . ."

He checks himself and turns away, but at once feels his hand in Ella's and hears her passionate whisper in his ear:

"Tonight you must forget that I'm a lady and a bride. Let's go where there is singing and dancing."

"No, leave me alone!"

"I want to be free, just one single night in all my life. I want to dance like the whirlwind, till I lose my senses. Come!"

"No!"

"You're afraid? You haven't got the guts! All right, stay if you like, you coward, I'll go all the same."

But her hot close breath, the fragrance of her hair and skin, her scorching look have already intoxicated him. He seizes her hand.

"Very well, we shall go. Once for all times. Be it my last day. . . ." And he hastily makes for the gate, almost at a run, Ella's slender figure pressed close against him, sending waves of shivers down his spine.

"Not this way," Ella whispers. "Not by the gate—they can see from the windows."

Without a word, Smilga turns the other way. Along that side the garden is edged in by a four-foot high solid fence that has no exit. But they do not stop. Neither of them says a word, nor do they need to. Smilga lets go of her hand and deftly swings himself across the paling. He holds out his hands to her and helps her to step on the first cross-beam, then on the second, and when she stands on the uppermost, precariously balanced on tip-toe, he puts his arms about her waist and lifts her down. During those few moments, while his powerful arms are clasping her close to him, her breath fails her and she all but loses consciousness.

She no longer feels the slight tremble of his hands. She does not feel the earth underneath her feet as she hastens along the path skirting the lawn towards the far end of the garden. Her feet brush the long dew-covered blades of grass stretching across the wire around the lawn. The dew feels unpleasantly wet through her light silk dress and stockings, but her eyes are flashing, her lips set in a strangely spiteful, defiant smile. Lifting her skirt with one hand, she deliberately keeps close to the border of the lawn, letting her feet scatter the dew drops.

Outside the servants' quarters the labourers are celebrating the eve of their young mistress's wedding. They have taken the coachman's rickety table outside into the yard.

On it stands a shadeless kerosene lamp, but nobody has found time to light it. A half-barrel of ale has been placed on a makeshift trestle near the acacia bushes. Beside it on the ground lie two empty ones. Bottles—full, half-full, and empty—are scattered about; spanning, as the custom goes on the Irbes estate, a bridge between those of lower culture and those above them. . . .

In her haste, Ella steps on the fragments of a broken bottle or glass. She hears the crunch as it cuts through her thin shoe and stocking and into her foot, but she feels no pain. Her eyes sparkling, her lips parted showing two rows of teeth like little pearls, she approaches the girls and women clustered opposite the door, prattling and jabbering and jostling each other. The men are noisily pressing towards the barrel of ale, shouting and singing.

Ella is at once surrounded on all sides by the women.

"Our young mistress! Our good mistress has come to see us!"

Each tries to elbow her way closer to Ella, so as to touch her hand, stroke her hair, or fondle the young bride, twittering eagerly all the while. For a moment, Ella is confused by this hurly-burly of voices. The humid fragrance of the summer night, the breath and warmth of these vigorous people enwrap her. Toil-hardened limbs are trembling about her in ecstasy, faces are burning, eyes sparkling. And again she feels a hot wave of impetuous, reckless passion flood her whole being.

She suddenly darts into the middle of the yard, the whole crowd of girls and women close at her heels, like a bunch of aspen leaves that the wind has snatched off the top of a tree and is whirling along the ground.

"Why don't you dance?" Ella asks, and an unaccountable, irrepressible peal of laughter breaks from her lips. "Don't you have anyone to play?"

"We do! We do!" the crowd shouts back. "The coach-

man's got a concertina!" And the coachman's wife joins the chorus: "The coachman's got a concertina."

"Well, where is he?"

"Over by the table." The whole throng of women shifts to the table, but the coachman is not there. With the concertina tucked under his arm, he has joined the other men near the barrel of ale.

The stable-boy is acting as inn-keeper that night. In his shirt-sleeves, barefoot and bare-headed, he is kneeling by the barrel, ladling out the ale into jars and handless jugs, more and more, and the more they drink that night, the greater is their thirst.

The concertina under his arm, the coachman lifts his jug from which the beer is trickling over the brim on to the ground. The stable-boy fills his and rises to his feet. He is to drink with the coachman, but neither of them touches his cup. Both stand motionless, staring at each other. The crowd presses closer. It is common knowledge that the two cannot get on together. Whenever they meet after drinking there is bound to be a brawl. This time, some are trying to intervene, but rather half-heartedly, for they would enjoy watching a fight between these two strapping young men. Ella also feels something more than mere curiosity as she looks upon them, and she can well understand the feelings that radiate from the faces and bleary eyes of the crowd.

However, it does not come to a scuffle this time. The young lady's presence has a sobering effect on the two. The coachman's wife catches hold of her husband's coat.

"Don't fight, my dove!" she says coaxingly, pulling him away. But he shakes her off violently.

"Let me alone, woman! Or else. . ."

His powerful push sends her staggering backwards, and she would have fallen but for the acacia bush behind her.

Strewn with blossoms she disentangles herself from the slender branches, flashing her white teeth as she laughs.

The women and young girls fall laughing upon the coachman, pulling and tugging at him.

"Play for us, love. . . . Just a wee little bit. . . ."

The coachman is groping for his wife in the crowd, who laughs baring her white teeth, and dodges him dancing round and round.

"Just a wee little bit, love!"

Somebody picks up the concertina that has dropped to the ground and presses it into the coachman's hands. Ella runs up to him, takes him by the hand, looks him straight in the eyes, laughing and wheedling:

"You will play for me, won't you?"

She moves quite close to him, and rises on tip-toe to bring her eyes on a level with his. Her face is radiant with joy and mirth. The coachman is silent for a bit, then winces comically, and without taking his eyes off Ella he, too, bursts out laughing until the tears run down his cheeks.

"I'll play, hang it all! But then you've got to dance, Miss."

Ella gives a quick nod, and with his eyes still on her the coachman begins to play. Ella rushes up to Smilga whose eyes have been fixed on her all the time, and whirls him round, first slowly, then faster and faster. Again the gardener's arms are tightly clasped about her waist, and his hot breath is scorching her face and neck. Her eyes flash lightning, her breath fails her. She can feel nothing about her. She is like a dry leaf eddyed by a whirlwind. The yard outside the servants' quarters is in turmoil. Everybody is twirling round, in couples and single, old and young. The lads have doffed their hats and coats. The girls' heaving breasts almost burst their blouses. Cheeks are burning, eyes flashing. The pipes drop from the men's lips. The women swirl about until they flop down breathless on the fringe of the dancing crowd in the cool dew-covered grass, only to merge in the eddying throng again.

Broken bottles crunch underfoot, and here and there a red drop shows in the wet grass. The coachman is pressing madly upon his concertina, sometimes drawing himself up as stiff as a poker, sometimes swaying, singing, and stamping in rhythm with the tune, then suddenly leaping up into the air, or swinging round drawing a harsh jarring noise from his instrument.

Ella abandons Smilga and takes a turn with another lad, then with another, and a third, then hinges herself on to a couple and whirls along with them across the yard. Presently she detaches herself turning round by herself, tilting back her head and greedily drawing in the cool night air. The stable-boy and the coachman's wife stop nearby and sit down exhausted. She understands those two so well, and again a hot wave floods her being. She grasps the woman and swings her round, then with a quick kiss pushes her back into the arms of the stable-boy.

"Dance, dance your fill! Dance enough to last you a lifetime!"

She catches sight of Smilga and takes hold of him again. And again his breath scorches her face and neck, the whirlwind whistles in her ears, red sparks dance before her eyes.

"Hold me tight. . . . Let the world go crash. . . ." The passionate whisper trembles in her ear, but she does not think whether it comes from Smilga or from someone else. She clings so close to the gardener that her hair envelops his face like a soft cloud. Her eyes are almost closed, her lips ecstatically humming in rhythm with the tune.

The music stops abruptly, and with it the whole thick cluster of people outside the servants' quarters, slowly falling apart and dispersing. With an effort, Ella breaks away from Smilga, instinctively turning towards the mansion.

By the acacia bush stands Mrs. Meyer with a kerosene lamp in her hand. Its quivering light reveals behind her

the frightened and perplexed faces of Mr. Meyer, Zommer, the forester, and the three ladies. Mrs. Meyer's face is white as a sheet, her eyes dilated, her hands trembling.

"Ella, child!" she cries in a voice as if she were recalling her daughter from the edge of a precipice.

Ella moves slowly towards her mother unaware that Smilga is following in her wake like one intoxicated. Every step that brings her nearer the lamplight dims the lustre of her face and eyes. At last she sweeps her parents and guests with her habitual ironical look. Then her eyes fall upon Smilga and light up again.

There is a jug of beer on the table. She lifts it and hands it to Smilga.

"Drink... to my happiness. It is my wedding tomorrow."

His hand trembles as he puts his lips to it and drinks avidly, while his eyes hang on her face, devouring her, pleading, and bidding farewell. He hands the jug back to her, and Ella raises it to her own lips.

"To your happiness, Smilga. Thank you for tonight..."

She tears her lips away from the jug, looks into it and shakes her head.

"No, that won't do, it must be empty. There must be emptiness, always and everywhere."

She puts her lips to it again and then flings it down so that it breaks to pieces. Then she turns towards the mansion.

Her parents, her fiancé, and the guests follow. Zommer is at a loss how to behave: whether he should take the part of the outraged bridegroom, or that of the magnanimous gentleman. The ladies keep twisting their handkerchiefs, vainly thinking of what to say.

Tight-lipped, with lowered eyes, Mrs. Meyer carries the lamp. When her glance falls on the red stain on her daughter's white stocking she flinches and takes the lamp in the other hand, leaving Ella's legs in the shade.

Mr. Meyer feels it his duty to apologize and explain. But the words will not come. The incident has been too unexpected and out of the ordinary. At last he turns to Zommer and begins persuasively.

"You mustn't take it seriously. She's still such a child... and so impetuous by nature. She'll settle down once she's married."

Meanwhile Zommer has made up his mind. The magnanimous wave of his arm, as well as his bloated face ~~be-~~^{be-}speak his readiness for even greater self-sacrifice.

Ella can clearly catch the whispering behind her back but she refuses to think about it. She has the feeling of everything sinking behind her, and herself slowly entering a deep cave that is steadily growing darker, and from which there is no way out.

2. THE LITTLE WHITE HOUSE

A mild and misty winter day.

Crows are circling about the little white house on the edge of the highroad, cawing and flapping their wings. Some of them have settled on the snow like little black dots on a white cloth. A dark strip of forest hems the snow-clad plain like the black border of a shroud.

In the little white house, Mrs. Zommer, the chemist's wife, is sitting at an elegant writing desk, carefully entering prescriptions into a large book. It is the job of Mr. Zommer's assistant, but Mrs. Zommer likes to do it when time lies as heavily on her hands as it does today with her husband away hunting with the forester since dawn. Mrs. Zommer's beautiful rounded handwriting stands out against the assistant's pointed loops and nervous, jerky curves. The house is wrapped in the murky dimness of a winter day. It is very quiet. The only sounds are the clinking of bottles in the chemist's shop downstairs where the assistant is working, and the laughter of

the cook and the chambermaid in the kitchen three rooms away. There is a faint smell of medicine and freshly ground coffee.

For the third time Mrs. Zommer lifts her head and turns round to look, then bends again over her writing.

The door opens almost noiselessly, and the cook's face appears—as round as the full moon.

"Shall I serve the coffee, madam?"

"Not yet," Mrs. Zommer replies without raising her eyes. "Watch out for the gentlemen. They ought to be back soon."

For a little while she continues with her work. Then she throws down her pen and crosses the room to a small glass cupboard draped with black cloth. Years ago, when she was very young, it was full of books from top to bottom. Mrs. Zommer seems to see them still, her Schiller, and Hardenberg, and Hamerling, and Turgenev, and Byron. But no, there is not a book in the case. They disappeared gradually, one by one. Little colourful things have taken their place. A child's little skirt, tiny vests, winter and summer caps, a small pair of booties, toys. . . . All belonging to her little daughter Natinya, who died.

She stands gazing at these things, but this time dry-eyed, crumpling her handkerchief in her hand, rolling it into a little ball, but not using it. Her lips are tightly drawn, her pale oval face cold as though carved in marble.

With an almost angry, bitter gesture, she turns away, walks up to the window and presses her forehead against the steamed-up pane. Through the dirty glass she can see the vague outlines of the smooth highroad bordered with telephone poles. Crows are hopping about on it, cawing. From a distance comes the jingling of the forester's bell, but the drivers are not yet in sight. Far beyond the strip of forest, from the wood-cutters' fires, rises a thin wisp of smoke and dissolves, merging with the grey winter fog.

When Mrs. Zommer turns away from the window her

face has a set, determined expression. She quickly crosses the room to the cupboard and turns the key. The glass door opens with a creak. Hastily, as if afraid to be late, she snatches the clothes off the hangers, whisks the hats and shoes from the bottom shelf, and flies with her load across the three rooms. In the corner of her bedroom stands an old-fashioned chest, painted red and bound with decorative iron fittings. Into this she flings Natinya's little belongings, bangs down the lid and turns the old rusty key twice round.

Frightened by her own action, she hurries from the bedroom. She resumes her seat at the writing table, picks up the pen, but soon jumps up again. She has left the cupboard door open, now she walks over and closes it. The cool glass door shimmers gloomily. The room, the whole flat seems gloomy and void. She moves about in it like a stranger, afraid to sit down, afraid to touch anything. She slowly passes from the writing room into the sitting room, from the sitting room into the dining room, then walks up to the bedroom door. But the bedroom scares her, as though she had committed a crime there. She retraces her steps, then walks back again. But as she casts back her thoughts, a strange change of feeling takes place in her, and by and by her heart grows unusually free and light.

Grey dusk supersedes the twilight of the winter day. Night rises on soft black wings from beyond the forest wall. The crows perch themselves on the branches of the fir-trees, their chattering slowly dying away. Silence descends upon forest and field. Only the forester's little bell tinkles faintly in the distance again. Presently the hunters' sleigh draws up in front of the little white house. Two men are sitting in it—the chemist and the forester. The horse is steaming as though after a hot shower. Two gaunt spotted dogs leap yelping about the sleigh.

The servant boy hurries up to take over the horses. The men alight and make for the house, talking in loud

voices. Mrs. Zommer herself opens the door for them. On their way up the stairs and in the little ante-room they knock the snow off their felt boots.

"Hullo, sweetheart!" The chemist laughs. He rarely laughs, never without having had a drop too much. "Why didn't you come out to meet us and take a drive? It's lovely weather. What d'you think we got? Four hares! A real holiday bag!"

"When the thaw sets in," the forester explains, "and the snow begins to drop from the branches, the hares keep to the edge of the forest and in the brushwood. If the snow hadn't been so deep..."

"Did you miss me?" Zommer asks approaching his wife.

"Like Penelope her Odysseus!" The forester jests.

The men go inside, while she lingers a little to lock the entrance door. She inhales the smell of forest, and wet snow, and brandy.

"Ella!" Mr. Zommer's loud voice comes from the room. "Come and join us!"

She obeys, wondering why her husband's voice sounds so strange that night, as though he were talking in a room that had been emptied of every bit of furniture. She enters the sitting room and sits down facing the men.

The forester has seated himself by the mirror in his usual attitude, his hands resting on his knees. His pudgy face framed by a short greying beard has more than its usual high colour. Even his bald head is rosy. It seems to Ella that he, too, talks and laughs a great deal more than usual. Zommer reclines in a chair opposite. His face with its dishevelled moustache is also red with the warmth of the room and the hunters' bottle. He says little, only listens and laughs—also apparently more than usual.

Ella is not quite sure, but everything seems to her different here tonight. Slowly but steadily the desire grows upon her to be by herself in these empty rooms, to think out to the end what it is that is surging in her heart, ring-

ing in her ears, hammering at her temples. She does not hear what the forester is saying, or perhaps asking. The chemist glances at his wife in surprise.

"Listen, Ella," he puts in when the forester's flow of speech stops for a moment.

"Yes?"

"Why don't you see to the light? It's dark in the room."

Ella rises without a word. Just then the door opens from the kitchen, and a maid enters in a stiffly starched apron, curtsies awkwardly to the forester, and says:

"Coffee is served, Sir!"

Her monotonous, ridiculous voice also seems odd to Ella that night, even indecent.

"Get out, don't be silly," and she pushes the girl back into the kitchen. The latter looks at her mistress in wide-eyed amazement.

The forester and chemist sit down opposite each other, and Ella at the top of the table, twice as distant from both men as they are from each other. A smell of freshly roasted fragrant coffee comes from the white porcelain jugs. The flower-patterned majolica lamp suspended from ornamental golden chains in the centre of the ceiling pours a gentle yellowish light over everything. A heavy carved oak sideboard stands gloomy against one wall, on it there are two silver-rimmed crystal vases. A magnificent grandfather clock ticks drowsily from the opposite wall, its shiny pendulum sliding to and fro behind its glass door, like a little moon. On the corner shelf gleams a row of copper dishes. The window is nearly screened by four rubber plants, almost as tall as a man, an oleander bush and an aspidistra. From a little round stand, a palm-tree in a green clay pot reaches out its fans, three almost touching the table, two overshadowing the snow-white figure of Flora.

Peace—warm, fragrant, and seemingly eternal—reigns in this room.

Ella finishes her cup as though in a dream. She wants to get up and refill it but only raises her head and remains sitting, listening to the men's conversation.

"It isn't what it used to be," the forester is saying. "Four hares! Five years ago, we'd have brought home ten at least."

"Maybe there's an epidemic on hares, just like there is on crayfish," Mr. Zommer tries to jest, giving his wife a wink from a bleary eye.

"It's worse than an epidemic!" The forester takes an angry sip from his coffee cup. "It's the peasants. There's not one among them now that hasn't got a gun. Maybe just some old muzzle-loader from Polish times, but good enough to hit a hare or a snipe. A real plague that is!"

The chemist makes no answer, glancing furtively at his wife.

"It's terrible, what the people have come to. No idea of what's mine and what's yours. No sense of private property, that's what it is. Not surprising, to be sure. Since they've lost touch with higher culture. . . ."

"Hm. . . ." Zommer mutters, still watching his wife's face. "It seems to me. . . . It seems to me you're a little biased."

But the forester, warmed to his subject, does not even listen.

"What can become of a people who are left in the shade, untouched by the sun of culture? What ideas, what aspirations can they have? What kind of lives do they live?"

An outburst of laughter from the top of the table interrupts his flow of speech. The startled forester turns to the chemist, but the latter averts his eyes, glances over his shoulder, and scans the room searching for the possible cause of this sudden laughter. Then he looks at his wife, blushes an even deeper red and lowers his eyes.

Ella's lips are still twitching with harsh scoffing laughter. But her brow is drawn, and there is despair in her eyes. She is obviously struggling to choke back her tears.

"Ideas . . . aspirations. . ." she mocks in a low voice, hardly moving her lips. A new fit of laughter, shorter but even harsher than the first, strangles further utterance.

"But Ella, darling. . ." Zommer waves his hand at her, trying to calm her.

The forester feels hurt. Sitting up straight in his chair, his lips pursed, he gazes stiffly over the chemist's head at the wall.

"Excuse me," Ella begins again in the same low voice. "Something just came to my mind. It was in town, our head mistress had a parrot that could say just three words: 'Good morning, madam!' And he would cry out these words morning and night, never knowing what they meant. And now I am hearing for the tenth time—higher culture. . . ideas . . . aspirations. . ."

"Oh Ella, darling!" Zommer leaps from his chair, at a loss whether to take it seriously or as a jest.

To the forester, however, it is perfectly clear that this is not a joke. He seizes his napkin, presses it against his lips, flings it down on the table and rises deliberately and solemnly. With a threatening look at his wife, Mr. Zommer hastens up to him.

"Oh, come on, sit down again. . . . It was only a joke."

Proudly and solemnly, the forester withdraws his hand.

"There's a limit even to jokes." He halts in the middle of the room, and turns towards them. "And although the little story told by the honourable lady could not possibly refer to me, I still consider it out of the question to set foot again in a house where guests are treated in this manner. Good evening." Having completed this long and laborious sentence, he bows obsequiously.

Zommer hurries up to him and catches him by the corner of his coat.

"Wait, don't be silly. Sit down."

But the forester will not sit down. He continues towards the door with Zommer desperately clinging to his coat.

Ella is bending over the table, biting at her napkin, her eyes dancing with suppressed laughter. The sight is too comical, she can hardly contain herself. She jumps up, runs out into the bedroom, flings herself down on the bed, burying her face in the pillow, and laughs and laughs.

A little while later, the forester's sleigh is heard crunching along the highroad past the little white house, the dogs yelping as they tear after it.

The chemist, lamp in hand, slams the front door so vigorously that the whole house shakes. He re-enters the room red with fury and excitement, and puts the lamp on the writing table. For a moment he stands indecisive. Then, hearing the clicking of glasses in his shop, he goes there, and soon his shrill, high-pitched voice rings through the whole house, as he vents his anger on his assistant.

Some minutes later he emerges from the chemist's shop even redder in the face, even more agitated than before. As is usual with him, his excitement, far from subsiding, grows and grows, till it snaps like an overstrung chord. With an ominously trembling hand, he snatches the lamp from the table. He'll go to his wife and tell her his mind, he'll rate her properly. . . . He does not know what he is going to say, but his rage impels him irresistibly. He takes three steps in the direction of the door at the back of the room—and stops dead as though he had knocked against a wall, gazing with dilated eyes at the empty cupboard. The lamp in his hand tilts over and almost drops. He takes another step towards the cupboard, draws up in front of it, raises the lamp bending forward and looks. It is empty. . . .

When he straightens himself again all the blood has drained from his face. His lips are blue, his eyes wreathed with tiny wrinkles. With long slow strides, his head bent as though under a heavy burden, he goes in search of Ella.

She is not in the sitting room, nor in the dining room from which the two startled maids fly as he enters. In the

bedroom he finds her stretched out on the bed, arms folded behind her head, her right leg dangling flippantly across the edge. Her wide open eyes, her pursed lips, her whole attitude is spiteful, contemptuous, challenging.

Zommer sets down the lamp on the chest of drawers, turns to his wife, and stares at her. But all he can see is spite and challenge, nothing else.

"Ella!" he cries as though from a long way off.

The corners of her lips move almost imperceptibly.

"Yes?"

"Tell me. . . ." He falters, not knowing what to say first. "Have you taken from the cupboard. . . ."

"Natinya's belongings, that's right. They are over there, in the chest."

Zommer swallows hard.

"And you did it, you. . . ."

"Naturally, who else."

"Have you gone out of your mind? What has come over you today!" Sentence upon sentence pour from his lips, almost overlapping. "You've gone mad. We would sit for hours and hours looking at our child's things. We cried over them almost every day. And now—in the chest! Speak, explain, Ella!"

Ella merely shrugs her shoulders. Her eyes are fixed upon the ceiling, her face slowly freezes into a mask of cold indifference.

"I've told you many a time, and you wouldn't realize. For the last six months you've been crying alone. I didn't any more. I'm sick of this worship of the dead. I want to live."

With clenched fists he comes close up to the bed, forcing back the tears that keep welling to his eyes.

"You're an unworthy person, Ella, you have no heart. You've never loved our child. I can see that now. You even defile her memory."

"Her memory is defiling all my life!" She lifts her leg

on to the bed and props herself up on one arm. "We have been devoting ourselves to that memory for three years now. Except for father, mother, and the forester, not a soul has crossed our threshold. Our house has turned into a cloister, and me you want to turn into a nun, a guardian of a dead soul, or I don't know what. But I am alive. I've stuffed all those rags into the chest. They're not going to dangle here right in front of my eyes forever!"

"I see," Zommer hisses, "no, I feel there is more behind it. I've been watching you. You don't need to think I haven't got a pair of eyes in my head. You've been smirking at everything I say or do. At morning and evening prayers you sit there with pursed lips, like a wooden image, and neither sing nor listen. When the forester is here your eyes glisten like a cat's. And tonight. . . no, that goes beyond human understanding. Get up, we're going to the forester's, and you're going to apologize."

"You may go!" she snaps and sits up in bed, as though preparing for struggle.

"You've got to go!" Zommer stamps his foot. "Tonight! This very minute! Come on, get up."

Zommer draws closer still, his eyes bulging from their sockets, his hands twitching. But he is still in control of himself.

"You take those clothes out of the chest at once and put them back where they were!" he utters painfully in a strangled voice. He no longer cares which she does first as long as she gives in somewhere, as long as he can break that cold, strange opposition that is ominously rising before his eyes.

He draws a deep breath, inclines his head and stares expectantly at his wife. She does not stir. Not a finger moves, not an eye-lid flutters. And his long-constrained rage and agitation rushes like a hot torrent to his head, floods his every limb, every muscle of his body. He hardly knows what he is doing, only feels his fingers strike

against her cheek. Then staggers out of the room like one drunk.

The blow has pushed Ella slightly over to the right. She straightens herself and looks about her, with wide open eyes. The room is quiet and empty.

The lamp on the small and distinguished-looking though rather old-fashioned chest of drawers throws its dim light upon the room. The glossy bearskins on the floor bring up memories of snow-covered forests and produce a pleasant sensation of warmth in the gentle twilight. Four white pillows shine dimly on the red quilts on both beds—like white snow-drifts in a pool of blood. At the foot of the bed is a washstand with a black-and-white veined marble top. Ella's eyes stray over all these objects and fasten themselves on a spot on the opposite wall.

A plain zinc crucifix. How often has she looked at it like this! For hours on end, till her eyes swam and her head ached with gazing and thinking. He, too, is dead... or is He? Does not His hand still guide millions of people? Does not the thought of Him imbue mankind with an infinite yearning for eternity? Is it, then, that the dead rule over humanity? No, He cannot be dead! Perhaps He is looking at her, and He too sees the green flicker in her eyes that her husband saw.

Her husband ... Natinya... Ella stirs to consciousness. She suddenly feels the smart on her left cheek burning like fire. Memory of the recent events bursts in upon her, and she slides back on her bed burying her face in the pillow. Again, as before, her whole frame is writhing and twitching, but this time with uncontrollable sobs instead of laughter. Yet the source is the same, both of laughter and tears.

Ella does not hear the carriage pull up at the front door. She does not hear Mr. Zommer hurry out to meet the arrivals. She has forgotten that it is Wednesday, and that every Wednesday her father and mother come over

from their little estate four miles away. All these years, ever since she left them to live with her husband, they have been coming regularly on that night. They come and sit with her for a while, and have a good look at her, and drive home again.

Having discarded his fur-coat in the hall, Mr. Meyer is pacing up and down the sitting room with quick little steps, rubbing his hands as though they were frozen. His slightly inflamed eyes wander in surprise from one door to the other. Why does not Ella hurry out to meet them as usual?

Hearing his wife whispering with his son-in-law in the study, he stops to listen. But he cannot catch their words, and lest they should suspect him of eavesdropping, he clears his throat and resumes his pacing, still rubbing his hands. There is obviously something in the air. Something has happened.

His wife comes in, fat and podgy, with a sickly pale, nervous, exhausted, troubled face, and a streak of white hair behind either ear. Glancing at her Meyer feels certain that something has happened, and he grows very quiet and subdued.

"In the bedroom?" Mrs. Meyer whispers.

Her son-in-law merely nods.

She goes out, leaving Zommer alone with his father-in-law. For a while, the two men stand beside each other, their eyes averted. At last Zommer pulls himself together.

"Won't you sit down?" he says, and sits down first, where he sat before. Mr. Meyer takes the seat near the mirror, the one the forester had occupied.

"Help yourself," says Zommer holding out his silver cigar case, and, taking a cigar himself, lights his first.

Puffing at his cigar and blowing out curly little wisps of smoke, Mr. Meyer gazes intently at the two vases on the mirror shelf, as if seeing them for the first time, though he himself presented them to his daughter on the sixth

anniversary of her wedding. They are rather valuable vases, works of art, made of opaque greenish Venetian glass. The artificial red, black-centred poppies in them look so natural that you seem to smell their peculiar bitterish scent in this red-rugged room, cluttered with red-upholstered furniture. His look wanders from the vases to the huge broad-leafed plant in the corner. Its top touches the ceiling, and between its indented leaves you can see a little gilded cage, like a little Swiss cottage with a tiny greyish yellow bird perched in it, its head tucked under its wing. It is warm, peaceful and quiet.

"The snow still soft outside?" Zommer says at last, his voice coming with obvious effort.

Meyer nods and looks round for a spittoon; his son-in-law's cigars are very strong.

"It is. This sudden thaw in the middle of winter, it is quite unheard of. I expect all the snow will have melted soon."

"We-ell," Zommer drawls, one ear cocked at the bedroom.

"You'll see. It's been thawing for more than a week now, and there are only nine days left before the new moon. There won't be a frost before that."

"Don't believe in the moon."

"You don't believe in the moon?" Meyer begins to laugh, but ~~breaks off~~ in the middle, startled, glancing at the door at the back of the room. "Well, you'll see. All the ice will be gone on the roads."

"And we haven't got the ice in yet for our cellar!"

"You haven't? I say, that was thoughtless of you. We got in ours the week before last. It's all frozen solid. I think it'll keep till the next lot comes in. Whatever have you been doing with your horse? It was free, wasn't it?"

"We used it to cart fire-wood. We thought it was too early for the ice, it wasn't thick enough. But the forester said today he'd had his supply brought up."

"Of course, who hasn't? Been hunting with the forester?"

"Yes."

"Yes, the snow is dropping from the trees. That's when the hares keep to the edge of the shrubs."

Meyer's eyes light up.

"What sort of bag did you get?"

"Four."

"Hm... not many. Well, we know the kind of hunters you are. The forester gone? So early?"

"He left..." Zommer throws his half-smoked cigar into the ash-tray.

"Why this hurry?"

"Well..." And suddenly Zommer leans over to his father-in-law and begins to tell, falteringly, excitedly, incoherently, and at great length.

Mrs. Meyer sits ponderously on the edge of Ella's bed. Her cool broad hand rests on her daughter's breast. Her head is drawn in between her shoulders, her eyes unblinkingly turned upon the girl's face.

Ella lies on her back, her attitude unchanged, her arms crossed behind her head. She is calm now but for her fitful jerky breathing. Even in the twilight of the room you can see her burning left cheek.

"You are all my care and worry," Mrs. Meyer mutters in a low reproachful voice. "My hair has turned grey with worrying over you."

"You always quote from the Bible, mama," Ella's voice is weak, but calm and determined, and full of conviction. Her agitation has almost passed.

"What d'you mean, from the Bible?" her mother cries, but at once realizes that her daughter is right. "What if I do. One should always remember the word of God. You have forgotten it, child."

Ella's eyes search for the crucifix on the wall, but she

cannot see it from her lying position. She shrugs her shoulders.

"You mean to say I am giving you as much heartache as Jacob's sons gave their father, and your grey hair. . ."

With a violent wave of her hand Mrs. Meyer stops her daughter.

"It is a sin to talk like that, child! I did not say that. But listening to you, one might think you did not care." She seems to withdraw into herself. Her face turns visibly grey with some suppressed heavy, torturing emotion that even she herself, perhaps, cannot explain or understand.

"I am not saying that you are wicked, that you're doing it on purpose. . . . But you've got a bad disposition, and you've been like this ever since you were a little girl. You want it all your own way. Every person has his father and mother to consider, and the word of God, but you. . ." Again she hesitates in her speech, as though afraid to say too much. "Father and I, we've been worrying ourselves about you since you were a child. You would listen to us, and even do as you were told, but one could see you thought otherwise. . . you always thought otherwise. And when Zommer was courting you. Anybody could see that you would never find a better husband in your life. But you, you would just stand there smirking, as though it concerned some perfect stranger. As though there was no need for you to think about this step that brings a person either eternal happiness or eternal misery."

"What did it matter whether I thought or not," Ella suddenly uttered in a strong voice that rang with self-irony. "As if I could have changed your decision."

"Were we thinking of ourselves? Don't you see that it meant your own happiness? And if not—you have a father and a mother who have brought you up with all their hearts—you might have come to them and poured out all your troubles. But you—you're like a piece of wood, like a stone . . . like black night. You went to the altar silent

and pale, so that people gossiped that we had forced you into marriage. And again, at Natinya's funeral. It was breaking our hearts, Zommer was beside himself, and you alone stood so calm. . . . I couldn't say, I did not see it, but father maintains he saw a smirk on your lips. And now Zommer tells me. . . you have thrown all Natinya's clothes into the chest. I don't think you've ever loved your child."

"You are wrong, mother. I did love her."

"But how can one forget! How can a mother ever forget her child? Speak up, explain yourself."

"About those clothes?"

"No . . . well, yes, about that, and about everything. I've been noticing it for a long time—you are keeping something from us. There's a gulf between us, and it grows wider every day. Soon we won't be able to come here at all."

Ella sits up with sudden decision, leaning on one elbow. But she checks herself.

"Perhaps we'd better not talk about it, mama."

"No, tell me, tell me everything, don't hide anything."

"Very well." Her face is cold and hard again. "Come closer to me—closer still. That's right."

Her mother hovers over her. There is suffering in her sickly face, but she controls herself. Her cool, heavy hand is stroking the girl's soft dark hair. Ella can feel all the love that is expressed in this caress.

She begins to speak, her voice quiet, but not subdued. Her sentences come short, measured, coherent, as though she had prepared them long ago. In the long years of her married life she has had plenty of time to think of everything a hundred times over. First she picks out scattered incidents from her childhood touching upon her emotional life. But the longer she speaks the broader grows her scope, the deeper does she cleave into her own and other people's souls, and views, and convictions. She digs into the very foundations of life as a gardener turns up the

loose soil of a hot-bed preparing it for new shoots to sprout in spring.

But her mother does not see these sprouts. She only feels that with each word her daughter moves farther away from her, grows stranger to her. Her whole body has sagged, she sits motionless except for her large lustreless eyes that stray about the room with an expression of despair, as though looking for help. On the chest of drawers, the lamp throws a circle of white light upon a red velvet frame in which stands a photograph of Ella—a shy young girl in a white confirmation dress, with a hymn book in her hand. That is how she lives in her mother's heart. But the voice that sounds in her ears now is that of a stranger. Everything she and everybody else hold sacred, and inviolable, and unchallengeable, is being defiled, destroyed, and trampled underfoot. The world of Ella's words is strange to her. Strange and hostile. The black gulf between them gapes ever wider.

Ella stops abruptly. She could have said a lot more, but why talk? She feels her mother's hand icy cold on her forehead. Instinctively, she turns her head aside, and the hand slides over her hair and down along the edge of the bed. Why talk? Her mother has heard everything, clearly, unmistakably, but her lustreless eyes, her sagging form bespeak a new question: *Why? Why indeed?* Could she have answered this herself?

The door from the sitting room opens. Her father comes in, clearing his throat, followed by Zommer. Mr. Meyer walks up and down the room several times, then approaches the bed, bends over Ella and carefully takes her free hand.

"Hm... no temperature. Pulse normal..." He drops her hand and steps back.

Ella utters a laugh. The other three start, as though struck by something sharp and nasty. The mother furtively wipes away her last tear.

"Do you consider me ill?" Ella swings herself up lightly, but remains sitting in bed, reclining against the pillows.

"Why ill?" Her father, too, utters a forced little laugh. "Know what? Let's go for a little drive."

"What?" Ella fails to understand him.

"Let's go for a drive, the four of us. We'll have both horses harnessed, yours and ours, and go two in each sleigh."

"In the middle of the night?"

"Oh, the nights are bright now. Nicer than driving by day. . . . Yes, and then we'll drop in at the forester's."

"Again!" Ella winces. "Won't you leave me in peace with that forester of yours."

"No, child, you can't leave it like that," her father's voice grows firm and strict. "The forester is the baron's official, we are all dependent on him. It's dangerous to antagonize him, he's not the kind of person to forget. And what an insult! Child, child, how could you be so rude!"

"Pooh!" Ella drawls. "He deserved more than what I gave him!"

Zommer flinches as though stung. Mr. Meyer pretends not to have heard.

"All right, let's just go for a drive," he says appeasingly. "It's a lovely night, and the road's as smooth as a carpet."

A short silence ensues. Everybody waits for Ella to say something, but she says nothing.

"Aah," the mother sighs dejectedly. "As if she would listen. We mean nothing to her."

"Hush, mother, don't you interfere!" Mr. Meyer says. "Well, daughter, what about it? Let's have a drive."

There is another moment of silence. Then Ella stirs as if waking from a dream.

"All right."

A sigh of relief breaks from somebody's lips, though nobody knows whose.

Half an hour later Ella is standing in the study dressed

for the drive. She is wearing a large warm fur-coat, a woollen shawl over her head, and double-knitted gloves. Her husband has helped her into her coat and is now standing on one side, watching her. Her mother is still fussing over her, wrapping her shawl tighter about her neck, pulling up her gloves. Ella stands listless. Let them. She gazes at the empty cupboard, with neither thought nor purpose.

Intercepting her look, her mother whispers:

"You'll put it all back tomorrow, won't you?"

"I will," comes the mechanical answer.

A gleam of hope shows in her mother's eyes, hope that she may yet retrieve her prodigal child.

The two horses are stamping about outside, harnessed one to each sleigh. The men seat themselves in one, the women in the other. They start out. The horses' hoofs clack over the hard road. The snow crunches gently under the smooth runners.

For a while the mother keeps fidgeting, tucking herself into the warm bearskin blanket. Ella holds the reins. The horse kicks its hoofs against the sleigh in front.

The mother heaves a prolonged sigh.

It is a warm, twilit winter night. They are driving over an open snow-clad field with little clumps of bushes scattered here and there. The moon is racing behind tattered clouds. A soft romantic atmosphere encompasses them. In it all the pleasant experiences of a lifetime melt into one--the distant, legendary childhood, the cherished dreams of life and love. . . . Above all, of love!

It is the kind of atmosphere that makes a person's inward ear strangely sensitive.

The mother hears that harsh chord in Ella's heart give another jarring quiver, so hostile, so incongruous with the nature of both herself and this night where everything tends towards harmony, and soft sweet stillness. A deep, melancholy sigh escapes her lips.

"Do put Natinya's things back again," she resumes. "Keep them there, as a memory. Your husband loved that child so dearly. . . ."

Ella listens, but her thoughts do not follow. Complete indifference has come in place of her recent agitation.

"Don't give vent to your imagination," her mother keeps on. "Your nature has always needed a firm hand. Remember the trouble you gave us when you were a young girl. It's different now. We're no longer responsible for your actions. It is you who is responsible now. And more than that. The honour of our whole family, the honour of our class hinges on the behaviour of every single person. By acting virtuously we raise it, by doing wrong we impair it."

"Aren't you sleepy, mother?" Ella asks, without meaning any harm.

Her mother pretends not to hear; perhaps she really does not.

"You have a husband. You are young, inexperienced, you don't realize properly what it means to you. Your whole life, and you yourself, are inseparably linked with him, by the law of God and man. You have no right to cherish any views, or thoughts, or desires in which your husband has no part. There must be harmony between you, your whole life must ring like a single chord. . . ."

"Must. . . always must," Ella mutters below her breath, and it is hard to guess what she means.

"Natinya's memory was the link between you. Don't you see that it was for your sake, and not for his own, that your husband clung to it so. Without a link of this kind there is no sense of duty between husband and wife. They may be married, and yet remain like two flies on either side of a window-pane, and never get together. If the sense of duty goes, everything goes. Think of yourself. Is it not true that your wrong, and wicked, and sinful thoughts grew as your love and attachment for your child

dwindled? When love wanes, everything wanes. Duty and love—these are the two mainstays of the world.... Yes...."

She heaves another long sigh and falls silent. Faith in the return of her strayed child sounds in that sigh.

There is a long silence. Ella feels the surface of indifference within her ruffled anew by rising waves. Surging and breaking against one another, they steadily fill her whole being with their lapping and roaring. But she knows from experience that she must listen to the leading tune, excluding all else, and she can hear it clearly, unmistakably.

"Duty and love! If, as you say, there need be some standard by which we ought to live, some dogma that should rule our life, then it could only be the other way round: love first, then duty. But you... you've turned it all upside down. Marriage first, then love; tradition first, then virtue; class first, then its honour; law first, then sin. There's no room for a live person in your lives...."

She stops drawing in her breath, waiting for her mother's response, angry, excited.

Mrs. Meyer keeps silent.

"Harmony!" Ella goes on impelled by her own resentment. "All you demand is outward harmony, something that might be taken for harmony on the face of it. But appearance, surface means nothing! It's what's in the heart that matters. What harmony can there be between two worlds that are as different from each other as night is from day? Day is night's enemy, it drives it out, step by step, devours it, destroys it.... You listening, mum?"

Silence.

Ella seizes the reins in her right hand pulling back the bearskin with her left, bends forward and looks.

Her mother is asleep.

Ella flinches as though she had received a slap in the face. Now that she has found in herself the courage to speak out, her mother is asleep! Sound asleep, her head

tilted forward, her chin deep in her fluffy coat collar, her hands tucked into her muff; now and then she gives a snore.

Whom can she tell all that had been fermenting and stirring in her heart for many years until it has finally moulded itself into a hard and definite shape? To that desolate snow-covered field on which the black spots of scattered bushes lurk like sunken, smirking eyes? To the old moon that is swimming across the sky God knows where, now diving behind the clouds, now emerging again? To the wood that looms like a black wall and seems to be creeping in upon her?

She is enveloped in silence. The horses' hoofs clatter on the soft, smooth road. The runners crunch in the snow. And Ella spins her thread of thought.

The horse's head pushes into the wood as into a black granite wall. Ghostly shapes, black and grey, flit past her. The clatter of horse and sleigh echoes eerily among the firs, as though there is nothing there but the humid scent of resin. This mysterious black maze makes her a little scared at first. But the feeling passes, and she continues spinning the thread of her thoughts.

She hears the other sleigh in front of her pull up.

"Aren't you afraid?" comes Meyer's reassuring voice.

"Go on. We're not."

Ella pulls in the reins and bending over her mother peers into her face. No, she has not woken, her eyes are shut, her breath comes with loud snores. A decision forms in Ella's mind. After a while she gives her mother a little shake.

"Wake up, mama!" she mutters.

Her mother stirs in her sleep.

"Mama!" Ella shakes her harder. Her mother moves her lips and sighs, but continues to snore. Ella knows this almost lethargic sleep into which her mother falls some-

times, and from which nothing can wake her. She jerks at the reins slowing down the horse.

By and by her eye accustoms itself to the darkness. She can clearly distinguish the greyish black forms of the fir- and ash-trees looming above the dry bracken. Underneath them the snow has thawed in patches, showing little black pools of moss. Noiselessly but for the flapping of wings the crows slide off the firs and remain hovering somewhere behind.

She cannot see the sleigh in front. Stopping her horse Ella strains her ear. Not a sound. Silence everywhere, behind her the swishing of black wings in the air. A quiver runs through her. Then suddenly she comes to herself—she is not alone. Let them drive on, the farther the better.

The horse wants to trot, but she curbs it. Ah, if only she could drive on and on, timelessly, never to turn back!

Something jumps from out of the fern right on to the road. A tiny snow-powdered fir-tree nods its head towards it, a soft little snow cap drops from it right in front of the horse. The animal baulks, charging forward and to one side across the sleigh tracks that criss-cross the little glade. The runners swish over the grooves of the forest road, the black forms of trees flash past her.

Ella clings to the reins, frightened. Then she realizes that it is of no avail; her strength is nothing against that of the maddened horse. Closing her eyes instinctively, a strange din filling her ears, she relaxes in her seat.

Let it race. Let it overturn the sleigh, hurl her against a tree and strike her dead. What is the use of living? What is there to live for? How often has she longed to go to sleep and never wake. The branches brush her head. If one hits her it would be the end.

But nothing happens. She can hear the horse's snorting, the crunching of the runners in the grooves of the road.

The wind whistles in her ears. Her cheeks are burning. A strange wave of heat floods her veins.

Why die? Is it not lovelier to live free? Go wherever the heart desires, follow the call of the blood. Fear nobody, ask nobody, beg nobody. Let the wind whistle in her ear and her blood boil.

"Heigh-ho!" she lashes out at the horse with the stiffened reins. Away, away from her husband, from father and mother. Away from this life, stuffy and musty with traditions, petty cares, and even pettier joys. To live free, to live beautifully!

May the horse trample down the tiresome, repulsive sanctity of wedlock! May the runners crush conventional virtue! May she be free like the whirlwind sweeping the snow-covered expanses.

"Heigh-ho!" she strains at the bridles all but crying out with the exuberance of her joy. The sleigh leaps from rut to rut, swaying and jolting dangerously. Let it jolt! Let her teeth clatter with the sudden jerks. Let the branches slash her face, scar it—who needs her beauty now? Her husband? She almost bursts into laughter. She won't go driving after him. He won't see her again.

Nora and Helmer?...

No. The closest link between husband and wife—a child—does not exist for them. Not even its memory. Her heart sings. How light it is, how free. Her newborn consciousness stirs and mounts and surges and shoots up like a flame that a powerful gust of wind has freed from the burden of ashes. Free and alone.

Suddenly she starts. Something heavy has dropped upon her shoulder. Leaning back she glances sideways bewildered. Then a cold flood stifles the flame of her exuberance.

Her mother!

She had forgotten her. Where is she going? Escaping—with her mother in the sleigh by her side? The horse is racing madly. She pulls at the reins. The horse stops snorting

heavily. You can smell the sweat. Slowly, but roughly Ella pushes away from her mother's limp, heavy body. It stirs, and turns, and utters a long sigh. Then her mother opens her eyes.

"Are we there so soon?" she mutters in a drowsy, troubled voice.

Ella does not answer. That sleepy, troubled voice rises from the old world which she has just imagined behind her. That very world which but a moment ago was retreating like the night at the break of day. Do the sleeping and the dead always rise again? Ella grits her teeth, choking back a cry of anguish.

The forest falls behind them. They are driving over open space, flat and monotonous as that in front of the little white house. Clumps of bushes lurk like black eyes out of deep sockets. Except that everything is more blurred and vague and distant, as it were, for a thick mist hangs over the field.

"Where are we driving?" comes her mother's feeble voice. There is weariness in it, and reproach, and fear.

Ella makes no answer. What is there to answer? As if she herself knew where that winding road was taking them. Not before they come to the place where they started. And they will come to it—she can feel that. She can feel the surging, scorching wave that flooded her a while ago ebbing away. She can feel the yoke of impotence that has been smothering her soul throughout these long years slowly descending upon her again. Oh, for more strength! But what would be the use; there is her mother beside her in the sleigh, heavy and motionless. Ella bends over, peers into her mother's face and winces. Heavy tears are rolling one by one from her mother's large and staring eyes, as they did before, in her room.

— Yet it is not the same. These tears are no longer a matter of indifference to her. All spirit has gone from her, and this fills her with bitterness and self-pity. She looks

back upon her life and sees that at every decisive moment fate looms up thus, in her mother's sickly face, and her large, heavy tears.

Is that a dog barking in the distance?

With a joyful snort the horse falls into a steady trot. The snow-covered field glides underfoot like a sheet pulled away by an unseen hand.

The mother puts her hand up to her face and sighs. Ella gives the horse the reins. Let it go, let it run, or stand, whatever it pleases. . . .

Now the barking sounds louder and clearer. You can make out where it comes from. It seems familiar.

Let them bark. Ella shuts her eyes. Weariness pervades her body. Her back aches. For a moment she has a clear vision of the little warm bedroom with its bearskin rug, and red quilts, and white pillows, the photograph of a young girl in a white dress with a hymn book in her hand, a zinc crucifix on the wall. How sweetly and soundly you sleep there!

She opens her eyes. Little red lights are flitting to and fro in front of her—people moving about with lanterns in their hands. She hears the familiar barking of a dog, the excited cries of men.

She recognizes them—her father and her husband. The little white house is just over there. . . . Her heart gives a leap of secret joy. She urges on the horse.

1905-1907



Vikis, the owner of the Lower Breki farm and sexton of the parish, was walking home from church. It was a Wednesday afternoon, but he had been summoned to assist the pastor in sanctioning with his blessings a christening that had been performed outside church by the verger.

Behind the door of the vestry he had sneaked a couple of hearty gulps from the bottle brought to him by the infant's parents, and now he was munching a rich and highly seasoned pork pie. He swallowed his last mouthful, licked his thumb and forefinger and wiped them on his trouser leg. What wouldn't he give for a bottle of beer now!

It was sweltering hot. He could feel the moisture gathering under his peaked cap. For half a mile the highroad lay across the bare rise. The tops of his boots were soon covered with a layer of fine gravel dust. The glaring white of the road hurt his eyes.

He belched up a savoury mixture of vodka and pork pie

8/10/6.

that left an agreeable taste in his mouth. With the tip of his tongue he slowly picked the bits of lean meat from out of the gaps between his teeth. His feeling of complacency gave way to a vague irritation. He had been hoping the pastor would stop and give him a lift as far as the avenue leading to the manse. But when the carriage had come up with him the spare seat was occupied by Rozenberg, the man who used to own the pub by the church. Rozenberg had greeted him, and the pastor had nodded with something of an apology in his smile, but Vikis still felt put out. Not for reasons of physical discomfort—he was ~~well-used~~ to walking, but because he had had to forego the pleasure of reclining in a carriage by the pastor's side. What did that Rozenberg have to turn up for at the wrong time?

On stepping out of church he had passed the pastor's carriage halted by the roadside and had half considered waiting for him to drive by. But then a silly kind of shyness had come upon him. Now he was angry with himself.

You could not really call it anger; it was too vague a feeling to define, and gradually as he plodded up the hill it dispersed completely. There was still that pleasant taste in his mouth, and a slowly gathering thirst. By the bridge a little higher up, where the water was deeper and cleaner, he would stop to appease it.

Vikis recalled the cool, lofty, vaulted church hall, the golden tracery of the chandeliers with their dwindling tapers, the pleasant droning of the pastor's solemn voice resounding through the almost vacant space. The content of the sermon had escaped him, but the solemn silence of the white church and the droning of the pastor's voice had been wonderfully uplifting, and so had the serious, reverent looks that the churchgoers had turned upon his own person as he had stood by the altar executing the duties of his office.

What glorious weather! Along one side of the road rose an embankment overgrown with tare vetch and burdock leaves. The other bordered on a clover field. And beyond it reared the castle hill crowned with a twisted birch-tree. Farther still was the Daugava, but it was not yet properly visible. Far away in the distance, however, it gleamed intermittently through the foliage of the lime-trees, like a slightly tarnished silver band. And yet farther in the dim distance stretched the barren, sandy, pine-clad Kurzeme plain hemmed in by an even line of forest. Vikis averted his eyes. He had seen it time and time again. . . .

Soon, however, happiness returned to his heart.

He stopped, waving his hand and sniffing the air. He could not see it, but he could smell the thin cloud of dust that the pastor's carriage had whirled up. On a still day like this, sheltered by the hillside, it remained hovering over the road for a long time.

He took another step and lowered his eyes—perhaps to trace the marks left by the pastor's carriage wheels. And there, right in the middle of the road, he noticed something glittering. A broken horseshoe, he thought, and went on when another idea sprang to his mind. What if it was a good horseshoe? It would be a pity to leave it lying about.

He turned back and stooped to pick it up. And next moment hot shivers were rippling down his spine. It was not a horseshoe at all, he could see that at a glance. It was a shiny object, square and with a slightly convex top. Slowly, carefully, as though fearing to burn his fingers, he picked it up. It was scorching hot from lying in the sun. Holding it in the tips of his fingers he examined it with dilated, unblinking eyes. He drew it closer, then held it at arm's length, and looked and looked, dazzled by its glitter.

It was a beautiful and valuable article, probably made of silver. One side was masterfully engraved with a

flower, something like a lily-of-the-valley. The other—with two large intertwined and elaborately decorated letters. He gazed hard but could not decipher them. Suddenly he noticed that his hand was trembling. And so was the other one, a little. He was breathing hard, as though he had been carrying a heavy sack or trying to unhinge the door of a cowshed. Hot little waves continued running down his back. Good Lord! Why all this emotion? It was not his property. What did it matter to him? It belonged to somebody else.

His thumb pressed of its own accord against the oblong knob. The lid snapped open. Vikis swayed on his feet as though somebody had given him a powerful push. The inside was gilded, a pale yellow. Under a narrow elastic strip were five home-made cigarettes.

Vikis pressed it to, and with his free hand mopped the sweat off his brow. With sweat-bleared eyes he looked about him. Some fellow must have dropped it. People were unbelievable sometimes. Fancy being so careless with a valuable thing like this!

He could not just let it lie. Some rascal would pick it up and that would be the end of it. With a hesitant movement he let it slip into his pocket and then quickly withdrew his hand. It wasn't his property. . . .

Vikis could not make up his mind what to do. All he knew was that he had to do something. He felt its weight drag down the corner of his coat. Thrusting one hand into his pocket he clasped his find. And as he did so something flashed upon his conscious mind. Yes, he had been trying to think what this thing might be worth. From ten rubles his mind has soared into hundreds. But why should he care? It was not his.

He gave an angry cough as though somebody had touched him on a sore spot, and strained quickly up the hill. His heavy boots eddied up the dust. A white cloud of it enveloped his legs. He felt vexed and disturbed.

But deep down in his heart there stirred a new and comforting emotion, which was the more attractive because he had never experienced it before. He would hand it over to the pastor for him to announce the find on the following Sunday. He would drop in and do it right now; he was passing the manse anyway. The owner was sure to turn up. And he, the farmer of Lower Breki, the sexton of the parish, would give him a gently disapproving smile and a friendly slap on the shoulder. No, no, he needed no reward. He had merely done the duty of every Christian. How pleasantly the pastor's voice would drone through the lofty vaulted church hall.

Ah, that would be beautiful. Vikis pushed back his cap and quickened his pace. And suddenly he gave a start. A man was walking downhill towards him. A stranger. What of it, there was nothing remarkable about meeting a stranger on the road. Yet there was something in the way he walked, keeping to the middle of the road, lifting his feet very high as though he were wading through mud or anxious not to trample something underfoot. He was holding a whip in one hand, the long cord twisted about the handle, and a half-smoked cigarette in the other. His eyes were fixed on the road. . . . Well, it was none of his business!

"It is none of my business!" said the expression on Vikis' face, but try as he might he could not reproduce the same feeling of indifference in his heart. The lean young face flushed with excitement, the sinewy hand gripping the whip were too clearly impressed upon his mind. He had even noticed the slight flutter of the lowered eye-lids and lashes as the young man shifted his searching eyes. Vikis knew that he had lost something and was looking for it. But how should he know what it was? And if it was what he thought it was, would it be right to produce it and just hand it to him? What proof did he have? Who would disclaim a thing like this?

Vikis stuck both his hands into his pockets. The young man raised a pair of anxious, questioning eyes at him and at once averted them encountering a cold and hostile stare.

He-hmm! Vikis gave a dry cough and continued uphill without turning his head. But his ears were burning. And his heart was pounding as though he had been caught doing something disgraceful. He was furious with himself. Why? Was he a crook or a thief? A valuable thing like this could not be handed over lightly to an utter stranger. Anybody could say, "Yes, it's mine!" No, he couldn't do that. Giving it to the pastor, that was a different matter. Let him claim it then, after it had been announced from the pulpit.... There, he had reached the top of the avenue.

Suddenly his legs almost gave way. On the top of the hill stood a horse and cart, in it a driver holding the reins, his head turned towards the road. He was very young--a mere boy. Vikis threw him a severe look, and when the other raised his hand to his cap in greeting, he nodded vaguely and muttered something under his breath. The face seemed vaguely familiar to him. Perhaps he had seen him when he had accompanied the pastor on his round. Well, he could hardly be expected to know every young shaver in the district.

Before he had taken another step he stopped aghast. What if the slope was visible from here? he thought. A furtive backward glance reassured him. No, it wasn't. Only the top of the church steeple and the broad, spreading leaves of some tree lurked in the distance. Presently he felt a new pang. And if the boy had seen him looking back? He squinted over his shoulder. No, the boy was keeping his eyes fixed in the same direction as before and had noticed nothing.

Vikis thrust his other hand so firmly into the other pocket of his coat that it counterbalanced the weight of

that thing. As he continued on his way, he instinctively tried to reconcile his troubled conscience and appease his ruffled feelings. First he gave himself a proper rating. Idiot! To get all worked up over some silly boy. . . . If you've found something—well, you know full well what to do with it and why. A sexton must set an example to others and not follow somebody else's.

He stood at the top of the avenue leading to the pastor's house. The pastor must have just taken off his dust-coat and stretched out on his couch. Never in his life had Vikis imagined anything more clearly—the pastor lying on his leather couch in his shirt-sleeves and waistcoat, his white-sleeved arms folded behind his head. The gown was flung across the back of a chair, the white collar with its turned-down corners lay on the writing desk. Through the opening in the shutters a tangle of sun-speckled leaves gleamed drowsily. . . . No, how could he disturb the parish shepherd's late afternoon rest. It wouldn't be nice. He would come tomorrow or the day after. No, tomorrow, of course it would be tomorrow.

Voices reached him from behind. Harsh, angry voices. The young man had probably joined his companion in the cart and was climbing in. They might ask him questions when they passed him. What of it—he didn't care if they did. Was he not the sexton of the parish? Who could say anything against him? Was not his conscience clear? There was a footpath turning off the road into the fir-grove belonging to the pastor's estate. If he followed it and then skirted the ditch to where it converged with the river, and stepped across the stones to the other side he could reach the Breki farm much quicker. On a hot day like this every step you saved was worth it.

The cart came rumbling up behind him. He bounded off the highroad as though somebody had given him a push, then quickly pulled himself together and strode on very

deliberately, controlling each step. Who said he had to run for fear?

Crrack-ed! Crrack-ed! rumbled the cart as it jolted over the cobble-stones. And innumerable sensitive little fibres Vikis had never even suspected in his body reverberated to the sound. What if they stopped and called out to him? There was a low hum in his ears, and his back was drenched in perspiration. His feet were almost too heavy to lift, and yet it seemed to him that even at a distance it could be seen how eagerly they were making towards the bumpy footpath, and how his shoulders rose and his head drew itself in between them, as though dodging a blow.

He felt immediate relief when the first fir-trees gently laid their shadows across his back. The farther he went the better he felt. Yet not before he had put a good distance between himself and the road and made a wide circuit did he venture to turn.

He had to stoop to see the highroad. Everything was all right. Those two were driving on, slowly but steadily. Suddenly he started and all but crouched behind an alder-tree. For a moment it had seemed to him that the drivers turned their heads towards him. Again he took himself in hand; nonsense, they would never think of doing such a thing, and if they did they would not be able to see him.

Be that as it may, the farther away the better. He would wait till they reached the foot of the hill.

There they were. Perhaps he had better let them top the next rise too. You could get a fair view from there. Up they went disappearing in a bend beyond a clump of lilac by the pagast house.

Vikis drew a deep breath and flopped down on the rotting stump of an alder-tree. The heat was quite unbearable. He felt as though torrents of hot water were streaming down his body and filling his boots.

He removed his cap and listened to his heart knocking like a hammer against his ribs. Idiot! That's what he was!

He was about to rise but remained transfixed in a half crouching position, his glazed eyes fastened on the damp leather bottom of his cap. . . . But it was only the railway train that had given out its short, shrill whistle down below. Why, of course it was the train, about a mile and a half from where he stood. Who would come here to whistle! Idiot! What an idiot!

Presently a strange sensation of complacency such as he had never yet experienced pervaded his whole being, as though fresh and powerful waves were surging over him, lapping up all the old dregs that had gathered there and bearing them away. The roaring in his ears abated, and his heart resumed its normal rhythm. True, he was still very hot, but it was merely the heat of the day.

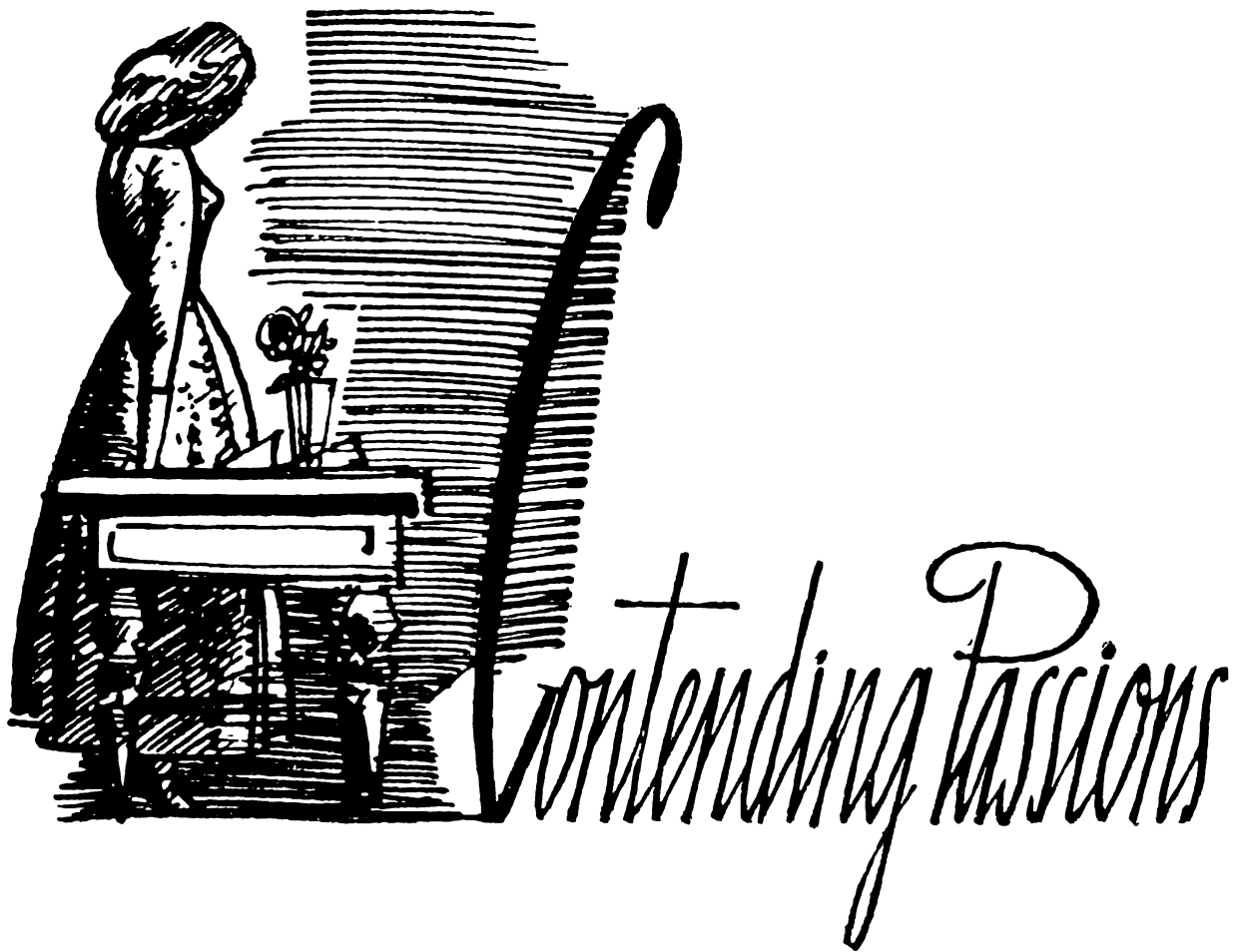
Very gently, as though afraid to wake a sleeper, he slid his hand into his pocket, took the object with two fingers and pulled it into view. Ah, how it glittered! How heavy it felt! He let it slide back and listened to the soft thud as it dropped to the very bottom of his pocket, weighing down one corner of his coat.

A little bird broke into a chirrup right above his head. Vikis started with a shudder and shied away the impostor. But at once he cast a frightened look about him. If anybody has seen him! He checked this thought before he had finished it. Who could come prowling and prying here in the middle of a working day! Yet to keep on the safe side he gave a loud cough, thrust his other hand into the other pocket, turned the dust- and sweat-stained lining inside out, peeped at it from under his arm, exactly as he had looked the other way, at the object—crumpled it in his hand and straightened it again. Then he gave another cough.

Why in heaven's name should he tremble and hide? Was he a thief or a crook? If he chanced upon him again—and how often did it happen thus in life!—he would return it at once. Without a word. Had he ever stolen or cheated as long as he had lived?

Again his thoughts measured the scale between ten rubles and a hundred. He rose to his feet and strolled down to the river, and across it to Breki. It was a good bit quicker this way. His heart felt light and almost joyful.

1914



1

The dress rehearsal of the new play *Contending Passions* had drawn an unusual number of onlookers. Everybody who had anything to do with the theatre had come to watch. Those of the actors and actresses not engaged that night had gathered in little groups in the pit or in the boxes, and even the ushers and cloak-room attendants would now and then poke their heads in at the doors.

Next to the producer, in the centre of the fifth row, dressed in a grey summer coat and a grey slouch hat, sat the author, Janis Zile. His chin resting on the metal handle of his walking stick, he gazed absently at the stage, and listened as absently to the producer's whispered remarks.

The producer was nervous. He kept jumping to his feet to give additional directions, and Zile would pull him down to his seat again.

"Don't. This is not the time. They've got a certain degree

of harmony and interplay, and that's what matters most. Your remarks will only upset them."

The producer was obviously dissatisfied.

"But this isn't what we rehearsed. We went through the whole thing, line by line. And look what's happening now. I've had this experience time and time again. I just don't know what it is. The dress rehearsal turns out something quite different from what had been rehearsed before."

"I think it can be explained," Zile said, watching the stage, where father and mother were engaged in a passionate argument, accompanied by ever more violent gestures. "Up till now each player was simply rehearsing his own part. Tonight they have suddenly realized that they are acting a play. They have got to fit in with each other and get into the right mood. In other words, they are faced with an entirely new task, and a far more difficult one at that. And in front of such an audience—including the author himself," he concluded, adding with a smile, "as though he knew more about acting than anyone else. Look, even your veterans are nervous."

A gesture of impatience from the producer.

"An actor never gets used to the stage. You can get used to heat and frost, to the rumble of guns, and the whine of bullets. To get used to something means to blunt one's feelings. And that an actor cannot afford. It would kill him. His nerves must be as sensitive as the strings of a harp are to the wind. Not only to his own lines, but to the audience too. . . . More to the front, a little more to the front please!" he called out, interrupting himself and the actors.

For a few minutes the actors were obviously upset by the unconcealed note of irritation in his voice.

Again Zile tried to hush him.

"Wait. If you have to say something, do it after the first act. Let's try and get a general impression."

"You can't imagine how little one can rely on rehears-

ing and studying. The merest trifle can upset the whole purport of the play. Someone gets on the wrong side of a table, and the whole situation is different. Or else he puts a different stress on a line, and the dialogue goes off at a tangent. Every performance springs surprises on you that nobody in the world can either foresee or anticipate, neither the producer, nor the actor himself. Everything depends on the moment."

"Oh, come," Zile interposed half humorously. "You seem to be a pessimist and a fatalist rolled in one. If what you say were true there would be no point in rehearsing at all. That's not so. Though in a way you are right. It's so fashionable now to talk about teamwork on the stage with no one part standing out, everything running on one level, tuned to one pitch, as it were. But I have observed that it is still invariably one or two roles that have the leading voice. That's my opinion as a playwright, too. Drama has its ideological and psychological keynotes, just like music. They decide the character of the performance, and modulate the rendering. And they are expressed only through the leading parts."

"True," the producer reasoned, "but only to a certain extent. From the ideological point of view, your keynotes can be tuned in a hundred different ways; not to mention the psychological aspect, and, above all, the technical one. And some minor part will at times prove decisive."

The curtain dropped on the first act. A few dim lights went up in the far corners of the hall, outlining more clearly the groups of onlookers. The producer went behind the scenes.

Zile was approached by two elderly actors, men who took note of the content of the play, the author's lines rather than the acting, and were prone to attribute every failing to his pen. Zile enjoyed talking to them. There was a healthy instinct of self-preservation in them, a professional solidarity.

After a few commonplaces one of them said:

"Wouldn't you agree that you are repeating yourself in the way you've constructed this play? The action reaches its peak in the second or third act. There's nothing left for the end which consequently drags, and thus weakens the general effect."

"You consider that a mistake from the dramatic point of view?"

"The play certainly loses a lot of its dramatic effect by it. And it's something that might so easily be avoided. You're so well versed in stage technique."

"I'm afraid I can't return you the compliment as regards modern stagecraft. You still identify action with its outward forms of expression—loud talk, gestures, movements. But profound emotional tragedy does not always express itself in that way. What you call my mistake I do quite consciously, purposely. All the noise at the beginning is only to set off the subsequent development. It's a sort of overture. The real tragedy follows, and the very contrast between its formal reserve and restraint and the noisy and rapid beginning should bring out its import, its depth. I don't know, I may be mistaken. But that was my intention. An experiment I am not quite certain of yet."

"Experiments are risky and invariably end in failure. The stage has its own laws that cannot be overlooked. You can't bring home your deep inner tragedy unless it is clearly expressed in words and gesture. The inner world must be projected on to the surface. Of course, that's where the actor comes in. But the playwright must give him something to go by, something to work on. Otherwise the public won't understand."

"They'll sit there yawning," the other actor added.

"I agree. But surely that can only happen if the dramatist and the actor belong to two different worlds; if there is no ideological and psychological bond between the creator and his interpreter. Anyhow it seems to me that

Zina Kvelde has understood what I intended to say. The whole play hinges on her part."

Perhaps the actors had something against the leading lady of the play; perhaps they simply resented the idea of an author having an opinion about the respective aptitudes of actors and the casting of a play. Zile could never tell where, in this world, objective judgement ended and plain subjective interests began.

"Zina? Well. . . I still think the part should have been given to Milda Zvaigzne. It needs a more lively temperament. Zina is too lyrical. She is more suited for the sentimental kind of heroine."

"Zvaigzne's appearance is more in keeping with this part."

"But it isn't a heroic part at all. If you studied the whole play you would see that the action develops among ordinary work-a-day men and women. It is a very ordinary common tragedy. But the tragic essence of it becomes apparent only occasionally, with people of a certain kind. My character needs neither heroic stature, nor any of the other commonplace attributes of a stage heroine. All it needs is a woman with some understanding and a warm heart."

"And pretty. . . . You dramatists always set great store by that."

The two actors exchanged glances and smiled.

The curtain rose and the rehearsal continued. Now and then the producer's chiding voice came from behind the scenes. Doubtless as a result of his last-minute instructions, the second act began at a much slacker pace than the previous one. Sometimes he would show himself from the wings at a window that was part of the scenery, flourishing his arms and dealing out corrections.

Zile took no notice of all this. He was waiting tensely for Zina Kvelde to appear, his interest in her undoubtedly proceeding from his interest in the play itself. Her part

was the pith and marrow of it. It would decide the fate of his whole work, of his idea, of his new experiment.

He was sitting very upright, clutching his walking stick with both his hands.

She made her entry very slowly, much slower than he had visualized it. But it was good the way she did it. It seemed to him that the whole rhythm of the play had at once grown more marked, the pace seemed quicker although she spoke slowly, uttering short phrases of no particular significance.

Was he mistaken about his own play, or did the centre of gravity really lie in this one part alone? All his attention was on Zina Kvelde. Not a movement that she made escaped him. He listened to his own words coming from her lips, and her voice seemed to infuse them with inspiration and meaning.

She was dressed in a plain brown frock. It suited her slim, medium-high figure. But her wig of dark hair, brushed straight back, gave him an unpleasant little shock. He had imagined her with her own luxurious fair hair. Her eye-brows were touched up, too, to match the hair, and deeply shaded. Her make-up, though noticeable, was not so heavy as to disguise the natural reserve and vitality of her features. Her whole aspect seemed a little strange to him. He must get used to it gradually.

For all her stage experience, it was obvious that she too was a little anxious. Her slender fingers moved nervously over her dress, as if she were not quite sure what to do with her hands.

During her first pause, when she stood wrapped in thought facing the audience, her eyes scanned the hall for an instant. She knew he would be there, and was looking for him. When she found him she almost imperceptibly inclined her head. Nobody else could have noticed it. He felt gratified that she should have thought of it, and his heart warmed to this woman in whose hands lay the fate

of his work. He nodded to her, thoughtless of whether this might put her off.

Her part had, indeed, none of the usual stage-effects, nothing spectacular. Only now Zile realized the risk he had taken with his experiment in a world accustomed to the superficial staginess of light popular plays and flippant comedy. But the moment she had come on the stage, the moment she had opened her lips he had also realized that he could rely on this actress.

The very absence in her acting of anything showy or loud was proof to him that she had understood the underlying significance of her role. She had no need to seek refuge in mannerisms; she was fascinating because life itself flowed from her freely and effortlessly.

It was particularly the modulation of her voice that held him from the first. He had always enjoyed listening to Zina Kvelde's voice. Now he abandoned himself to it as though he were under the spell of music. It had none of the artificiality of stage intonations. Though burdened with thought, it still had the free resonance of pure exultation. Those were his own words she spoke, yet her voice lent them a new ring, a new warmth. While writing them he had seen with his inward eye each small movement of the body, each change of countenance. But as to the words themselves, his imagination had stopped at their actual content, the idea they conveyed. Now he recognized how inadequate that was. Only the warm inflexion of a voice that rose from the very heart could impart to his words a vitality that would make the listener tingle in every nerve. His was merely the vessel; she filled it with tremulous content. |

When Zina Kvelde left the stage for a moment he drew a deep breath. Nothing he could see or hear was of any consequence. It was merely an interlude between her exit and her next appearance. Clearer than when he wrote the

text he saw how much the whole weight of it rested upon this leading part.

During the intervals he talked to people he knew. Listened to praise and criticism. Joked and argued. But his mind was not with them.

When the dress rehearsal was over he went up on the stage. Why? He had not intended it. There was work waiting for him at home. This occurred to him only when he found himself in a room adjoining the stage, and a rather harrassed-looking producer came out to meet him.

"Don't draw conclusions from a dress rehearsal," he said as though anticipating criticism. "The show is going to be better."

And he continued in the usual way pleading shortage of time, under-rehearsing, and all the hundreds of calamities that seem to besiege the stage like menacing enemy legions. There is hardly a place in the world where you hear so many grievances as you do in that little room adjoining the stage.

But Zile was satisfied, and pacified the producer.

A natty young thing was sitting at the piano strumming a valse from a popular light opera. Two chorus singers hurried towards the exit humming in tune, then slammed the door behind them. Zina Kvelde, in her coat and fashionable spring hat, came out of her dressing room and greeted Zile with a nod.

He went forward to meet her and warmly pressed her hand, which was cool and a little unresponsive, or so it seemed to him.

"Thank you," he said, himself wondering as he spoke—thanks for what?

But she seemed to guess his meaning, and at once withdrew her hand, with a protesting toss of her head.

"Nothing to thank me for. I was not in the right mood today. I'll be better in the show, you'll see." She was a little curt, a little nervous.

"Going home? We could go together."

They stepped out into the street.

"I don't want to praise," Zile said without looking at her and keeping carefully to her side. "But I do know that the part on which the whole play depends is in reliable hands."

She was visibly pleased.

"I am trying my best. But perhaps Milda Zvaigzne would have been better cast. She has more of the heroic temperament."

Zile could clearly detect the note of rivalry to which even the greatest among stage artists are not immune. It gave him pleasure to reassure her. He could have, at this moment, even stretched the truth a little.

"You know very well that the old-type heroine is no good for my part. I could never abide heroes and heroines. Besides, they have had their day, both on the stage and off it. It seems to me that you are the first to have understood that."

"Have I nothing of the heroic about me? I've acted Mary Stuart in my time, and Fjordis, and Guna, and Spidola. And I used to flatter myself that I hadn't done so badly."

She said this ~~archly~~, with a mischievous glance at him. Zile felt uneasy.

"I don't really know what you call heroic. So far I've only met heroines on the stage. And they always seem exceedingly comical to me. They are a mixed product of man's imagination, literary tradition, antique epos, and classical ~~caricature~~, with a touch of the emancipation period thrown in. They are unnatural creatures, artificial psychology in a brightly painted frame. I've always hated carved and painted images. It's time you women shook off the enforced standards of man's imagination, and similar clichés. You have every right to be true to your real and peculiar natures. In life as well as in art. Above all in art! Art is often the first to open the door to life's reality."

For a while, Zina walked in silence. Zile felt that his arguments had been disjointed and vague. His usual handicap! Only with his pen could he think coherently and express himself convincingly.

She had been watching him out of the corner of her eye.

"You're interesting to listen to. Why didn't you want to come to our rehearsals? You could have explained how you really visualized each character and each situation."

Zile frowned.

"Have I not made myself clear in my manuscript? Do you think my lips could fill in and amend the inadequacies of my pen? If you do, you don't understand a writer's work, the very nature of writing."

"That's not quite what I mean," she argued. "I am not asking for cast-iron rules. They would be useless because they couldn't be followed anyway. You authors think everything is clear and comprehensible in your work. But sometimes the actor cannot recapture your thought or mood. Everyone has his own individuality and can easily miss your point, or even misunderstand you altogether."

"It seems to me that what the actor cannot grasp by sense and instinct, after having studied his part, it's just no use trying to explain. We don't want someone acting on instructions, we want heartfelt, truthful acting, something with the actor's own mind and soul in it."

"I may be wrong, but I think I more or less do feel this part. At any rate, it fascinates me enormously, more than most parts I've played before."

"Yes. I felt that from the very first words you spoke."

She did not hide her pleasure at this acknowledgement.

"Still, don't judge by this rehearsal. I was as self-conscious and embarrassed as a schoolgirl."

"You didn't show it."

"We learn to control ourselves and hide our feelings."

But it spoils the acting all the same. It always happens when the author is present."

Zile laughed lightly.

"And now you see that I am not a bit dangerous. I wasn't the cleverest man in the audience by a long way!"

"But you were the most deeply involved. You visualized your characters and images when you wrote the play, and along comes the actor and shows you something entirely different. I felt as though I were smashing a beautiful statue or vase."

"In a way you are right. The stage often shows me something different from what I imagined. But it's not necessarily disappointing. It is pleasant, of course, if the stage character is just what you imagined it to be. But even if it's not, as long as it is full-blooded and artistically accomplished, it seems attractive. Wonderfully new and fascinating."

"And what do you think of... mine?"

Zile hesitated before he replied.

"I wouldn't like you to think I am flattering. You have grasped the very essence of it, down to the minutest detail. I was staggered. Your interpretation was warm with life. The part, and, consequently, the whole play is in safe hands."

"I'd like to believe that this is not mere flattery. I feel this part very closely. I have hardly ever been able to memorize any lines so easily. I suppose that woman of yours has something of myself in her. Sometimes I step into her life, forgetting that it is merely a stage part. I actually live it. I do not think Milda Zvaigzne would have done better."

Zile ignored this remark.

"I demanded from the start, categorically, that you should be cast for it. Do you know what I liked best about your acting? Your voice. You have an exquisitely modulated, feminine voice."

"I've done some serious training. I sing a little, as you may know. They're inviting me now to St. Petersburg, to some small opera house there."

"No, the loveliest quality in your voice is not its training, but the artless, genuine ring in it, its sincerity. Sincerity, that's what it is. Each lifeless word rolls like a warm wave from your lips. I think that listening to your voice would stir anybody, even the most indifferent, the most aloof."

A delicate flush came to her face.

"I admit, I have an intimate feeling for the part. I live in it. That is why everything you say. . . I feel myself that my voice doesn't sound flat. But it is because the play is so rich in content and thought, and the language is beautiful. And its build-up is so fluid and fascinating. You don't have to stumble over long and involved periods that tax your mechanical memory and make your speech ranting and unnatural. Your language is full of vivid imagery and well-matched colours. Music and colour fuse into a dynamic whole. That is something new in play writing, and I feel it has a great future. It unbinds the creative actor and gives him scope to express some of his own inner world as well. . . ."

She broke off and laughed.

"Here we go singing each other's praises like a couple of decadents. Not a very nice occupation gushing over each other like this, and far too sentimental. Let's talk about something else."

Zile shook his head.

"I'm a very selfish person. I prefer to talk about my own work. I am really happy that my part has found such an interpreter. But tell me, why did you make up like that and put on a wig? Did you really think it necessary?"

Zina gave a little toss of her head and looked at him pertly for a second. But her answer was serious.

"You can't do without make-up. Artificial light makes the natural look unnatural. Everything is artificial on the stage."

"But that wig was not necessary. Why do you think this part calls for dark shades? You are not Milda Zvaigzne."

"Because. . ." she hesitated. "I imagined that was nearer to what you intended her to be. Sufferers and heroines are traditionally dark. I suppose they are more impressive that way."

"Pure convention and long out of date," he replied irritably. "I didn't think you still held with that sort of thing. Whether you are dark or fair, it makes no difference to suffering or exaltation in life or on the stage. You have such beautiful. . . I mean your hair is so characteristic of you. There is no need whatever to change it. By doing so you give up what is most attractive and typical in your personality."

His interest in her personality thrilled her, both as an actress and as a woman. Again she gave that wanton little loss of the head and shot him a sparkling glance.

"One might think you were no longer talking of my stage personality, but of this one here-off stage!"

"Both. You are one of those rare creatures among actors in whom the artistic is in tune with the human. True beauty always has both those aspects."

She sensed that the conversation was approaching dangerous ground and fell into a quieter and more reserved manner.

Presently they reached her flat. With one foot on the first step she proffered her hand. She intended a hasty and formal good-bye. But as she looked into his face she hesitated. His eyes were upon her with such glowing warmth and artless trust that she could not help responding.

"You could come and see me one day," she said, surprised at her own invitation which but a minute ago had

not even entered her mind. And to lend it a more official sound she added drily:

"You're so interesting to talk to about art."

Zile bowed. He pressed her hand with unconscious vigour. Only when the hem of her coat had vanished behind the closing door did he turn to go.

2

The morning after a performance Zina usually had a headache, especially if her own acting had been poor and the whole show a failure.

This morning, however, she felt scarcely a trace of weariness, and it was simply by force of habit that she relaxed on her couch, just like she used to in her school days—curled up in one corner, with her legs tucked under her. There was a little volume of Whitman's poems in her hand. On such days she avoided reading anything that was connected with the stage. She needed rest and diversion—or simply idleness.

She had trained herself not to think of the previous night, and was not thinking of it now. But her general mood was pleasant, and that was enough for her. She knew that she had acted well. She could well imagine what kind of phrases the critics in the morning newspapers would have used about her acting if she had let herself break away from her firm resolution.

She smiled. Man is an odd creature. And an actor is an odd kind of man. So he is doubly odd. . . . Even the applause and adulation of fools is pleasing to him. A warped nature, no doubt. But who can help his nature?

There was a noise in the corridor, but she took no notice. Here, in her home, she was a little idol, and like every idol a bit of a despot too. She only listened to what she liked and ignored the rest.

Then her mother opened the door, and in the crack she caught sight of Janis Zile.

Her first reaction was one of displeasure. She had a vision of long talks on last night's performance and everything connected with it, which would mean ruffling the calm of her mood, disturbing her snug tranquility.

But one look at him allayed her momentary vexation.

He was meticulously dressed, and slightly embarrassed and awkward, like those big schoolboys who would sometimes call with flowers. There was no more need to rise for him than if he had been one of them. She stayed where she was and only stretched out her legs and straightened her dress.

He looked almost frightened.

"Excuse me. I took advantage of your invitation. But I have chosen the wrong time, I see. You are not well."

The part appealed to her for some reason. Very well, if it pleased him to think that, let him.

"I usually allow myself the luxury of half a day's illness after a performance. But you needn't worry. It isn't anything serious. Actors' disease, you know. To rest my nerves and indulge my laziness."

"In that case I am disturbing you."

"You're doing nothing of the kind. I think I must have been expecting you, I had a premonition you might come."

"I've come to thank you." 

"Let us drop this petty convention of thanks and courtesies. We don't need them, you and I. Who is the one to thank anyway? Yours is the chief merit, after all. You created and inspired, my part was purely executive. No, don't argue! I know what I'm saying. We have each done our share, and we can both be pleased with our success. You in particular. . . . But why are you standing? You're not in a hurry, are you?"

He drew up a chair and sat down at her feet. Then he took another anxious look at her face.

"You may say whatever you like. I don't believe you. You are really ill. I've never seen you so pale."

"Oh, but it's really nothing to speak of. It's just part of an actress's condition of health, so I enjoy it. The more a part sweeps you away and the better you play it, the more it saps your emotions and takes it out of you. A certain relapse is only natural."

"I've been thinking about you since last night. How can you stand it? Where do you take the nervous energy? You burn like a fire. But you can't burn for ever—one day you'll burn up."

"We all will, sooner or later—you and I like everybody else. But we exist only as long as the fire is burning within us. Fire is our element."

"It never struck me till last night what acting means. What we can offer you in a written part is a mere trifle. It is you that feed the flames. You infuse inert matter with your spirit and your soul. And when you carry people away and thrill them they give the credit to the poet. Yours is the most thankless job in the world. Self-sacrifice is your heroic share. What you perform is a supreme act of heroism. But do you think it is appreciated, I mean, the real essence of it? And yet, you find enough strength and energy. . . ."

Zina Kvelde folded her arms behind her head and fixed her eyes thoughtfully on the opposite wall.

"There's something in what you say. Whenever I act with real inspiration I always feel as though I were going beyond my part. No, that isn't quite what I mean. . . . I feel my part as a kind of framework, or a setting that I have to fill with what is in me. I speak your lines, but am caught up in the whirl of my own emotions. I think your thoughts, but I pour into them my own, all the stored-up experience of years, everything that is in me, and around me, and behind me. And what I only dimly sense somewhere ahead of me. At such moments I believe that I am imbued with the power to render tangible and visible all this. . . . I know it isn't practicable. Perhaps not even correct. . . . I've been told so more than once. But I can't help myself."

Zile did not take his enchanted eyes off her.

"Don't listen to others. Yours is the only true, the only worthwhile way. Don't let them put you off by saying they cannot understand you. You're great enough to demand that they should rise to an understanding of what is still beyond them. They will grasp it, if not today—then tomorrow."

Her slender, nervous fingers were turning over the pages of her book.

"I love a full house, I can't deny that. We are all the same in that. A weakness of the profession, I suppose. But to you I can confess something I've never told anybody yet. I never play to the house at large. As soon as I step on the stage I single out somebody. . . . It may be a girl who can be hardly discerned in the theatre hall. Or some awkward, bashful youth whose eyes I feel glued upon me. Or an elderly woman with her spirit broken by life. I almost hear her suppressed sigh. . . . And then I play to her alone and try to make her feel and see what I see."

Zile's eyes were still upon her, as in a trance.

"And who was it last night?"

She stopped to think.

"That's just what I've been trying to remember this morning. I think it was you." But noticing the radiance that came to his eyes, and the glow on his face, she grew cooler and pulled herself up to a sitting position, adding: "I think it was only natural. You understood me best. And let me tell you one thing. Never imagine an actress in ordinary life to be what she is on the stage. What is most attractive in art may be quite the opposite in life. More often than not, it is."

"That might well refer to me. . . ."

"To you? Would it?"

She rested her chin in the palms of the hands and for the first time contemplated him closely and intimately.

He was dressed with almost ridiculous care, and his

black tie was knotted a little ostentatiously, yet his appearance was not unattractive. His smooth, slightly tired face had neither the studied thoughtfulness, nor the affected shyness that rendered the usual type of poet slightly ridiculous to her eye. There was nothing eccentric about him, nothing emphatically virile.

"We actors detest actors outside the profession. There's nothing of that about you. It seems to me that you deserve respect as a human being as well. Of course, I imagined you quite different. We women have our set standards."

"Your ideal, you mean."

The strange inflexion of his voice as he uttered these words made her laugh despite herself.

"Now, don't you get sentimental again! In poetry, you've got to. But alas for those who try to turn life into a lyrical poem. They get sloppy and impossible. And it happens so often that it isn't even funny. It doesn't amuse me in the least, when those schoolboys or students come along with their bouquets."

"I suppose they often do."

"Rather. . . ." She began to laugh again. "Especially when they've seen me act a very young, very loving, very sentimental girl. One that moves in the best circles, of course, and is dressed in silks—that's absolutely essential. You can't imagine the effect on a young boy's heart of beautiful garments and a red rose in your hair. Yes, there must be a red rose, too. And then they stand before me so awkwardly, gazing at me like a Chinese at his idol. . . . And can't make up their minds whether to recite what they've crammed into their heads, or try to use human language. And one hand will furtively slip into the pocket where there's sure to be a sealed envelope. I've often felt tempted to say—pull it out!—or to pull it out myself and see if there's a love letter inside or a twenty-five ruble note."

Zile laughed too.

"And what do you do?"

"I don't know that I do anything. I just look at him with wide eyes and wait to see what's going to happen. That of course puts him off completely. And he seizes the first opportunity to get rid of his bouquet and make a dash for the door. But sometimes my admirer stands gazing back at me as wide-eyed as myself, and I see terrible disappointment written all over his face. Because without my make-up, and without the pig-tail down my back, I am neither as young, nor as beautiful as I was on the stage. Well, that's too much of a temptation. I deliberately wrinkle my forehead, pull in my neck, and sometimes even put my fingers to my nose! You ought to see the fun of it!"

She burst into a peel of carefree laughter, like a naughty schoolgirl.

"Well, sometimes I have to pay dearly for my fun. After the next performance, when the applause has died down, I hear an angry hiss from somewhere back in the upper circle. And I know it is my late admirer and his friends."

They laughed as though sharing the joke.

But Zina suddenly grew serious. A perpendicular line appeared between her brows.

"But I'm getting tired of these callow youths. I'm not even in the mood now to play jokes on them. I make mother send them packing, bouquet and all. I don't care if they hiss at me from their corner."

Silence fell. Zile broke it first.

"But surely they're not the only ones to come. You must have plenty of real admirers."

"Admirers..." she scowled at him. "You ought to know better than use that trite, silly word. Admirers.... As though I didn't know what they admire. Don't I know them with their enchanted faces and adulating eyes. I sometimes feel them in the middle of my acting, and it throws me off my balance, I feel like running away and hiding behind the scenes. It costs me a terrible effort to pull myself together and carry on. It makes me choke with disgust, and I

feel all jumpy. And I lose control over my movements, my voice. They look at me as they'd look at a prostitute."

Zile felt a little embarrassed, and did not know how to express his reply.

"The reason is that as a human being . . . let's put it plainly, you're an attractive woman. I understand that as an artist you are dismayed with the primitive instincts that your attractiveness stirs in men. But it seems to me that it is only natural. Our higher sympathies and instincts cannot be separated from the purely biological ones."

"What do I care about your psychology! It disgusts me to be an object of your observations and experimentations. It disgusts me to be the means by which men indulge their instincts. I feel permanently threatened. They want to grab my human self so as to destroy the only thing in me that is of any value—the little share of artistic talent I possess. Tell me, is it not humiliating? Is it not deeply degrading?"

"You would like your personality as an artist to be abstracted, divided from your human one. Content and form apart! But we're not metaphysicians, and you're not a nun. Or are you? That would be a pity!"

"We?" She narrowed her eyes playfully. "Do you count yourself among them?"

Following a sudden whim he took up her teasing tone.

"Your admirers, you mean? That common crowd? I do, worse luck! What are you going to do about it? Only, for God's sake, don't wrinkle your forehead—though it isn't half so ugly as you think it is."

It was not in their natures to remain serious for long. They needed swift change, constant cross-currents of alternating moods. They spoke flippantly, and enjoyed it. Very much like at a reunion of old friends after a long separation. The last hint of suspicion disappeared from her voice and look, as did his shyness and self-consciousness, caused by the unaccustomed sensation of wearing a new suit.

"Tell me, how is it that you know a woman's heart so well?" she asked abruptly, irrelevantly.

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Do I? Do you think so?"

"I don't think so, I know it. I ought to be competent to judge. Any woman who has seen your play will tell you the same."

"I don't know what women say. Men's opinions vary."

"Men. . . . They're the know-alls, of course. They like to hold forth on us, but they're no judges. All they can do is to imagine and guess."

"Don't forget that I'm one of them. I, too, can only imagine and guess."

"That's why I am asking: how is it you know us so well?"

"If you are not flattering me—simply because it is given to me to imagine more vividly, and to guess more accurately than others."

"At times it is as though you were reading a woman's heart like an open book. How do you do it? You must have known a great number of women very intimately. Don't get me wrong, I didn't mean to imply promiscuity. But it seems to me that an understanding of woman's mind can only come with a lot of experience and a good deal of personal observation."

"To the statistician, not to the psychologist. The writer's range of personal experience and opportunities of observation are inevitably limited. Nothing can stretch them beyond the precincts of his subjective world, least of all statistics. He will always remain confined within the realm of his own fantasy."

"You're a subjectivist and an idealist. What about your reputation as a social writer?"

"There's a lot to be said about that."

"Don't! Not today. Talking to you is beginning to be almost as exciting as last night's show. And I was going to relax. . . ."

With an impetuous little movement her hand touched Zile's that was resting on his knee. He gave in at once. He had not intended to give their conversation such a serious turn. He had not come to discuss problems but to have a simple heart-to-heart chat.

"The season is closing in another week. What are you thinking of doing with yourself during your holidays?"

"I'm not thinking of doing anything. I don't think ahead. Never. I leave it to chance, it's best. If an opportunity offers itself, I go away—no matter where. If not I stay in town. And that's just as good. I've never felt that my holidays were wasted. I let chance decide things for me. I read a lot, but without any special choice, I'm terribly erratic and unmethodical. I take special delight in living like a tramp for a while—free and irresponsible. It's such happiness not to have to get up at any particular hour, or be at rehearsal on time!"

"Tell me, how is it that there's no gossip about your personal life? Your colleagues have the most extraordinary tales told about them, but you are hardly mentioned. . . ."

A cold little flame sprang to her eyes.

"Are you collecting stories about the lives of actors? Are you trying to draw me out on my private life? What does it matter to you? I'd hardly call it worthy of you!"

Imitating her recent gesture, he placed a soothing hand on hers.

"Don't be so sensitive, Zina Kvelde. I'm not collecting anything of the kind. Besides I don't see why my being interested in a person should seem insulting to him."

"I didn't mean that. On the contrary, I like it when people think about me. We're all vain, aren't we? But we're not so corrupt as we are generally considered to be. We certainly couldn't live the rackety sort of life people lay down for us. Our work wouldn't allow it, nor our natures. . . . But why talk so much about me. I'd rather hear what you are

working on now. We are all dying to know what is in store for us next season."

Their conversation flowed on; it was warm and intimate as though they had known each other for years.

3

Zile accompanied Zina Kvelde to her last rehearsal that season, a revival of some old play.

He sat in the wings watching the stage through a chink in the scenery. The hall was completely empty. From time to time an usher or cloak-room attendant would poke his head in at the door and at once withdraw it.

Presently he was accosted by two actors, the second lead—tall, gaunt, and dark, and a very youthful lover, mobile and smiling.

"You're a frequent visitor here," the second lead said. "Are you thinking of joining us next season as our playwright?"

"What makes you think that? No, I'm not."

"But it would be most desirable," the lover said beaming. "It would make such a difference to our work if we had a playwright with a thorough knowledge of literature."

"Especially one who was attached to the theatre," the second lead joined in again.

"As a matter of fact, I did think about it, and I came to the conclusion that you are mistaken. Even if a person knows the stage, it does not necessarily follow that he is a good playwright. I know hardly anything about stage technique. That's why I am now trying to get an inkling of it."

"Very important, of course. It's our chief handicap that our dramatists do not know the workings of the stage and don't consider what is possible there and what is not. A line or a scene that may appear very significant to the

author as he sees it with his mind's eye, viewed from his writing desk, as it were, often falls flat on the stage."

"Besides, they sometimes write things that are simply not actable."

"Well, to my mind nothing is unactable. If the dramatist has to adapt the flight of his imagination to the present level of stagecraft, then progress is ruled out, and the forces that impel it collapse. But stagecraft has got to develop, it has got to grow so that it can master and express everything that is conceived by the dramatist's imagination."

"As long as that imagination does not soar somewhere in the clouds. Of course, a lot needs doing about the stage, you are right there. But the poet ought to give more consideration to the actor. He sometimes writes a part that would baffle even a genius. There are parts we actors simply fight for, so to speak. And there are others that nobody wants to undertake."

"I think Blaumanis will remain unsurpassed for a long time to come."

"In other words, if I understand you rightly, a dramatist ought to write with certain definite actors in view. That's what Blaumanis is supposed to have done. I can quite believe that some actors would welcome that. They would keep comfortably in their old rut and their work would be reduced to trying to find an occasional new movement or gesture so as not to get altogether stale. But whether or not that would lead to a development of dramatic art as a whole—I don't know."

"But sometimes you, too, write with a definite actor in mind, don't you?"

The second lead nodded agreement. "In your last play, for example."

"You mean Zina Kvelde? But some of you tried to persuade me that the part was better suited for Milda Zvaigzne. Dramatic fantasy is a complex matter. Its own visions merge with impressions received from the stage,

and the two often blend and intermingle. But the dramatist's imagination will never take over something ready-made, because it is by its very nature creative, and not merely reproductive. Spiritual affinity and psychological contact between writer and actor are to a certain extent essential. You have to have that for the poet's ideological and artistic problem to find a manifestation on the stage, which is true to life and yet artificial at the same time. The moulding of the two things is done by both poet and actor jointly. The stage image is the creation of two minds and two souls. That is what makes it so complex, and that is why it so rarely attains perfection."

"So you think that Zina Kvelde has grasped your problem, that she has the kind of soul. . . ."

Second lead and lover exchanged glances over Zile's head.

"Well," the second lead observed gravely, "I suppose she has rather settled down of late, and become more sensible. She's had her fling."

"Nobody could keep up that sort of life indefinitely," the lover added meaningly.

The blood mounted to Zile's head.

"What sort of life are you talking about? What do you mean?"

The young man held back a little.

"Nothing in particular. I'm not saying she is any worse than others."

The second lead looked down from his full height at the sitting author with a quizzical expression on his face.

"Nor any better. There are no angels or devils in the theatre. Those who act such parts on the stage resemble them least of all in actual life. Zina Kvelde certainly belongs to neither category. She's just an average actress endowed with the average human qualities, good and bad."

Zile had risen to his feet.

"Why are you telling me about Zina Kvelde? I never asked you, did I?"

"Come, come, don't get ruffled. We're not saying anything against her. She's a good friend, and an able actress. Only it's odd to see a man of experience and an artist of some standing get caught up like a schoolboy. Idealizing where there's nothing to idealize, and compromising himself in the eyes of society."

"Excuse me, gentlemen. I am very much obliged to you for your solicitude, but allow me to take care of my own reputation. I have managed without your kind assistance up till now, and I shall do my best to continue so in the future."

He turned on his heel and applied himself to the chink in the scenery.

Their voices had risen so high that the actors on the stage had stopped for a moment. Zina glanced round inquiringly, aware of being the subject of discussion.

On their way home Zile was unusually subdued. Zina, on the other hand, in the anticipation of her approaching holidays, was as gay and sprightly as a schoolgirl.

"My poet is so gloomy today," she said with a laugh. "May I not ask the reason?"

"Have you any enemies among your colleagues?"

"En . . . enemies? Not that I know of. Our friendships and enmities are somewhat like parts in a play. They come and go. On the whole we all get on very nicely."

"Tell me. . . I don't know how to put it. . . . Don't you feel I'm with you too often? Doesn't it seem so to you?"

She shook her head, laughing and shooting him one of her mischievous looks.

"What's come over you? Getting worried about your reputation?"

"Not mine, but yours?"

"What exactly do you mean?"

"Some of your colleagues deemed it their duty today to make me understand that we two were much too close friends. They started on your past. . . ."

She interrupted him, her whole body stiffening:

"It isn't their business. . . or yours!"

"Certainly not mine. I've neither asked you any questions nor tried to find out for myself. I am merely telling you."

"Why should you? I need no references, and I'll not stand for advocacy either, or accept instructions!"

Zile tried to appease her.

"You don't need to. . . . I only mentioned it because. . . . It made me think that perhaps I am really imposing myself on you. How am I to know how you feel about it?"

"Those who mix with me ought to know how I feel about these things. I am free and independent, and I meet whomever I please. If people must pry and gossip, all right, let them. That doesn't worry me, not in the least. If a person thinks I compromise him—the road's wide enough, he is welcome to cross over to the other side. There's plenty of room over there."

Zile was utterly miserable.

"You've got it wrong. . . . You've got it all wrong. . . ." At sight of the unhappiness on his face Zina burst out laughing.

"Oh, you great dramatist! All right, forget it! Don't let's reason and judge, and misjudge. To be frank, your friendship—if I may call it that—flatters me immensely. And I think I know how to appreciate it. And as for those silly gossips, it just is none of their business!"

"None whatsoever!" Zile cried heatedly. "How stupid of me to have mentioned all this. Forgive me. It will be the first and the last time."

They shook hands and parted warmly.

The season with its work, and excitement, and dust, and all manner of misadventure was over. Before they went their different ways—some on tour, others to take a rest, or a course of hospital treatment—the whole company gathered for an outing to a park near town.

Everybody connected with the stage had come along, actors and stage hands, wig-makers and seamstresses, producers and dramatists. There were a few writers there, too, as well as theatre fans and friends of sundry actors.

At first they were so determined to enjoy themselves that their gaiety was a little artificial and deliberate. But the vast park with its giant trees, its lush grass and the mill-pond shimmering below soon put them in genuinely high spirits. The food and drink they had brought along did its share. And the warm, breezy, gently clouded day soon dispersed the last dregs of winter's cares and toil.

All pleasures were theirs. The occasional passers-by eyed suspiciously and from a distance this all too noisy company, and edged away. A few respectable citizens cocked an eye-brow at this sweetly chirruping flock of eccentrically dressed women, and, dropping their half-smocked cigarettes, made for the gates.

"I bet those old fogeys consider us utterly depraved!" artless little Anna Salnis exclaimed most artfully, pointing her green parasole at them.

"They're the kind," Fricis Liepkalns, the company's veteran leading actor, reasoned tragically, "who are ready to empty their wallets at your feet while you're on the stage, but give you a very wide berth if they see you in the street."

"Especially if their wives and daughters are about."

"Even if they aren't," the youthful lover Zarin chimed in. Crouching on the grass by the ditch, he was fishing for

a colt's-foot bud with the handle of his walking stick. "You with your red and green parasols would get the most phlegmatic of turkey-cocks up in arms."

"Red and green. Green and red—what a blatant challenge to this drab and trivial work-a-day world." Shifting from foot to foot, the slow-moving stage-light operator was methodically filling his English pipe that hung from the corner of his lips like a smoking pear.

"Whoopee!" came a voice from the group. "Let's storm this Golgotha!" And the owner of the voice bounded uphill like a dog, the whole laughing crowd hopping, skipping and jumping at his heels.

Zile and Zina Kvelde followed in the rear.

"We're the most reasonable people here," she said laughing.

"I don't know about you, but for my part I've done with reason for the day. Three cheers to recklessness, and mischief, and folly—yes even folly—just for one day a year!"

"Hurrah! Folly must claim its rights. Three cheers for folly!"

"No, I really mean it. Folly's essential, if only for the sake of variety. Wisdom would lose all glamour without it. Man would look as drab and grey as unbleached linen."

"Unbleached linen. . . . How clever you are, Mr. Dramatist! Now come on, keep up!"

She broke into a run. But Zile kept his pace, smilingly as he watched her figure top the hill and disappear. Her striped summer frock clung to her lithe and supple figure that was so youthful, so conscious of its own beauty, so strong. Her every movement was soft and graceful, yet free of the deliberate pose of all those others. Culture and nature in glorious harmony.

She did not disappear completely. Soon he caught a glimpse of her broad-brimmed hat with its fluffy white

feathers that caught the changing reflections of golden sunshine and green beech-leaves, her oval intelligent face and gently sloping shoulders heaving slightly with her deep breathing.

"See, you're too reasonable after all. Or else, I'm too frivolous. We don't match."

"True. You'll have to look round for a younger partner."

By way of reply she seized his elbow and spun him round.

"We know those young old men, flaunting their age to make themselves more attractive."

All the benches on the top of the hill were engaged. The air rang with light-hearted voices and laughter. Now and again they caught a remark aimed at themselves.

"Strength and Beauty! The Idea and its Incarnation! Thought and Fantasy! Long live this holy Unity!"

"Long live ink and face-powder!"

"Hold it, right here, in the centre. A statue at a classical revelry!"

But mockery had no sting that day. Today there was no malice. Mocking and bantering was in the very nature of this set of people, who were all good at heart though the stage had strained their nerves and unbalanced their dispositions.

Zile and Zina turned aside to where the poet Apsespeter, with a broad panama on his head, a nickel-plated walking stick hooked on his elbow, and a sprig of mountain ash in his buttonhole was desperately holding forth upon the beauties of nature, in front of an audience consisting of five chorus girls, the prompter, and the stage manager.

"Just look at the lake. As calm as a mirror. Like molten silver. . . ."

Choking with suppressed laughter, Zina tugged at Zile's sleeve.

"Listen to that: molten silver. . . ."

"Where's your reverence for a poet, you hussy!"

"The green shrubs rise like a rampart, like a mystery. And across it the red chimney of the ribbon factory casts its shadow like a plankway for our dreams to step upon. . . ."

A young little thing with blue eyes and flaxen pig-tails had her enraptured eyes glued on the poet and her lips were moving to his words.

Zina could contain herself no longer. Puckering her forehead so that a perpendicular line appeared between her brows she exclaimed:

"I disagree! The chimney isn't red at all."

"I beg your pardon! What do you mean?" the poet turned round, touched to the quick.

"It just isn't, that's all. The top's black with soot."

"It is if you look superficially. But look with an aesthetic eye! The factory chimney is made of bricks, and bricks are red. I hardly think you'll disagree with that."

"Ah, that's a different matter. Facts are facts, I withdraw my objections. But that rampart of yours . . . that mystery. What kind of mystery is that! Look, the women have hung their washing on the willow-trees, and there are kiddies scampering about under them!"

The girl's blue eyes darted at Zile like two sharp arrows. He felt so frightened that he took to his heels, pulling Zina behind him.

The fat comedian Adler, visibly light-headed, had clambered on to a bench and was banging his hard bowler hat with his fist.

"Children . . . dear children! Just a moment, please! One moment's attention. I want to speak. I want to speak seriously. . . ."

"Now, isn't that a genius of a comedian! Spends the whole season cracking jokes, and chooses this day of all days to speak seriously!"

"Just a moment, children! All the season you have been the slaves of your public. This day is yours. Spit on every-

thing. Don't think of the autumn. Summer blooms but once a year. We're young only once. . . ."

"Don't get sentimental, Adler!"

"Just one moment. . . . Take a deep breath, children! Snatch from life whatever you can. It flies by like a whirlwind, like a cloud, like a. . . . Tomorrow may be too late. . . ."

"What you can drink today, don't leave for tomorrow!"

A half-emptied bottle was pressed into his hand. A girl whose light dress he was crushing under his dusty shoes as he stood on the bench, tugged at his trouser leg.

"Come down, stop playing the fool."

"Just a minute. . . ."

But nobody was listening to him any longer. Tears welled into his eyes, and burying his face in his hat he climbed down to the ground.

Zile and Zina strolled along the path that followed the slope of the hill. The crowd with its laughter and chatter dropped behind. Before them stretched a tangle of green brushwood, and beyond it, on the other side of the fence, a meadow, and dams, and a railway station, and red and green railway carriages, and the jumble of the city with its roofs and tall slender church spires.

"Oh, look!" Zile said, pointing.

She nodded, and each felt that the other understood.

Dusk was drawing in, and the crowd broke up into groups of twos and fours, dispersing to the benches under the overhanging branches of trees, to distant corners of the gardens, to winding secluded paths. Loud voices and laughter subsided into a gentle, intimate murmur, punctuated with subdued exclamations, suppressed sighs, or whispered lamentations. They were too emotional, too temperamental, these people, to keep to one mood. They had been in a crowd long enough. The spell of the twilight called for intimacy.

A mysterious whisper rose from behind the bushes and

from the shaded benches. The park was drenched in an exquisite languor and the fragrance of leaves and grass. From somewhere far away came the rumble of city life and the flicker of red lights.

Zile and Zina wandered aimlessly along the winding paths, scarcely speaking. They needed no words.

Anxious not to startle the couples on the benches they tried to keep to the open. When they had walked round the whole park they sat down on a little patch of meadow on the hill-top.

It was quite deserted. The large trees murmured gently in the evening breeze. The moon had not yet risen, and the mill-pond reflected the waning glow of the sunset.

"Not bored?" she asked leaning one shoulder slightly against his.

His laughter came low and warm.

"Bored? I could sit like this for ever."

"Don't talk in hyperboles. Save them for your lyrical poetry. I don't believe in ~~eternity~~. But this moment is beautiful."

He took her hand and squeezed it as though this had been a compliment to him.

"All life would be beautiful, if only people knew how to use it. If only they had the courage to drink from the full cup without thinking of the morrow. Without looking back, without probing into the future. But we often let the best and most precious in life slip by unused, unexperienced, unlived."

"No philosophy, please. Not tonight. Don't let us spoil this evening by talking clever. . . . Surely we often miss a lot in life by ruminating on it."

They sat in silence for a while.

"I'm getting chilly. Shall we go home?"

He had been thinking the same. They rose and strolled out of the park.

Then the horse-driven cab was jolting slowly along the

bumpy, dark and deserted streets. It was pleasant to be so close together, just the two of them, hidden from curious eyes. Like guarding together some secret they alone shared.

Zile jumped out first, with the agility of a young and gallant lover. Then he helped her out. They stood for a moment not knowing what to do. Without a word, not even offering him her hand in farewell, she passed through the outside door, leaving it ajar.

For a second he hesitated, then followed her. He closed the door behind him and remained standing where he was.

"The staircase is dark," he heard Zina's voice somewhere ahead of him. "Be careful. There's another step lower down."

The floor creaked under her receding steps.

His heart gave a leap. This was an invitation. She was calling for him to follow.

His feet groping for the steps, his hands gliding along the smooth banister, he mounted behind her. A strange fear gripped him in this darkness with the creaking of her footfall close by. But he would not have stopped if the stairs had collapsed beneath his feet. He would have walked through empty space to follow her.

The creaking in front had stopped. She must have reached the door. Quite close now he could hear her breath and the rustle of her dress. Or was it only imagination? Bending forward, he peered hard into the darkness, and then it was as though her warm breath had fanned his face. He stretched out his hand and it touched her hair.

He started back, as though he had burnt his fingers.

"Sorry! I didn't mean to. . . ."

He heard her low laughter.

"How timid you are."

The key grated in the lock. A light shone painfully bright in the hall as the door opened.

Wearily, as though wrapped in thought, Zina removed her hat and hung it on the mirror, then started slowly unbuttoning her jacket. It had somehow caught in the lace of her blouse, and she could not get it off. Turning her head over one shoulder she said almost curtly, and looking past him:

"Give me a hand, would you?"

His nervous, fumbling fingers slid over her shoulders. He carefully slipped off the jacket that still held the warmth and aroma of her skin intoxicating his senses, and stood holding it in his hands, instead of hanging it on the clothes peg. ~~He~~ ~~was~~

In the mirror in front of which she was tidying her hair Zina looked into his reflected face. Their eyes met, and he seemed to detect a quick nod, and a glimpse of that sweet smile of hers. Her features remained unmoved, but a strange inward glow came to her eyes, and a slight ripple seemed to cross her lips.

She was sitting relaxed in a chair when Zile entered her room, her hands weakly folded in her lap, her head tilted back. A withered beech-blossom from the park was pinned to her breast.

He sat down on a low stool at her feet. His hands gripped the arms of her chair. He bent forward and kissed her hands. First one, then the other. . . .

Suddenly his lips touched her dress. He felt two hands caressing his head, ruffling his hair, two palms pressing against his ears.

She lifted his head, bent down close, very close to him and looked into his eyes.

An endless, fathomless look.

He saw nothing but those eyes. The whole world around him rolled up like a sheet in the wind and sank away. As in a sweet delirium he plunged into those eyes. A hundred different emotions murmured in his ears. He dreamed an unforgettable, inexplicable dream. . . .

The dream lasted for three days. Zile would come in the afternoon and stay till late at night. They went nowhere. Nothing could lure them outside that room. Beyond the two of them, the world, existence itself had ceased.

On the fourth afternoon Zile found himself forestalled by a visitor. It was a rather corpulent, middle-aged gentleman, elegantly dressed, highly perfumed, and gallant to a degree. He rose with an obsequious bow as Zile entered.

Zina introduced them. He had come to invite her to the Petersburg Opera.

Zile made no attempt to conceal his coldness. This other man must be made to feel that he had come in vain and most inopportunist. And what was more, that he, Zile, had a say in the matter.

But the stranger seemed fully aware of the latter circumstance. He had talked everything over with Zina, and now he addressed himself almost entirely to Zile.

"I have not given up hope. Miss Zina Kvelde has no reply to my arguments. Her present material position is nothing compared to what I am able to guarantee her."

"That may be an important point. But to an artist, not necessarily a decisive one."

"Who said it was! But I also offer her great prospects in her career. I guarantee them!"

"If you rate her as a careerist you underrate her."

"I'm not a careerist!"

"Pardon, young lady. Every artist is a careerist—if we must use that rather old-fashioned expression. He is as much of a careerist as he is a true artist. What is career? To my mind, it is a steady ascent up the ladder of development and popularity. What some people term a career is essentially the process of inner development. The path to perfection. If you resign from that, you resign from your-

self, from your art. How far can an artist develop on the Latvian stage? I don't mean to speak disparagingly of Latvian art, but we all know that Zina Kvelde has already reached her peak. To stay here is child's play to her. And what remains for the future? Routine, the comfortable old groove, the same that dozens of others are treading."

"I'm afraid there is some truth in that," Zina remarked thoughtfully.

"Don't let fine words entice you," Zile broke in heatedly. "Latvian dramatic art is going to rise higher than you think. And Zina Kvelde stands among those whose duty towards it is supreme, and whose task will be the greatest. She is our leading dramatic artist. But as a singer... we don't know as yet."

"We do, to some extent. I have heard her, and I think you will grant me some competence in the matter. I have talked to her teachers. I am deeply convinced that she has a brilliant future as a singer. Opera requires dramatic ability as well. It is the most synthetic, thus the supreme form of stagecraft."

"Hackneyed phrases that have long since lost their meaning. But don't let us talk about art in general. You had better tell me what makes you so interested in Zina Kvelde's career? The age of generous sponsors is said to be past and gone."

Smiling urbanely, the gentleman nodded agreement.

"Certainly. I am as much an admirer of art and artists as I am a businessman. I admit that frankly. If I speak here of Zina Kvelde's future as a singer, of which I am deeply convinced, I always keep in mind my enterprise and its purely commercial interests. Both she and I have only to gain."

With this he turned his back on Zile as if the conversation between them had never taken place. As if he were an utter stranger to him, and one of no consequence whatever. He bowed gallantly to Zina.

"You'll think it over. I shall be here till Saturday week. If you agree just let me know. I shall pay your fare in advance. It all stands as I said before."

While Zina was showing him out, Zile paced the room nervously.

"What a piece of impudence!"

Zina sat down at the table, looking thoughtful.

"Perhaps, a little. All businessmen are. Dealers in art are no better than other dealers. This one does not mince his words, at least."

"I don't see why you should let yourself in for any negotiations with him."

"There's no harm in that, is there? Let him have his say."

"I can't take that for an answer. Are his promises beginning to tempt you?"

She shook her head.

"I never listened to them seriously."

"And they aren't worth it!" he cried passionately. "I am telling you in all earnest—you are a dramatic artist, one of the best if not the best. As a singer, you will be one among hundreds."

Zina smiled.

"I have never heard you say anything like that before."

"Because we always talked of the theatre. We never bothered about opera. The future of the stage will spring from the dramatic theatre. The future synthetic art form cannot be moulded out of present-day opera, which has its origin in the old classical drama. Drama will predominate in the future. Anybody with any talent must stick to drama. And you in particular."

"I wonder. . . . I wonder if you haven't some commercial interests of your own in talking of the drama to me—like that other fellow has, with his opera?"

Zile was struck dumb.

"What. . . . What do you mean?"

She took both his hands and drew him close.

"Aren't you slow? Don't you understand what I mean?" Holding her hands in his he bent down to her.

"And what if it were so? Can you possibly hesitate between him . . . and myself? Yes, I do want you to stay, with all my heart, with all my being. It has gone so far with me that I cannot work, I cannot live without you. Don't you feel it, don't you feel how deeply you are rooted in my heart? Don't you?"

She dropped her head meditatively and disengaged her hands.

"So it has gone as far as that. I see. . . . I hadn't meant it to, not at first. But who does? Such things happen of themselves. But what are you standing for? Sit down."

"No, I must go. I am leaving town for a few days. I only dropped in on my way. . . ."

They parted in silence, but warmly. Zina's eyes plunged into his as though probing into his very soul.

He walked down the stairs hesitatingly with a feeling that he had forgotten something—something vitally important.

He stopped in the middle of the street to think. What was it? Should he go back?

At the corner he turned his head and saw Zina standing at the window nodding to him.

He raised his hat and took his leave of her, of the window with its white curtains, of the house where she lived, of the street that her feet had trodden so often. He could have dropped down on his knees and kissed those smooth stones. . . .

6

His letter came three days later. It lay unopened before her, while she sat with her elbows resting on the table, her head buried in her hands, gazing at the familiar nervous writing.

What might it be? Surely she knew him too well for such a question. But why this letter? Had they not discussed everything there was to discuss, time and time again? What was there left for him to say to her?

Something like anger stirred in her. Could he not leave her alone for a little? For days her life had been in a whirl, and her nerves and emotions were yearning for appeasement and rest. They had tired her more than the long theatre season.

Yet she had to admit that she felt strangely empty without him. Everything about her seemed drab and meaningless without his presence. All was void and silent without the sound of his steps and his voice; bare and insignificant without his glowing thoughts and surging ideas. While she herself was lost and abandoned without his warm caress and tender look. Without his o!—so, deep, caressing look. . . .

What havoc he had wrought with her! She could not recognize herself. She had lost her head like a silly little thing with neither character nor will-power. She felt like a plucked blossom cast into an eddy. It was ghastly, yet infinitely, irresistibly thrilling to be drawn like this into its fathomless depths.

She rose to her feet and dressed with no conscious aim in mind. She wanted to escape from the letter, and from her own self. Why couldn't the man give her a moment's rest? What did he intend by this letter? More likely than not, a few silly lines in good old conventional style. Amazing he had not sent the traditional picture-postcard, with a landscape and a verse printed in one corner. It would probably still come to that. . . .

She tore open the envelope moodily. In it were two sheets, closely covered with writing.

Surprised, she sat down again. What could he have to say?

She began to read. Having skimmed the first lines, she

returned to the beginning, trying to read slowly, taking in each word, weighing each sentence. Only for a while. The letter enthralled her, bore her away. She could not tear herself from it, or lift her eyes.

It could hardly be called a letter. It was a poem, a symphony of feeling and inspired thought. Through its rugged form rang the harmony of the simple, intimate language that flows straight from the heart.

She felt a hot wave gather her up and hurl her into an eddy. He had touched upon her most carefully guarded, most delicate heart strings; how did he know them? She herself did not know them so well. He had stirred those subconscious instincts of woman's nature from which her own consciousness shrank. He had forced his way into her life like a thief, like a criminal to whom nothing is sacred. He had rummaged through all her secret little sanctuaries, rummaged through them and left them transformed.

Her face was glowing. She was in a state of utmost excitement. This man had led her to the very borderline whence she could go no further. For she knew, one more step and there would be no retreat for her.

She swept across that line as though born by a hot gust of wind. She was dazed with the sublime rapture of giving herself up to this whirling destructive force. Let it take her. . . . Let it lift her sky-high, and hurl her down into fathomless depths. Yet feminine pride, and spite, and something like apprehension sprang up and like a limp, chilling counter-gust struck her in the face and whispered a warning in her ears.

She had to get things straight. She could not go on like this any longer.

She stepped out into the street. The letter was in her pocket, but she was not thinking of it. Nor was she thinking of where she was going, but in her heart of hearts she knew.

She knew that Zile was married, and where he lived,

though it had never been mentioned between them. She also knew why she was going there, though not with her conscious mind.

"My name is Zina Kvelde," she said to the woman who opened the door for her. "I am an actress. Zile knows me well."

The sound of her own voice surprised her. Was it really hers?

"My husband is not at home—if you wanted to speak to him personally. If it is something else, do come in."

Zina stopped in the middle of a light and spacious room.

So this was his wife. A little younger than herself, of medium height, plain, serious. A first glance revealed nothing special about her. Her dress very clean and neat, with not a trace of kitchen or wash-tub. Her hands clean and well-shaped, but visibly hard-worked. Nothing in her betrayed whether this visit pleased or displeased her, or was a matter of indifference. Her face was uncommonly kindly, but at the same time reserved, and strikingly serene.

Zina was beginning to feel ill at ease.

"I am the actress who acted in his new play."

The other woman nodded.

"I know. I know you."

Zina's eyes tried to penetrate the calm countenance before her. What was going on in this woman's mind? Did she know or didn't she?

"I did not know you before. I suppose you don't go out much."

"I shouldn't say that. Quite a lot. We see every new play. . . . But won't you sit down for a moment—unless you are in a hurry to go?"

They sat down at Zile's writing desk, facing each other, his empty chair between them.

"So this is where he works. . . ." Zina said fingering some sheets of paper covered with writing.

"Yes. Only I would ask you not to shift anything here. He is most particular about that."

Zina gave a little laugh.

"I suppose you have to watch his likes and dislikes."

"Not I. I know them as it is. I never mislay anything. But he can't bear a strange hand."

"Oh, of course. . . . A strange hand. . . ." Zina moved uneasily in her chair. She controlled her sudden impulse to laugh, but her lips curled contemptuously.

"It must be interesting to be a writer's wife. I suppose you have great respect for your husband?"

"I am not the only one, I think."

An almost imperceptible flush passed over Zina's face. Was this an allusion, or simple-heartedness? She wanted to change the subject, but the words were out before she could check them.

"You are alone, you and he? You haven't any children?"

"We haven't."

"Tell me. . . . You must understand my interest in married life—don't you find it a little monotonous and dreary like this—the two of you?"

She looked into her visitor's face and smiled.

"Monotonous and dreary—with a person like him!"

She rose and walked over to the bookshelves. Her hand glided caressingly along the blue and grey volumes. "These are our children. We have a large family. Oh no, we know neither monotony nor boredom."

"But that's got nothing to do with you!" Zina burst out again.

The other woman was not listening. She was leafing through a thick volume, her eyes lingering on the closely printed pages.

"I know every single line here. I knew them while they were still in manuscript. I know how his imagination gave birth to these people who talk and act here as though they were real. I know how his mind formed the ideas that

now inspire and excite so many. I know how they tormented him in their initial vagueness, and how they gradually shaped into clearly defined problems, and their solutions. I know it all. I lived through it all together with him. And you speak of monotony. I doubt whether your ever-changing, eventful life can bid you more variety."

"But what has that to do with you? Are you a writer too?"

"I am his wife."

All of a sudden Zina felt a pang of resentment at this woman's self-confidence and assurance.

"Ah, I see—you are his inspiration, his ideal, as it were. They're all said to have had one. It must be thrilling, being an artist's ideal, isn't it?"

Something like irony flickered in the other woman's eyes, as she said:

"That is a favourite phrase with people who give little thought to its real meaning. Inspiration . . . ideal. . . . Their inspiration and their ideals live within themselves, they are part of them. The currents of life run through them and leave their gold in their souls. We, the wives, are what we are only because we are the ones who see them scatter that gold in their works. We are there when they need a person in whom to confide their ideas at their conception; to share their torturing doubts and desperate unrest with; to show their images and pictures to in the process of creation. They need a living soul that thinks with them and feels with them. The walls here are silent, and paper is just dead matter. But they must feel another's heartbeat by their side."

"I understand that. . . . But in that case, an artist's wife is a passive figure. Why could she not have her own views, her own life, her own aspirations? Excuse my saying so, but to me it seems a kind of mental slavery. What you consider the life's work of an artist's wife is slavery, the worse for being voluntary."

"If you look at it like that, we are all slaves. Slaves of our duty, of our natures, of our hearts. You may call it whatever you like. But you are merely trying to force all life's deepest significance into an old and useless term. Ours is work too-valuable, creative work. Women whose names do not shine on every theatre bill and at every street corner are equally conscious of their importance."

Zina stood biting her lips. Something was surging up in her, bursting out of her, but her reason told her not to be tactless and injure without need.

"I must admit that what you are saying is strange to me. Mine is a gypsy nature. I could never imagine myself in the lap of a happy family. Does it never occur to you that you and your like are tying down your husbands too closely to their hearth and home, and to yourselves. They need life's broad expanses, its freshness, its alternating impressions. They must have the wind and the open sky, or else they will grow fusty and mouldy in their cosy corner."

She could no longer disguise her irritation with the superior smile, the calm, the self-confidence, the unperturbed poise of the woman opposite.

"Their cosy corner. . . . You say it so emphatically. Now allow me to ask. Does it not occur to you that every mental worker needs a corner of his own where he can freely spin the thread of his thought? A cosy corner. . . . But you cannot write with frozen fingers. Only those who do not work and have nothing to work on can afford to roam the world and live at their own pleasure. It is the takers of this earth that you mean, they know neither cosy corners nor mustiness. They flit from one such corner to the other, all their lives. They can never stop, for if they did they would feel the musty smell that rises from within. They are the ones with mouldering souls. . . ."

"Believe me, those with blossoming souls also like to plunge into deep waters sometimes. To get an airing, a change. I have the deepest respect for your husband, and

I do not doubt the harmony of your common life. I am sure nobody appreciates his value as an artist better than you do. But do you think that for the sake of his family life, for the sake of his hearth and home—let us be plain—for your sake he should desist from any human infatuation and joy, from new impressions, new experiences?"

Something flashed in those serene eyes.

"How can you talk about it? What do you know about it? You are people who belong to one day. You act dozens of parts, all equally well. You have lost the power to distinguish between what is your own, and what is assumed or imagined. You think you swim in the deep, boundless ocean of life, and never realize that you have strayed into a morass. Once you have set out you never return home, you have lost your own selves, and with a mask for a face you tramp along with the joy- and pleasure-seeking crowd. You who belong to one day, one instant, what do you know about those, who, though they, too, may seek diversion and infatuation, will never break away from their centre of gravity, their life, their work."

A silence ensued. Zina looked very grave now, almost angry.

"Yes, apparently married life leaves a much deeper imprint than I imagined. However, I should not like you to think of me as one of those pleasure-seekers who belong to one day. I'm not quite like that. . . ."

"I am sorry. I did not mean it like that."

"I understand. You were carried away with the problem itself. I suppose I haven't the proper family instinct, and that is why there are things I don't quite understand. How do you reconcile it with respectable wedlock, if the husband seeks diversion, be it ever so slight, ever so reasonable. A whiff of a strange perfume, a wee speck of dirt is bound to cling."

She had got herself under control. Her look was still grave, but soft now.

"A speck of dirt. It sounds revolting, but it may be true. There is no such thing as absolute purity in life. Life is like that. Certain impurities are inherent in our physical selves—sweaty feet, dirty finger-nails. The same applies to moral purity. And we are all alike in this. That is why we do not shun each other. Our impurity is redeemed by our ardent, our common quest of purity. This yearning in us purifies our souls and our lives. When a man and a woman live together, they have to share this desire. Once they do that, it grows into such a force that no errors, no infatuations can crush it. They are like the spots on the sun which we neither notice nor feel."

For a long while both women sat silent and thoughtful. Then Zina rose and hesitatingly approached the other.

"Forgive me. Don't think ill of me. I am not so bad as you may think."

She gave the actress's hand a warm squeeze.

"I think nothing bad of you. You have nothing to apologize for. We women rarely understand one another, because we are brought up in a world that is full of hypocrisy and makes us consider each other enemies."

Zina lingered a little looking at her. Was not this hypocrisy too? Did she really not know, or was she merely pretending not to know? Could she, if she did know, have returned her look so serenely, almost amiably?

But she lacked the courage to say outright—this is what I am like; now do as you please.

She walked home depressed, with a heavy head.

* * *

Zina closed all the windows and drew the curtains. She could not bear the brilliant sunshine, and the street noises irritated her.

Her brain was in a state of fermentation. Contending thoughts kept rising and closing in combat, like gusts of wind from opposite directions clashing in a narrow crevice.

She paced up and down her room until she was worn out, until her legs were numb, and a leaden heaviness in her whole body dragged her down upon a chair. At table she did not touch her food.

She lay uncovered at night, though the cool air sent shivers down her spine. All physical sensibility seemed gone from her, while her brain went on grinding away like a mill. She felt she would never think out her thoughts and come to a conclusion. She felt it increasingly harder to unravel the tangle in her mind.

Nevertheless, after midnight she got up and unconscious of her purpose, put on the light.

When the sheet of paper lay in front of her she realized what it was for. She was going to write an answer. And it flashed upon her mind that it was this letter she had been thinking about all the time. She had known it from the start that she would have to write it, and her subconscious mind had been working to formulate what she was going to say.

She still did not know it. There was so much, so infinitely much to write. Where to find the words to fit her muddled thoughts and express every shade of her surging emotions?

But that much was certain; there was no other way for her. She could not act otherwise.

Only at first did she fumble for words. Presently they began to flow of themselves, and she wrote quickly, thinking no longer of logical sequence or smoothness of style.

"I cannot leave without a few lines to you. And leave I must. You know that as well as I do. Not, of course, because I have discovered after all that the opera attracts me more than drama. As for that, you are right. I don't know where ~~you are~~ ^{you are} not right, for that matter. I am still under the spell of your mind, and I don't know when I am going to disengage myself. If ever. . . . But that hardly matters now.

"And so—I have to write, though I am a poor letter writer, and I know that I shall not put down one-tenth of what I have to say to you. After your letter, my own lines seem colourless and insignificant to me. Still I hope that you will understand even what I lack the power to express. You have always understood me without words.

"I must admit that your letter took me by surprise. Not that our brief friendship was to me a mere trifle or pastime. I was attached to you heart and soul. I was struck to you like a thistle-blossom, and you could have done with me whatever you pleased. But I never thought that I, an ordinary, average woman, could hold your attachment so deeply, so tragically. Your letter was like a hot wave that broke over me. I still cannot come to. I don't know what I am going to say to you. I know only one thing—we have got to stop. We cannot go on. For both our sakes, but mainly for yours.

"How am I to convince you that everything I am saying and everything I am resolved to do is for your sake alone. Believe me, my own life and fate are as far removed from my thoughts as can be. There are moments when the most selfish person thinks not of himself but of another, of the one who is near and dear to him. That, too, may be a kind of self-love, it is not for me to judge. And if I speak of myself first, it is only on your account. You know me little, despite your uncommon power of penetration. I see from your letter that you are in the grip of your feelings and your fantasy. You regard me through the prism of your own inspiration. You see me in the colours of the rainbow. In your eyes I have the glamour of a fairy princess, you don't see what a work-a-day, common, average woman it is that you have clad and adorned with your own fancy.

"Don't worry, I am not going to depreciate and belittle myself. In the first place, because I am fully aware of my abilities as an actress, and secondly because it would be to no avail with you. But that's not what matters now. Your

letter is addressed to a woman for whose sake you are prepared to break your life like a piece of dead wood. For our common future you want to shed your past like a worthless rag. Both our pasts you want to delete like so much writing in chalk. It thrills me and makes me proud to know that these are not lyrical phrases. You are putting your life and existence into my hands, like an exquisitely polished, precious stone. I cannot take it lightly for my own, nor drop it carelessly. For better or for worse I have learned its true value. My hand trembles, and there are tears in my eyes. I am in an ecstasy of pride and fear.

"If I were sufficiently flippant, or sufficiently wanton, I would set this precious stone in a ring, and deck my finger with it to flaunt it in streets and cinemas—as many women do. Or else, if I were one of those truly great women whose hearts can encompass their beloved like a crystal tumbler holding intoxicating wine—then I would set my precious stone in gold and wear it on my heart for ever. Alas, I am neither the one, nor the other. I am an ordinary, average woman, and that is why I have to return to you what is worth more to me than life itself.

"I am not ashamed to tell you that you are not the first man in my life. You never asked, because you stand beyond such questions. You do not belong to those hundreds of men who look upon woman as their private property, and jealously calculate exactly how much of her belongs to them. Consequently, I can tell you that. In some instances I have nothing to regret. Others I do regret, very bitterly, I am ashamed, I condemn myself. But what is done is done. We cannot put back the clock by a single past minute, that is our great tragedy. My experience has made me more cautious. I no longer trust implicitly my emotional impulse. I look back first at the shore I am about to leave behind, and onwards towards the froth-crested breakers. I must know where I am going. Particularly since I am not sailing alone. And even more so, since I have you for my companion.

"We have been together but a few short weeks. Yet to me they have the import of years. All my previous life seems to wane before these weeks. That is why I cannot just skip over them, as I skipped over those many preceding barren years. What I have received from you I cannot cast aside as I cast aside those petty joys and puny sufferings that filled my life before you. You promise me a lifetime equally rich and full. I realize the value of your promise. But I am not made for it. I must resign from it—for my sake as well as for yours.

"First, about myself. I find it hard to imagine anything so long as a lifetime. No doubt, that is my nature and disposition; to my ear it is just a beautiful word. I know you will forgive me my bluntness. I don't believe in eternity. I am a one-day being, and I cannot be any different. How can I help my nature. I have been brought up like it, my profession has moulded me thus. I suppose I change with every new part, every character I enact. And something of each remains in me. I often think I am like a bee flying from blossom to blossom. I am as changeable as spring weather. I cannot tell in the morning what I am going to be like in the afternoon, any more than you can. And this changeability holds the very essence of my existence. I am a field lark that cannot bear to be locked up in a room. Those who love me must never wish to lock me in a cage, be it twined with the loveliest of roses. Love's sweetest slavery would kill me. By tying me down for life you would be committing me to slow death. You would not—you could not intend that. I know you too well.

"I am saying this at a moment when your love fills my being like a sweet scent. When my soul is like an instrument newly strung and singing to the touch of strange winds. At a moment when I am yearning for you body and soul, when to be with you all my life seems the highest, the most beautiful attainment I can conceive. And yet I know that it is but a passing fancy. I cannot deliberately

close my eyes and walk on without looking at the road I tread. I am intoxicated with your love. Yet I know that every intoxication passes, and then there must be a long and painful hang-over that only narcotics can artificially allay. I am not so utterly tired and ~~empty~~ inside as to wreck my nerves and drown my life. I love life above all else. I want to live.

"And for your sake . . . I mean—above all for your sake. You are a man of steady brain work, of ideas, of imagination. You are great and revolutionary in your creative work. Your life exacts from you quiet, concentrated, tireless labour. You need an inexhaustible supply of fuel within yourself. You must smoulder steadily within, and never catch a spark of fire from without that would set you ablaze and destroy you. Your thirst must remain unslaked, your yearning unappeased for ever. It is hard. And tragic. But from this springs your greatness and your power. When a glass is emptied it is worthless and void. When the fire has consumed itself the wind scatters the flakes of ashes. Emptiness is the death of you. In one respect you are mistaken. Not in actual gain lies your happiness. Not in grasping and holding what you desire, but in for ever questing, and longing, and desiring, and thirsting. Such is your nature.

"Since you left I have acquainted myself with your life and work. You are not angry with me, are you? I can be lightminded and leap headlong into the abyss—if it is a question of a moment's delight. But if I sail out to sea I cannot but first scan the horizon to see what is looming in the distant ocean. I knew of her before. Even the most lightminded of women cannot help wondering whether another woman is in her way. I met your wife, and that decided my fate.

"I tell you frankly that it is not because you have a wife that I am leaving you. There is not a trace in me of philistine morality. I never demanded from my so-called admirers either birth or marriage certificates. That is their

own affair. Yet this time I could not. I cannot consider you like any odd passer-by that comes my way, and vanishes again when one of us has had enough.

"You have a wife before whom I stood rent with jealousy, envy, and shame. I was not ashamed because I had broken into her life trying to snatch what was hers by rights of precedence. We did not talk about it, though I am sure she knew. Not one word of reproach, not one unkindly look did she give me. I have gone through every kind of scene in my lifetime and know their worth. But in front of your wife I felt ashamed, because I had aspired to her place.

"For the first time I got an insight into the true nature of your work, and an understanding of what a woman means in your life and work. You have the best wife that ever walked the earth. Quite apart from what she means to you in practical life, though that, too, is immensely important. I am speaking of her as your assistant and working partner, the person who is closest to you and knows every thought you conceive and its development; knows your moments of exultation, and those of weakness; your spells of sublime inspiration, and your hours of bitter pain. Now I know why you understand a woman's heart so well. Your every line breathes her warm breath. Her eyes are bright with the pictures of your fantasy. Her heart beats to the rhythm of your language. What you are you are through her. Has that ever occurred to you? You men are terribly conceited and ungrateful. You do not appreciate the treasures that come pouring down upon you day in day out, like golden showers. You can throw up everything and go chasing after a worthless fragment of glittering glass.

"And I had dared to fancy myself in her place! I with my eccentric attire and my eccentric, stage-warped nature. A sightseer who walks into another's garden and carelessly plucks an exquisite flower which that other person has been lovingly tending and watering since early spring. No, I am a terrible self-seeker, and so are we all. To me a man

is but another rung to support my foot in my upward climb. Ninety-nine out of a hundred are, indeed, worth no more. They feel happy when my heel presses into their neck. And that is all the happiness they need. They ask no more. Yet even these worthless slaves leave a mark on you—contempt of men, a certain unwarranted conceit, a trace of superficiality, lightmindedness. How can I, then, such as I am, attach myself to you, and attach you to myself. It would be madness, it would be criminal. It would be only for a short span of time—our enchantment with each other would not outlast that. Eternity is not for me, while a moment's oblivion is not for you. Exultation would be followed by emptiness and suffering. For both of us. For the three of us. Let us not forget that third. None of us, and you least of all, have a right to do so.

"There is a rose in the vase on my table. When I put it there it was a bud. It blossomed out and passed its prime, and every time I lift my head from this letter another petal has disengaged itself and dropped down on the table. There is nothing sadder to me than a dying blossom like this. It came to my mind that such would be the fate of our love. I would a thousand times rather see it die at once, while in full bloom than wither away like this.

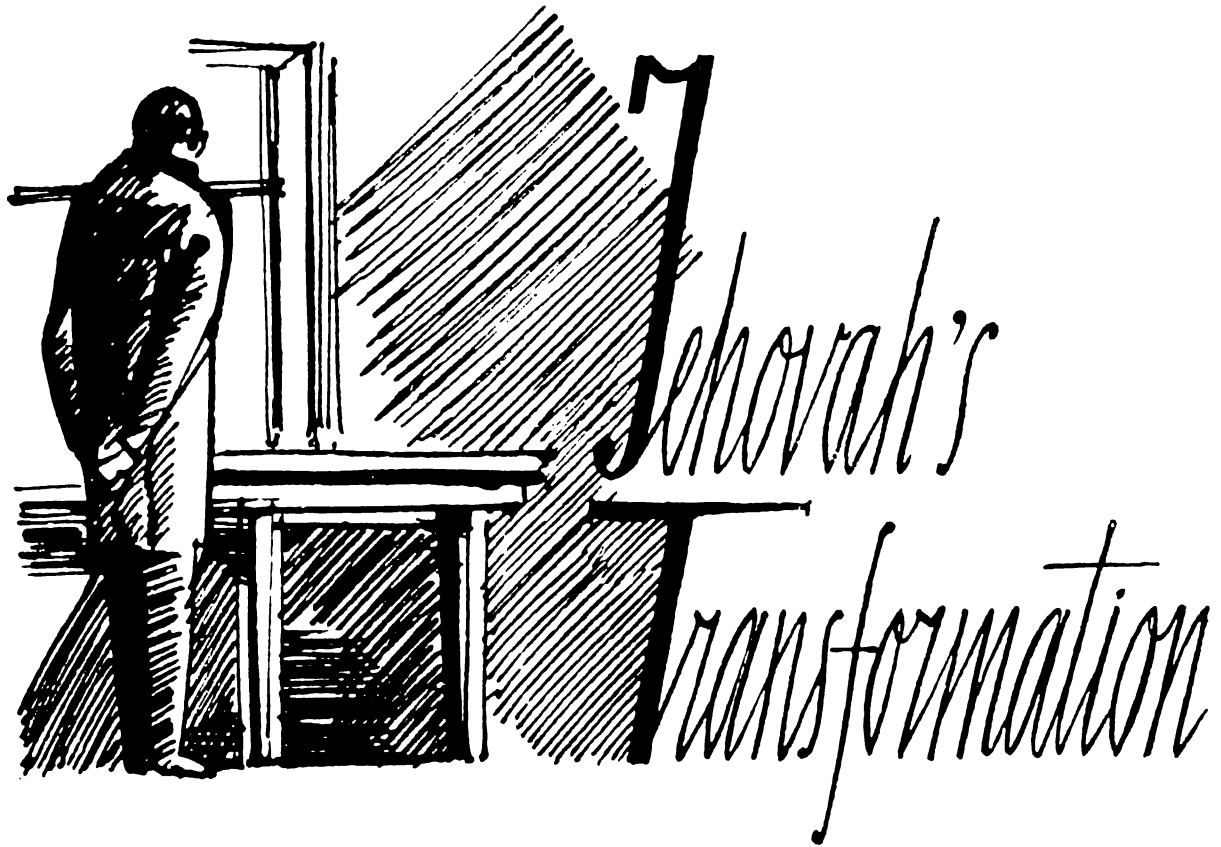
"But why speak of death. My comparison with the rose is sentimental and out of place. We shall simply break off the thread and keep a little silken reel each of unforgettably lovely days, of brief rapturous nights, of every moment we shared. It seems to me that neither you nor I have anything to regret. Not I, at any rate. That I know for sure. I who knew only slaves and trampled on them have learned to know a real man. One who uplifts you instead of dragging you down and humiliating you. I go from you with a richer comprehension of life and its value. I have walked through another's garden without breaking a single twig, yet my heart is full of blossoms. These days have been the most beautiful in all my life. I shall cherish them as a pre-

cious souvenir from you. I should like to believe, yes, I almost believe that you, too, will cherish, as a gift from me, a tiny part of what you wrote to me in your letter. These four pages are the finest poem you have ever composed, the dearer to me for being addressed to me. It will be my talisman, and every time I am overcome with doubts about my own value, my personality, the importance of the work I am doing, I shall take it out and look at it.

"I owe you a great debt of gratitude, you have made a different person of me, more dignified, more independent, and prouder. I know and feel that never again shall I be able to sink to the level of all those ninety-nine admirers, and followers, and sponsors. I am no longer capable of giving myself to any passer-by, because you have proved to me my own worth. It is as though you had entrusted me with it, and made me responsible for it. I know now the true value of art, and the happiness of giving oneself up to it with all the strength of one's heart. I know my way. And—thank you for it.

"We part without bitterness or hate, don't we? And, if you agree, not for ever. We part as the best, the warmest of friends, and we shall meet again. I shall always follow up your work, and rejoice as I watch you grow ever greater. It will fill me with pride because I was once so close to you. And you will see my soul break into blossom ever anew, in never ending continuity, because of the life-giving streams that now run through my veins. Our footprints will remain indelible on the paths of the park, and on the pavements of the streets, and in life itself."

1920



Pastor Zanderson rose from his couch and walked up to the window. A loose spring under the patched leather upholstery gave a shrill buzz like a bee thwarted in its attempt to sting the clumsy foot that had trod on it.

Moodily he gazed at the world without. The window was a new one, the pane clean and shiny, and the yellow frame still smelled of varnish. Straggling lilac bushes and cherry-trees rose behind the filled-in line of trenches, hiding the bare slope of the hill. On the left loomed the charred skeleton of a pear-tree, its trunk naked, its branches like white finger-bones. There was not a living tree in the whole garden. What the soldiers had not chopped down had been consumed by the flames when the Germans set fire to the pastor's estate.

The Daugava rolled on as before, but now it could be seen all the way from the castle hill above to where it flowed through the little village below. On the Kurzeme side a boat was moored to the bank. A man with his trousers off stood stooping in the water, fishing for boulders to build his house with. Among the former estate fields three little

houses shone white against the dark green background of the pine forest. Another tiny white roof gleamed farther down amidst the crumbled walls of the mansion. These were the homes of the "new farmers." As far as the eye could reach the landscape was dotted with little plots, white where the rye grew, and green where summer crops had been sown. They looked ridiculous, these tiny fields, to one whose eye had been accustomed to the broad expanses of the estate fields stretching up from the banks of the Daugava to the highroad beyond.

With a shrug Pastor Zanderson turned his back on it all.

In the adjoining room Aboliene was bustling about at the range, roasting a chicken for the pastor's dinner. He walked up to the bare table and drummed his fingers on it. Ah, it was not like his old desk with a buzzer at one corner. Now if he wanted to call her he had to raise his voice, or go to the door and open it. And this room was not like his old study with its large green writing table, its book-case, and its maps of the missions on the walls. This had been the maid's room, and it was poky, and uncomfortable, and he was not used to it. Its single window in the back wall left most of the room dark, dank, and unfriendly.

Aboliene opened the door without knocking and came in wiping her hands on her apron.

"Going out, Reverend Father? The chicken's nearly done. And what a tough old bird it is! Abol's fetching the third armful of firewood. Those Zeligises really have some cheek, charging thirty rubles for an old bag of bones like this!"

As she spoke they heard the rumble of logs crashing down on the floor in the other room, shaking the whole house. The only inkstand on the table gave a jerk. The penholder rolled over the note-book and came to a halt on the very edge of the table. Acrid smoke from the rotting wood drifted in through the open door.

The pastor frowned.

"I'll go out for a moment. Call me when it's ready. I'll be out in the . . . on the bank."

He had been about to say "garden" but had checked himself in time. There was no garden now, and Abol had laughed at him for using the word.

But Aboliene did not budge.

"What are we going to do about the gravy? I'll rake up some onion, and there's still some lard in the pot. But we need sour cream!"

"Try those-new farmers. They have cream, haven't they?"

"The Zelgises have only two cows and five mouths to feed. The Abriks might let us have some, they've got four, they take cream to market. But I doubt if they'll sell any to you."

The pastor's frown darkened. "Ask the Rudzits."

"I can't do that. We've quarrelled. Their boys throw stones at my goat. The things she shouted at me this morning, honestly, I've never heard the like of it."

Pastor Zanderson had heard. Tired though he had been from his journey, they had roused him from his sleep at six o'clock with their blasphemies. His presence had not embarrassed them in the least. They had used the foulest invective, and Aboliene had done just as well as her neighbour.

The pastor turned abruptly.

"You'll get some somewhere, I'm sure!"

But Aboliene stood looking at him expectantly instead of going about her business. After a moment's hesitation something dawned on him.

"I see! I suppose you need some money again?"

"I do, Reverend Father! Can't get a thing without money these days."

"Nor do we need to, my dear woman. We shall pay for everything we take. Don't, for heaven's sake, take anything without paying."

"We couldn't if we tried. Nobody would give us a thing. You're lucky if they sell to you."

The pastor opened a drawer containing all his morning's collections. A little over a thousand rubles. He pulled out a five-ruble note and held it out to her, but she made no move. Adding another note, he rose angrily to his feet.

"This ought to do. Enough for them. . . ."

And he stalked out of the house without even listening to her reply.

The main part of the house was charred and blasted, with a gaping hole for a front door and the rubble round the porch hardly cleared. He had to climb over debris and piles of brick, limestone and coal, and make his way round the caved-in wall of the dining room. A large flat stone had been rolled up to the doorway—they had not even taken the trouble to repair the steps.

Pastor Zanderson angrily rubbed the dust off his patent leather boots in the soft grass and glanced back at the house. The large brick building reared its grotesque, soot-blackened front. The outlines of windows and doors were jagged where the former tenants of his estate had broken out bricks for their own needs. A slanting temporary roof sheltered the part inhabited by himself and the Abols. A whiff of black smoke was curling skywards from the tin chimney.

The pastor walked as far as the outhouse. This had also been allotted to him and was easy to repair. The roof, the ceiling, and the door were still standing. But the hinges had been wrenched out leaving huge gaps in the walls. Every scrap of metal, even nails, had been removed.

A dry cough racked Pastor Zanderson's whole frame, for the third or fourth time that day. He turned towards the yard with its sorry remains of flower-beds and hedges, and what was left of the sweeping drive. To a maple-tree with a single protruding branch was tethered Rudzit's calf. In the avenue some urchins were romping about, trundling

their hoops. Janis Abrik and Mile Rudzit were walking up the drive from what had once been a tenant's cottage and now belonged to one of those "new farmers." They were both turned out in their Sunday best, he wearing a grey jacket and riding breeches, with puttees wound round his legs above ankle-boots, she a short-sleeved white blouse, a short skirt, white ankle socks, and white shoes. The white lace trimming of her underskirt, showed pertly with every puff of wind. They did not interrupt their animated conversation till they were almost level with the pastor. Janis raised his hand casually to his cap by way of a greeting, and Mile stared him full in the face with what seemed to him a flicker of irony in her eyes. The couple walked down the avenue squabbling with the kids. They were obviously on their way to the singing rehearsal. The Cultural Society was holding an open-air ball that night.

As he crossed the yard Pastor Zanderson endeavoured to keep his eyes off this new farmer's house, which seemed to force itself into his view. Whenever he passed here his eyes strayed towards it of their own accord much as it pained his heart. A brand-new shingled roof, fixed only the year before. Three red chimneys. ~~Six windows~~ ^{four windows}. One of Rudzit's windows even had a curtain, behind which the pastor could glimpse a rubber-plant and flower pots. New farmers indeed. . . .

And there was Zelgis just pulling up his cart in front of the clover stack behind the cowshed. It was a dry, sunny day; what matter that it was Sunday? What matter that the pastor had come and was going to deliver a sermon at five in the afternoon in the school-building? Those "new farmers" had more important problems on their minds. . . . As the pastor reached the alder-fringed edge of the ditch Abrik and his wife emerged from it. Both were carrying rakes. They must have been mowing in the meadow below. Fine weather for mow-

ing! What matter that it was Sunday, and the pastor had returned.

The pastor shifted his eyes to the right, and to the left, and finally fastened them on the distant field of summer wheat beyond. It was too late to escape an encounter.

Abrik and his wife exchanged a look. She passed by with her nose in the air without as much as a word or glance. He raised his hand to his hat as though intending to doff it in greeting, but then merely pulled the brim a little lower and changed the rake to his other shoulder. He stopped.

"Taking the air, Mr. Zanderson? Yes, you can walk here safely now. We've filled in the trenches. The cattle used to break their legs in them. Only don't you go into the alder bushes. They're all twisted with barbed wire. And the dug-outs are a real trap they're so overgrown with nettles and creepers. I don't see why our people can't get together and clear it all up. It's only a couple of days' work. The whole place will soon be crawling with snakes."

"The land has been allotted to one person. Let him do the clearing."

"Why did they allot all the trenches to one person? Am I any worse than they are that I should do all the work? Was I the one to dig them? Was I the only one who ripped the woodwork off the dug-outs? When they needed building material they all came along, but as soon as it's a matter of clearing, I'm the owner. It isn't right."

The pastor wiped his glasses and hooked them back on his ears. His fingers moved jerkily.

"Nothing is ever right with you, Abrik. You always grumble. And yet it is you who has had the best share."

"The best my foot. . . . How can you say that. It's only that one field that's any use at all. The stretch of clay at the foot of the hill isn't worth having. In dry weather it's as hard as a rock."

Both men were looking at the lush wheat field, as though guessing each other's thoughts.

"That's a fine field of wheat you've got, Abrik. You'll have white bread to eat all the year round."

"D'you mind it?"

The pastor's hand shot up to his glasses again but he controlled it.

"No, I do not mind it. I do not grudge anything to anybody. I wish everybody the very best, as long as he gets his share in justice and fairness."

"You mean to say I didn't? I hear you're intending to take it away from me?"

"It is mine in justice and fairness."

"A queer kind of justice I call it. For twelve years I paid my rent to you, and to Arpis before you, and all I had was that clayey slope. And now that I've got four acres where something can grow, now you're trying to take it away from me. Now it's yours in justice and fairness. Well, there's nothing doing. The central committee has confirmed it as mine."

"I have appealed to the senate."

"You have, have you? A fine thing to do! Why on earth did you ever pick on your profession, I wonder? You ought to have studied to be a lawyer. Or you'd have made a first-class horse-coper. . . ."

Pastor Zanderson had already reached the caved-in cellar. But he only stopped to catch his breath when the tumbled, elder-crowned ruins hid him from view. His heart and his hands were quivering with agitation. His pulse was pounding at his temples. He could still hear Abrik showering abuses on him at the top of his voice as he turned into the yard.

Was this for a pastor to endure? Here of all places, where he had been lord and master for eight years. The Abriks of this world had once come to him cap in hand, imploring him to wait with the over-due rent. . . . From his pulpit he would hurl at them the thunder of his wrath

while they stood bowed before him, praying for a kindly word.

Abol appeared in the gaping doorway. On seeing the pastor he waved his hand and approached hobbling over the stones and rubble.

"Mr. Zanderson! Quick, somebody's waiting to see you!"

The pastor did not hurry. Let them wait if they needed him. In the old days nobody was admitted fifteen minutes after reception hours. As he looked at the lame old Abol his anger rose like leavened dough. Whatever had made him employ this godless scoffer? Anybody would have agreed to till his ten acres for him. Abol did not even address the pastor's wife as Reverend Mother. And now he was simply calling him by his name, as though he were no better than some Abrik. . . . Nor did he bother to take his hands out of his trouser pockets.

"Ozol and his so-called wife are here."

The pastor knew full well who Ozol was and what he had come for. Yet he asked without looking Abol in the face:

"What do they want?"

Abol grinned.

"To get married, of course," he said narrowing his eyes to cunning, glittering slits, through which he seemed to be probing the pastor's thoughts on the matter as though expecting them to be most peculiar. The pastor turned aside and gazed towards the Kurzeme pine forest beyond. How he detested this Abol, who had had one son in Siberia since 1906, while the other had joined the Red Army and left with the Bolsheviks. Only now did he realize the full weight of his own folly in giving a job and a home to this atheist and rioter.

The two men walked towards the house. The pastor felt Abol's narrowed eyes focused on his back.

"Aren't you thinking of building this year, Mr. Zanderson? How long are we going to perch in this swallow's

nest? It may do while the weather keeps. But soon the rain'll be trickling through the roof. And when are we going to have a shed? The least you've got to keep's a pig, and I can't do without a cow or something. There's heaps of hay at the foot of the hill to feed it on."

The pastor flashed a look at him through his glasses. "I've got permission to fell, and I was hoping you'd do the job for me towards spring-time."

"The felling's child's play. But there's nobody to cart. You wouldn't pay a hundred apiece."

"Four hundred rubles for one winter day? No, I wouldn't and I couldn't pay that. There is no such price in the country. It's plain robbery."

"Nobody'll do it for nothing these days. We've all got our own troubles to worry about. And if they can't make a profit on you. . . . Yours is easy money, after all."

"To be sure. It just comes pouring down upon me. I make it out of thin air. Really I can't understand you. A reasonable fellow like you talking such stuff. We live in two little rooms in Valmiera Street—do you know where that is? Do you know how much I have to pay for my son's tuition? My daughter works at a post office. The Reverend Mother needs to take a cure in Kemeru, but we cannot afford it, we have not enough money."

And that man had the cheek to laugh! The blue veins on the pastor's temples swelled.

"Of course—Kemeru, and sea-side resorts, we can't afford such things for the time being. We'll have to leave them to those who don't need to do any building. . . ."

Pastor Zanderson was not listening. He quickened his steps along the footpath to the demolished part of the house, opened his door and slammed it behind him.

Ozol and his so-called wife were standing by the table. With a nod in answer to their greeting he sat down. Only then did he notice that Aboliene had already started bringing in the dinner. A plate, a knife and fork, a little earthen-

ware bowl with gravy, and some slices of rye bread were on the table. How incongruous when he had business on hand. And to crown everything she now opened the door carrying a steaming dish of meat.

"Not yet! A little later!"

His hands trembling as they always did when his pulse throbbed at his temples, he wiped his spectacles with the corner of his handkerchief. Before putting them on again he turned to look at Ozol and his so-called wife. There was nothing remarkable about him. But that woman. . . . Quickly he jerked the glasses on again. She had a strikingly, indecently well proportioned, slender figure, and her face was outrageously fresh and beautiful for a peasant woman. The round cut of her blouse showed her tanned neck, and there was even a rose pinned to her high breast. Not a trace of shame, not a vestige of contrition in either face. . . .

"I hear. . . you want to be married?"

"Yes, Reverend Father."

It was the woman who answered so glibly, so unhesitatingly. . . . He sat twirling his pencil.

"I see, I see. . . I hear you already have children?"

"Yes, Reverend Father, we have two. One is three, and the other eight months."

This time Ozol replied, but his "wife" chimed in:

"He was eight months on June 13."

"I see, I see. So I heard. . . But why have you come to me? I suppose you hold different views."

Ozol exchanged a quick glance with his wife and gave a cough.

"We shouldn't have bothered you, Sir. We're registered. But the old folks insist. So we thought we might just as well, to please them."

"I see. . . I see. . . ."

The pencil jumped nervously over the sheet of paper. As he asked questions and made notes he had the sensation of observing his own actions, and wondered how he could

talk to them and keep so calm. As though there was anything worth asking or noting!

Ozol interrupted him. What would it cost them, this . . . er, business.

"We're not rich. We can't afford to pay a lot. They say Lielpeter paid five hundred. That's too much for us."

And even to this final piece of impudence the pastor forced himself to make a calm reply.

"According to your means, my friend, according to your means. There's no fixed rate. Each pays what he can."

Then he shook hands with them, first with one, then with the other.

"Excuse us, but we're rather in a hurry. We sing in the choir, you know. There's a rehearsal before the concert."

"So you're in that choir too!"

"Yes, Lize is an alto, and I'm a tenor. Our tenor isn't very strong. Not much time to rehearse in the season."

They left. Pastor Zanderson had risen from his chair and followed them with his eyes, his fingers mechanically crumpling the blue note-book. Beads of perspiration had broken out on his forehead. How could he have let them go like this? That atheist who had been in the militia under the Bolsheviks. . . . Why had he not told them what was burning in his mind and on his tongue?

In a hurry, were they? A tenor. . . . Shaking hands with them. . . . He slapped the note-book down on the table. Just then Aboliene came back with the dish of meat.

"Come and eat now, Reverend Father. Someone else may call, and you'll have no chance to eat at all."

It occurred to him that she must have been eavesdropping. The door had been left ajar. He could hear two male voices in the adjoining room, one of which belonged to Abol.

"Thank you, that'll do. And close the door, please."

But Aboliene was in no hurry. She arranged the dishes

on the table, then gave the gravy a stir with a wooden spoon.

"The best I could do, Reverend Father. It's a bit thin, I'm afraid, and the meat's still on the tough side. They've palmed us off with the oldest hen they had, the rascals! And here's five rubles back. I only managed to wheedle one glass of cream out of them. They didn't have enough for themselves, they said. Their son had come over from Riga for the ball, and they'd have to give him some food to take back to town."

All right, all right—he was about to say it, but stopped himself in time. Why "all right"? What was right? Why should he keep pretending and lying to himself? He lifted one wing off the plate and began to eat. It was tasteless. Him not to be able to get half a litre of cream! They needed it for themselves. . . . That was how they treated their pastor nowadays. The meat stuck in his throat.

The door opened again. It was Rudzit, short and stocky, with a beaming face and long, smoothly brushed hair, a real old-time peasant. He bowed and remained standing at a respectful distance.

The pastor nodded to him without interrupting his meal.

"What's on your mind, Rudzit?"

"What can there be on my mind? Nothing much. It's only about those three days for my horse, when Abol took it to sow your barley and cart the limestone. You know, don't you?"

"Yes, Abol told me. It's Sunday today, and I still have my sermon to think about, but never mind. I see this is your new way of life. I shall have to pay you sooner or later, anyway. I want no favours. How much are you going to charge me?"

"Well, how much can I charge? I'm not out for profit. Every hour without my horse is a dead loss to me. But seeing as you're my neighbour. . . ."

"All right, all right. Tell me how much."

Fishing for the second chicken wing with one hand, he opened the drawer with the other, and rummaged among the banknotes.

"Well, it's one thousand for the two days, and let's make it three hundred for the one odd day."

The pastor's hand instinctively pushed back the drawer.

"One thousand three hundred? You've surely made a mistake somewhere."

"What's there to make a mistake about? It's what everybody pays. I ploughed up one acre for the schoolmaster, and he paid three hundred though it didn't take me more than half a day. But I couldn't charge you that, you're my next-door neighbour after all."

"A fine sort of neighbour you are! And how much will it cost me to have my ten acres tilled? Have you thought about it?"

"A lot, to be sure, if you haven't a horse of your own. But everything costs a lot nowadays. D'you know how much the blacksmith took of me just to fix my plough-share?"

The pastor said no more. What was there to say? All he wanted was to get rid of the man as quickly as possible. He counted the money in the drawer, then pulled out his wallet, and added another two hundred-ruble notes. All this he flung on the table, rose to his feet and turned away while Rudzit counted it slowly and methodically, turning over and examining every single note.

"You can never tell with money these days. You get a false note and there you are. My word, these do look shabby. Not one that's new...."

One ten-ruble note was all criss-crossed with sticky paper.

"You might change this one for me, Reverend Father. I'm not even sure you can see the number."

"I did not make the money myself. I pay it as it comes."

The state bank will change the whole lot for you if you like."

"The bank. . . It'd be easier for you to get rid of it in Riga."

At last he had counted it all, and gathered it up, and was making for the door. But before leaving he turned round once more and said:

"If you think I charge too much you might try somewhere else. I'm not out for profit. I've got plenty of work to do myself, every hour's a dead loss."

The pastor could not get the second wing down. Pushing back the plate he called for Aboliene to take it away. He sat turning over the pages of his blue note-book but could not find the notes he had prepared for the day's sermon. When he did so eventually, the hand holding the page trembled, the written lines swam before his eyes, and his mind could not grasp the thread of his thoughts.

There was only one hour to go, but his attention was diverted by two more visitors. First by an old woman for whom he had deposited sixty rubles in the state savings bank back in 1913. Then by the former pagast messenger, whose wife had eloped with the junior teacher. What could he do about it? What could he do about anything at all these days? They had those new-fangled institutions for every problem.

He locked the door and engrossed himself in his notes. He had always been in the habit of thinking over his sermons very carefully and building them up very logically.

A man of reason, a believer in his idea, he had never relied on mere eloquence and empty phrases.

When he had finally traced the thread of thought in his notes, he at once realized its inadequacy. Although vaguely acquainted with the new conditions, he had come with the best of intentions, in a forgiving and conciliatory spirit. In this spirit he had intended to preach and act in a world rent with bitter contradictions and terrible discord. He

would help bridle the rampant passions and sow the seed of Christian love in this much-neglected soil. Like a skilled gardener he would tend the delicate sprouts, even if he did not himself live to see them grow and break into blossom and bear fruit.

Now he saw the vanity of it. Drop upon bitter drop these people had infused into his heart. Heavy, painful thoughts went round and round in his mind. Who was he to be here amidst these sorry ruins, where you could break a leg before you found your way indoors? Under this makeshift leaking roof? They did not even bother to provide their pastor with a decent place to live in. Not even half a litre of cream could he get for his own money. And he had wanted to be charitable, and preach love and forgiveness.

Crumpling his sermon, he pushed it into his waistcoat pocket. Then he looked at his watch. He had another forty-five minutes, but Jurgitis had not turned up yet. Martin Jurgitis, the present parish elder, might have come with his horse and cart to drive him over to what used to be the alms-house and was now a school, and where the service was to be held that Sunday.

Pastor Zanderson opened his suitcase containing his gassock, his crosses and all the things he needed for Holy Communion, examined everything carefully, and closing it again set out on his way.

Zelgis had just brought a cartload of clover to the shed. Standing on top of it, pitch-fork in hand, he was cursing at the fretting horse. With a dark sidelong glance at the pastor he swung back his body and thrust his fork into the clover heaving up a good load. His wife was leaning out of the loft-hatch ready to receive it from him. Abrik's wife was busy chasing the hens from the cabbage field by flinging chunks of mud at them. At the top of the avenue Rudzit's little dog rushed out yapping at the pastor.

He hurried on. The suitcase was heavy, but he was unaware of the physical strain. He was thinking of the

Sundays of old, when a carriage and pair would drive him to church, the Reverend Mother by his side, his son and daughter opposite on the front seat. He would watch his tenants thronging the road right down to the very church, noticing if anyone was missing. After dinner those who had failed to appear at church would come cap in hand, with their excuses and apologies, all those Abriks, and Zelgises, and Rudzits. . . .

His head was burning. His temples were covered with beads of perspiration. Turning into the highroad, he looked up towards the sheer bank of the Daugava, on which stood the white ruins of the church. The base of the tower rose in grotesque outline against the sky, while its slender spire lay across the debris as though making a lunge at the altar. The Gothic vaults of the windows were crumbled. The south transept had caved in scattering white stones down the sloping bank. Nobody gave a thought to restoring the church. Not even Martin Jurgitis had as much as suggested it.

Fury was seething in the pastor's breast. Evil had taken deep root. Life on this earth had become like unto whited sepulchres, which are within full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. People were worse than wild beasts. Not only in their attitude towards him. What was he and his sufferings? A drop in the great dark ocean that washed the shores of this vale of sorrow. But the very foundations of it were rotting. These people spit at Him whom he was called upon to serve.

His mind's eye saw a different picture. A different voice rang in his ears, a voice that rose from the past. He saw himself at the altar, in the pulpit, pouring his thunderous fury upon the bowed heads before him that bent ever lower under the harsh rod of his words. Not one sin, not one human frailty found mercy in his eyes. The Lord's own merciless anger flowed from his tongue, while the power and conviction of His words were in his heart. It had sometimes

happened that people complained of him at court or at the consistory. But a pastor had some standing in those days, and secular power was on his side. Never could a hardened or recalcitrant sinner hold his own against him.

A voice was thundering in the pastor's ear, and it seemed to come from Jehovah Himself. The voice waxed louder and angrier. What were the sins of those days compared to the depravity of today! Like Sodom and Gomorrah the world was stinking to heaven. Soon brimstone and fire would rain down upon them. Everything pointed to that. The end of the world was near, it would roll up like a parchment scroll. And then He would appear sitting on His heavenly throne, and He would judge without mercy all those money-grubbers, and extortioners, those land-distributors, and Sunday desecrators, those who scoffed at holy wedlock and at all piety, those debauchers, those dance-goers, and altos, and tenors, and socialists, and democrats. They would come to their senses and know how to respect their masters and preachers and other representatives of God on this earth. But it would be too late. There would be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Like streaks of fire, the words of his sermon flashed before Pastor Zanderson's inward eye. Living examples from present-day life and from his recent experience thronged in upon him. The madness of the Revolution, the merciless German rule, Bermont's biting rod, fire and sword, ruin, devastation, and famine—had not all this been the Lord's chastisement and warning? But you closed your eyes and stopped your ears. You, who are now doomed by the Lord to eternal destruction and the tortures of hell!

Pastor Zanderson stopped on the bridge in the shade of a willow-tree to take a breath. His face was flaming with grim inspiration and a rapture that shook his innermost being. Thou of little faith! And he had thought of reconciling himself to all this wickedness and of sowing the seeds of Christian love in this wilderness. Like the

prophets of the Old Testament he must come among the faithless and dissipated people and smite with the bloody rod of His anger those whose every deed was a grievous sin in the eyes of the Lord, and whose every word was a travesty against heaven.... I the Lord thy God am a jealous God.... Unto the third and fourth generation.... With brimstone and fire....

He raised his eyes. A long black cloud had veiled the sun. Was this not the shadow of Jehovah? Ah, he recognized his God again and knew what He demanded of him. Were it not for the suitcase he would have folded his hands—here I stand before You and know Your will!

The road was steep and it had been churned up by the war. His boots were soon covered with an ugly layer of dust. The suitcase was dragging at his arm. But this only served to whip up his fury, which mounted with every step he took.

The blasted walls and broken rafters of the pagast house loomed on the hill. On one side sprawled a hideous jumble of bricks and debris which had once been the school. His eye rested with pious ecstasy on this site of desolation. This had been the seat of secular wisdom, which had abandoned the word of the Lord and presumed to prosper by wordly learning. And he heard the Lord's own voice "Thou art but dust and ashes before my eyes!" That would go into his sermon, too. They would tremble and bow their faces to the earth, and there would be no hope for mercy. Yes, it was a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

Three old men were comfortably seated on a log outside the alms-house smoking and chatting happily. At his approach they slowly stuck their pipes into their pockets and quite unhurriedly rose to their feet. The school-teacher's servant's little daughter was sprawling in the grass, her bare legs in the air, playing with a kitten....

The pastor's eye swept past all this. His heart was heavy with Jehovah's anger. Jehovah's thunder was roaring behind his temples.

In the first room that was stacked with school-desks up to the ceiling he noticed the unmistakable smell of dust. They had not even bothered to clean it. A whiff of fresh cigarette smoke hung in the air. He pushed open the door and stepped into the large room. The little congregation had spread out along the walls and in the corners of the room. Some had ensconced themselves in the recesses of the windows, others were seated on tables they had dragged in from the front room. Presently the cheerful hum of voices died down. Again the pastor caught the smell of cigarette smoke.

He swept his eye round the room without focusing on any individual face. Yet he took in everything. He had trained himself to doing that without appearing to look. About fifty people, that was all the Lord's word had been able to assemble after so many years of godlessness and sin.... On the floor by the wall crouched old Mother Zelgis, the one and only representative of his former estate. His eyes strayed towards the window. Above the heads of the people rose the black silhouette of an old lime-tree. No, it was not a tree—it was the shadow of Jehovah. Jehovah would not forsake him.

He entered the teacher's room and relaxed on a chair for a moment. His breast was heaving. At first he could see nothing through his steamed-up glasses. Nor was there anything much to see here. A plain bed, a plain deal table. The collected works of Janson and a song about somebody called Hiawatha. The pastor turned over a few pages fastidiously using the tips of his fingers. A secular song, what else could he expect.... There were some picture post-cards on the walls showing very scantily dressed females. Above them, side by side hung the portraits of Baron and Rainis. Such were the school-teachers of today,

the men who brought up the country's children! What would the people come to ten years hence? Would not the state be forced to build new prisons, and could it afford it? Another theme for today's sermon! Ah, he would make them shake and tremble!

Averting his disgusted eye from the indecent pictures, he rose to his feet. Jurgitis had not come. Perhaps he would not come at all. After the sermon there would be christenings and marriages. Well, he would have to manage by himself. A heavy thundercloud was gathering about him charged with lightning. Jurgitis, too, would get his share. He above all. For unto whom much is given, of him shall be much required, and no man, having put his hand to the plough and looking back, is fit for the Kingdom of God.

He took his cassock from his suitcase, but as he was pulling it over his coat the same old woman came in who had called at his house before about her sixty rubles. He ordered her out in a peremptory voice and applied himself fumblingly to fixing his crosses. His hands trembled so much that no button seemed to fit into its buttonhole. Then at last Jurgitis appeared and helped him.

Jurgitis, the parish elder, was rather out of breath and visibly repentant.

"I'm a little late, Reverend Father, I'm sorry. There was such urgent business. . . ."

The pastor did not ~~deign to~~ inquire into the nature of this business. Perhaps he had been celebrating the completion of a new granary; or he had been busy getting in the clover from his fields. Whatever it was, it was abominable, so he did not ask. Besides, a word now might take the edge off that grim fury with its flashes of lightning and roll of thunder, and that would never do.

With a nod he indicated the wall, asking: "What kind of person is he, this teacher of yours?"

"The teacher? He's from Kurzeme. An elderly man. Don't know much about him, I've no children to send to school. But he's well spoken of."

The pastor pointed at the wall again.

"I should think he is. They're of the same sort themselves. A godless socialist, that's what he is. You can see it from these pictures and from his books. I'm going to bring it up in my sermon."

Chatty as he was by nature, Jurgitis suddenly lapsed into silence and grew strangely fidgety. Then, pulling from his trouser pocket two folded slips of soiled paper covered with pencil writing, he said: "Here's the list of our parish members, Reverend Father."

The pastor skimmed it with his eyes and looked at the last number on the list.

"What? One hundred and forty? And what about the others?"

Jurgitis grew even more fidgety.

"The others don't want to sign on."

"But they had done so before! If I remember rightly, there were something between four and five hundred."

"Four hundred and sixty. That was when they were expecting those American parcels. But then there weren't enough parcels to go round, and what was in them was... not much. So people changed their minds. Specially since they've got to put down how much they're going to pay. Nobody's very keen on paying these days."

The pastor, who had been holding his hymn book in one hand, now clasped it with both and pressed it against his middle. The feeling of this book and his cassock never failed to restore his dignity. His eyes hardened as he measured Jurgitis from head to foot.

"I see, I see.... They grudge their humble mite for the upkeep of their parish. Yet it is said—each is entitled to his share. I shall speak about that, too. Indifference to faith has afflicted the healthy body of our people like

leprosy. One hundred and forty—is it not blatant mockery before the eyes of the Lord? And I see here mainly the names of women and farmers. Where are all the others? We used to have thousands of members from three pagasts.”

Jurgitis stood before him with tightened lips and downcast eyes, plucking at his little grey beard.

“We used to.... Don’t talk of what used to be, Reverend Father. We’ve lost a third of our population. The parish is new, it isn’t organized yet....”

The new-fangled word, so odd on his former sexton’s lips, nettled the pastor. Was it not a reminder of 1917 and 1919, and of all impiety and wickedness that was crying out to Heaven?

“My roof is leaking. I’ve got to walk over rubble and sand—look at my feet. I can’t get half a litre of sour cream for my own money. Soon I’ll be reduced to dry bread. They extort from me three hundred rubles a day for the use of a horse.... My timber is rotting in the wood, and there is no one to cart it for me.”

Jurgitis did not lift his eyes and went on twisting his beard. The pastor himself had not expected his voice to grow so hard and brittle, or such a spiteful ring to steal into it. In his confusion he absently put the hymn book on the table alongside Janson’s collected works.

At last Jurgitis spoke. “We’re all hard put to it,” he said. “Your roof is leaking, but there are many who still live in dug-outs and cellars. The ones who can’t work have no roof over their heads at all and die of cold and hunger. The old farmers have something to start on at least, but the new ones struggle to cope with their building, and virgin lands, and taxes.”

The pastor rose to the full height of his righteous indignation. Lightning flashed through his eye-glasses.

“I see, I see! Avarice, and covetousness, and venality have gripped the people. New farmers... new farmers....

They've ruined the estates. Wherever you turn you see those little white shacks perched on every hill. They even refuse to pay compensation for the land they have stolen. Mark my words, God's vengeance is at hand!"

Now Jurgitis, too, got his back up. To the pastor's amazement he declared: "It's a state reform. Think before you speak."

"I—think before I speak? I, His own summoned and appointed servant! I, who am to answer for these souls before the Lord our God! Martin Jurgitis, I have thought, and I know what I am to speak. Nay, not I, for it is He who has sent me, and He will speak from my lips. Martin Jurgitis, look at my feet. They are covered in dust, nor shall I wipe them. May it be with me as it was with the One whose voice was crying in the wilderness, and who yet spoke the rulers' sins to their faces. Even though the Scriptures do not tell us that those rulers were socialists and planned the overthrow of the divine order of things. And so help me God! I will say it straight to their faces. I shall speak the words Jehovah has put into my mouth. Let my voice ring in this all but vacant hall—it will be heard! These silent walls will echo it. I shall have the windows opened so that the depraved world may tremble with the Lord's anger. Those who indulge in out-door gaiety capering straight into Satan's jaws; and those who come here smoking and chattering as though they had come to a public house. And those, too, who live unconfirmed till the age of twenty, and those who cohabit unwedded, entering their names in Satan's Registers. And those who do not christen their infants till they are three...."

Jurgitis' hand fell heavily and rudely upon the pastor's shoulder. The pastor drew in his breath, his mouth gaped open.

"Hush, Reverend Father. That's just what I thought, that's just what I was fearing, and why I hated coming

along. You're the same as you used to be. You've forgotten the court and the consistory, the proceedings and the investigations, all the trouble and worry we had!"

The pastor glanced sideways at the window. Jehovah's shadow was still there.

"I have forgotten nothing. I am not proud of the persecutions I suffered at the hands of those unbelievers. But I know that they will be a credit to me when the Great Day comes. I am ready to shoulder my cross anew and bear it. For it is He that wishes me to do it. Such is His will!"

"That's all past and forgotten. We weathered the storm and got through it safely. Now times have changed. Have you thought of that? But maybe you've only come to preach for the day? Maybe you've got some other job in Riga?"

"What do you mean?" the pastor murmured, slightly baffled. "No, no I haven't. If I had relations or friends who were well connected, as some others have. . . . We live in two little rooms in Valmiera Street. I have to pay for my son's schooling. My daughter works at a post office. . . . I did try to find something. . . . But. . . I have returned to my old parish."

"That's just it. If you've returned you'd better forget your old habits. In those days you could storm, and rage, and hurt, and nobody could do a thing to you. You were under the baron's wing, the law was on your side. You had an estate, you had tenants. If anyone didn't want to pay his tithe, his home was mortgaged and the police turned him out. Your place was on safe ground. Times have changed. People can please themselves now. If they want to have their children baptised, and to be married in church, so much the better. If not, they go to the registry office."

"Ah—and register with Satan!"

"That may be so, but I beg you to think before you do anything rash."

But the pastor shook off Jurgitis' hand.

"I am here in the name of Him who sent me."

"I know you are. But you've got to live. You've been allotted ten acres of land, and twelve acres of orchard. You want to build, and your timber's rotting in the wood. You have no money, and you can do nothing with your own hands. And don't forget, you've got an enemy or two from old times, and a reputation to live down from the Izbikši parish back in 1905. Now I hear you're about to sue Abrik again, and pick quarrels with the new farmers, and hold forth against the Cultural Society, and damn and chastise all and sundry. If you've got a job in Riga and you've come only for the day, well, go ahead. But I'm not going in with you. I wouldn't vouch for anything that may happen there."

The pastor turned limply towards the window, but through his dimmed glasses he saw nothing. He turned to the wall, but the faces of Baron and Rainis leered at him like grey shadows. All was grey and dumb, silent and expectant. His own voice came toneless and weak.

"But how's that. . . . Am I—am I to resign and compromise. . . . Am I to hush up what is crying out to heaven. . . ."

"It won't cry out, don't worry. I'll do what I can on my part. Brežgis from across the river promised he'd help. He's got a threshing machine and a saw mill, and it's a big place. I hope our parish's going to grow. When we're through with the haymaking and the harvesting we'll try to get some people together. With some fifty horses it's only about a day's job. Couldn't you promise them something? American gifts, or comforts from the Women's Corps? And one more thing. See that you fix "Remembrance of the Dead" for September 3rd. The peasants are having a fair then with a concert. You see, half of those

who're here today are on their way from across the river to the Cultural Society concert."

Jurgitis had pressed the hymn book back into the pastor's hand. Now he was gently ushering him towards the door whence came a loud hum of voices and sounds suspiciously like suppressed tittering. The pastor resisted mechanically. He had not yet chosen his course of action and did not know what he was going to say. But his resistance was rather spiritual than bodily. His legs stepped out in the direction forced upon them by Jurgitis, who whispered just as he got to the door.

"Think of your son, whose schooling you've got to pay. Think of your daughter at the post-office. Think of your children."

The pastor was thinking. As it happens at such moments in life the thoughts raced madly through his mind. In the space of time it took him to reach the doorway he had thought a hundred thoughts, all of them curiously irrelevant to his recent anger. . . . The Reverend Mother wanted to spend a season at Kemeru, but all he could afford her was three weeks at Baldone. . . . His boy was craving for that patent watch in Berg's shop window. . . . The other night they had had to walk all the way from the second Ganibu Dam in the suburbs where Pastor Grinšpan had celebrated the fortieth anniversary of his pastorship, and it had been long past twelve o'clock. . . . Good English cloth was six hundred and fifty a yard these days. . . . How sweetly the lime-trees rustled when he drove through the avenue in his carriage and pair. . . .

Jurgitis opened the creaking door and held it for him. The hum of voices abated slowly. The people sat up straighter. Some cleared their throats, others blew their noses. By the time the pastor had mounted the pulpit with hesitant steps you might have heard a pin drop in the room.

His eyes swept the congregation before him. Though his glasses were clean he could see nothing. He inclined his head and his look fastened itself on a splotch on the deal board of the pulpit and the letters K.P. engraved on it. Jehovah's voice no longer thundered in his ears. All he heard was his pulse throbbing at his temples. Raising his head he saw without looking the rows of swarthy, curious faces, low-cut white blouses with flowers pinned to breasts. An old woman, the one who had come about her sixty rubles, was wiping her eyes with the corner of her large blue shawl.

His own voice penetrated the blankness of his mind only after he had spoken the first words:

"I the Lord thy God am a jealous God..."

A shrill little cough checked him. Jurgitis was staring straight at him with a curious expression in his eyes.... The pastor remembered. It was the voice of the former Jehovah that had sprung to his lips.... His daughter had to wash her white blouse with her own hands, and she pinned a bunch of artificial violets to her breast.... His eyes turned towards the window. Jehovah's dark shadow was there no longer. The old lime-tree shook its rustling crown. A golden sunbeam was weaving its way through the knobly branches. The sky's blue expanse stretched far beyond the ruins of the pagast house. The school-teacher's servant's little girl turned a somersault in her effort to catch the kitten.

"But I also show mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments unto the thousandth generation. Amen."

The rest came easier. He remembered. Opening his gown he pulled the notes he had brought from Riga from his pocket and glanced at them. But he did not keep to them. It was a different voice that sounded in his ear now. And different words had been put into his mouth.

Great is Jehovah's anger, but greater still is his mercy.

Weak and sinful has He created man, therefore He shows mercy unto him like a father unto his disobedient yet dear child. Weak and ignorant are we all, high and low, rich and poor. But the Lord's strength is about us, and His wisdom brings us light.

Thus spoke Jehovah now. And the further the more ardently did Pastor Zanderson expound His will. He had never believed in mere eloquence and empty phrases, yet now he abandoned himself to them against his nature and custom. For was it not His mind he spoke, and His will he executed? He cast about for poetic figures of speech and examples from the nation's history. He quoted folk songs and Lindin's speech at the Constituent Assembly. He spoke of wholesome out-door recreation and of the people's great prospects for a happy future.

He gave out the hymn and descended from the pulpit to retire until the next part of the service. Jurgitis followed on his heels to the teacher's room.

He faced the parish elder with almost a smile on his lips.

"Well?"

Martin Jurgitis nodded quickly. "Good. The beginning was good. If you go on like this there's still a hope..."

Outside in the yard the first couple had driven up bringing a yelling infant for its christening.



The heavy iron gates slammed to, and the menacing crash that reverberated through the air might well have been the echo of Jehovah's angry voice.

The two sinners stood where Jehovah's wrath had driven them.

The brown and black darkness of night drew in upon them. Heavy winds swept over their heads. High above the rust-coloured clouds swished through the air like the wings of terrible invisible birds.

Adam and Eve stood where Jehovah's wrath had driven them. After the rosy twilight of Paradise they were blinded by the darkness of the world. Accustomed to the gentle touch of a mild breeze, their naked bodies felt lacerated by the harsh winds. After the eternal calm azure overhead the clouds seemed like terrible rust-coloured birds of prey ready to swoop upon them.

They stood hand in hand pressing close to each other. The wind had spilled Eve's long tresses, and her hair tumbled down to her knees wrapping them both like a soft mantle.

Adam bent his face over Eve's head.

"What is it? Why are you so restless?"

He could feel the tremor of her body but did not know what to call it. He did not yet know the word for Eve's trembling, nor for his own fear.

Eve pressed herself against him.

"Hold me tight. Keep me closer. Put your arm round my waist and warm me. Warm me with your breath."

When Adam did so she lifted the cloak of her hair and drew it still closer about him. And feeling his warm body all along hers she laughed her sweet laughter.

"Let's go . . . there. . . ."

She had meant to say "let's go on farther," but she did not yet know how to express that idea. They had known no difference between near and far in Paradise, nor had they ever gone anywhere. Days and aeons had flowed past them imperceptible, unfelt. . . .

Wrapped in rusty-black darkness the Syrian desert spread out before them like a tawny carpet. The soft sand that still held the pleasant warmth of the day's sunshine crunched softly beneath their feet.

From time to time they stopped to listen to the murmur of the wind and the soft swishing of the desert sand round their legs. Silence reigned. After the continuous hum of sounds from birds and beasts it fell upon their ears like the sad and terrifying voice of stillness. They felt infinitely lonely and sad. But they did not yet know the word for loneliness or sadness.

The soft sandy expanse fell behind and they stepped upon sharp stones and jagged rocks that slashed their feet painfully. Weariness spread from their feet to every limb. They were not used to walking so long.

Eve tugged at Adam's arm.

"I want to sit down."

But Adam had discerned something in the dark and wanted to get near it.

"Look, there is something blue ahead of us. What might it be? Let us go and see."

It was a river—the very same river that flowed from here into the Garden of Eden to swell the fruits of the trees and slake the thirst of the beasts.

They sat upon a stone that was sprinkled with soft sand and gazed at the bluish waters.

It was good to sit down after the fatigue of the walk. Eve rested her head on Adam's shoulder. With one hand propped on the stone he folded her relaxed body in his arms. Here in the river valley the wind hardly touched them. Nor did the sand graze their feet, it filled the crevices and padded the sharp stones with its warm dampness. A gentle murmur came from somewhere high above the surface of the river. From a cranny in the sheer rocky bank floated sounds as from a broken flute. The silence and vastness all round seemed infinite.

Presently something warm and wet dropped upon Adam's neck. First he took it for one of those brown bumble-bees that in Paradise would sometimes alight on his head or shoulder to rest. But then another fell, and another, sliding down his shoulder and arm. He turned his head to examine it. These were not bees. They rolled from Eve's eyes.

"What is it?"

Eve put her finger-tips to her eyes. The lids felt wet, and large warm drops quivered on her lashes. As soon as one slid off there was another in its place.

"I do not know. Something is dropping from them. It has never happened before."

Was it rain? But there were no clouds in the sky. Adam laid Eve's head in his lap to see. But the night was dark, and Eve's eyes even darker, like two black acorns with yellow rings. And the drops continued to fall, even when her head was in his lap. No, it was not rain.

Perhaps you could drink it? He bent down and put his

lips to it. The drops were warm and salty. He had known springs in Paradise seething from the very bowels of the earth so hot that you could not drink from them. Had Eve, then, something of the earth's deeply hidden fire?

Gently he rocked her head on his knees wrapping her hair closer about them both. By and by her breathing came slower and deeper, and sleep descended upon her. Lucky woman! She could sleep even while his head was brimming over with strange thoughts, like a fruit-peel bowl dipped into a stream.

As he gazed at the surface of the river it seemed to grow smoother and clearer. Had he lifted his eyes he would have seen that it was the reflection of the sky above that was beginning to clear. The blue ribbon of the river shimmered greenish gold darkening to almost black along the edges. And presently there were a myriad bluish spangles swaying upon it, in close pattern. The whole surface seemed to be studded with glittering blue gravel.

Adam gazed enraptured. He roused Eve.

"Go and see if you can scoop them up with your hand."

She stepped down to the bank and tried, first snatching at the spangles with her fingers as you do to pick a scurrying beetle off the ground, then with her cupped hand as you scoop up a golden-finned fish. But the water ran through her fingers leaving her palm empty. She grew angry and splashed the treacherous river surface.

"I cannot get anything."

"Do they run away from you?"

"I do not know. Sometimes they seem to float on the surface, and then again they appear to sink to the bottom. Come and try!"

But Adam was too weary to get up for such a trifle. Eve came back to him and sat down by his side. And then, together, they raised their eyes and noticed the same spangles overhead.

They had seen them there before. Those were stars.

But in Paradise they had always been visible alongside the sun and the moon, and they had been wan and lustreless. Here they sparkled and glittered scintillating blue like a thousand eyes all turned upon the exiled sinners. And now their fear was mingled with a thrill of delight they had never yet experienced. It made their skin tingle as though pricked by sharp little thorns.

As they gazed spell-bound a yellow-golden streak gleamed above the dark mountain range far beyond the river. Slowly it broadened into a half-disk, then to a disk that shone light-gold, rising from the hills. It broke the straight horizon into a radiant glittering arc from which sprang a golden bridge spanning the river and dropping at their very feet. As the disk climbed skywards it gradually paled. Light and shade appeared on its face, making it look human.

Eve flung herself upon Adam burying her face on his breast.

"Jehovah!" Breaking from her lips, the cry rolled across the river and reverberated in the distant hills. Jehovah... Jehovah... Jehovah... it echoed farther and farther until it died away in the distance.

Angered by this unexpected outcry, Adam rose to the full power of his youthful strength and manly indignation.

"No!" he cried.

And "No, no... no..." came the echo rolling into the distance till it was heard no more.

Adam tried to lift Eve's face towards the light.

"Look, look at Him. This is not Jehovah. It has not His beard, nor His angry eyes, nor His thunderous voice." Look, it is the moon, only larger and brighter here, just as the stars are. Look, how beautiful!"

As far as the eye could reach, the sandy expanses and jagged rocks were swathed in golden light. The river was decked with small glittering scales. The hills cast upon

the water their rugged black shadow and across it ran the gently quivering golden moonway.

They stood gazing at the vastness of the world with its contrasts of light and shade hitherto unknown to them. After the changeless beauty of Paradise the world appeared strangely attractive. Their hearts trembled and danced in their breasts, and leaped up to the wan, gliding moon, and dipped down into the black shadows of the hills upon the water with its golden quivering path.

The long walk and the strain of new impressions had wearied Adam. His head drooped and slipped into Eve's lap, upon the soft mantle of her hair. When presently he was asleep, it seemed to Eve that she was left utterly alone. The vastness, and silence, and contrasts of this world troubled and frightened her. And a longing for Paradise lost flared up in her like a kindling fire.

Gently she moved Adam's head on to a sand-covered stone, then set out along the river bank downstream towards Paradise. At first she stepped cautiously, on tip-toe, turning her head every now and then to make sure Adam had not woken. But when the sleeping figure on the smooth stone had merged into the yellow desert she broke into a run. The sharp stones cut her feet. Her thick hair hampered her progress, so she twisted it into a cord and gathered the warm burden in her arms.

The moon had faded and dawn had broken when the black wall of Paradise came into view, a line on the horizon that slowly broadened until it loomed high above her, unapproachable, unsurmountable, menacing.

Eve fell flat on the ground and lay thus for a long time. She had come in vain. The wall was too high for her to scale, and there was no chink or opening wide enough for her to slip through. Desperate, she raised her eyes to where the wall cut into the pale sky. An unapprehended feeling of solitude was wrenching at her heart. Her longing for Paradise contended with a smarting regret for

Adam. What would she do there on the other side of that wall without him, her husband? Loneliness would corrode her soul like rust. She turned and looked upstream. A boundless plain spread out before her eyes broken only by desolate rocks.

Something flitted through the air. Lifting her eyes she observed two gnats winging their way over the wall of Paradise. They looked strangely large against the rose-tinted sky. Their buzz seemed to set the whole atmosphere quivering with the joy of receiving the first living breath. These were the first fugitives from Paradise. They, too, were tired of eternal, changeless abundance, and bliss, and peace. Or they might be simply curious to see the world into which the day before the humans had been driven. So they had set an example. . . . Jehovah's quick anger had failed to foresee this. These were the first—but who could tell. . . .

The water rippled at Eve's feet, and looking down she perceived two little red fishes with glistening silver scales straining nimbly upstream. These, too!

Eve grew thoughtful. They were escaping from Paradise to which she had come to regain admission. Once again she pictured life behind those walls, in its eternal plenty, and happiness, and peace. She imagined herself there without Adam—and jumping to her feet she gazed in the direction whence she had come. Something caught at her heart wringing it till she all but cried out loud.

The two gnats had disappeared in the distance. The fishes were gone. Stretching out her arms she strangled a cry. Her whole being was burning with desire. She did not know what it meant, this desire for her man, for her husband, for she had not experienced it before. She had been Adam's wife, yet for the first time now the woman in her stirred. All other feeling lost itself in this strange agitation. She hastened back.

The sharp-edged stones had torn her feet, and they

were bleeding. But she felt no pain. The longing within her was swelling like a river after a cloudburst. Her stirred blood was surging in hot waves, beating against her temples. Fear gripped her. What if she found Adam no more? What if he had crossed the moonbeam bridge that spanned the river and was wandering among the mountains in search of her? What if she were left alone in this desert?

She did not see the sun that had risen behind her back. She did not see the next living creature cross the walls of Paradise. A cry of anguish and despair broke from her lips.

Was it merely the echo, or was it Adam answering her call in the dim distance? Her voice vibrated over the smooth surface of the river rending the air. He ought to hear, wherever he was. For it was not merely her voice, it was her very soul gliding like a seagull above the water, through the desert, to the end of the world.

And Adam heard. She saw his youthful form bathed in golden sunlight emerge from the morning mist. Never had she seen him so handsome, so manly. What would she say to him of her cowardice, her treachery, her faithlessness?

But Adam was too enraptured with the morning splendour of the world. He looked as though he were intoxicated by the fermenting juice of grapes. Something of the sun that shone dazzling bright in the morning sky was burning in his eyes. Something of the stream that was rolling onwards with irresistible power was gushing through his veins. Something of the eastern wind that swept the earth and echoed mysteriously from the sheer river banks quivered in his caress.

Never had Eve seen him thus before. She abandoned herself to his powerful arms, unable to take her eyes off him. It was no longer the bond of common sin alone that linked them. A new stream had caught up both their hearts and was carrying them off in its surging waves.

Hand in hand they waded into the river to wash their bleeding, dust-covered feet. And for the first time they perceived that the water felt cool and sweetly assuaged pain and heat, and that relief from weariness and pain was pleasant.

As they stepped ashore two little birds alighted upon them. One of them perched itself on Adam's arm, looked at him with bright, beady eyes and flitted off, now hovering in the air, now hopping from stone to stone. The other rested on Eve's shoulder, brushed its beak on her soft hair, scratched under its wing and followed its mate.

Enraptured, enchanted, Adam held Eve's hand.

"Let's follow them!"

They followed the birds till they reached the foot of a hill. The yellow slope rising gently from the river was now covered with broad-leaved creepers. Trees and bushes had taken root in the crevices reaching skywards proudly and powerfully. Tiny streamlets threaded their silvery meandering way among the hills carrying little blue and yellow pebbles in their downward glide.

Calling to each other, the two birds fluttered low above the broad-leaved plants. And as Adam and Eve looked closer they saw heavy clusters of red berries dipping their heads into the stream. They realized their hunger only when they began to eat. Like the two birds they clambered up the slope, picking out the sweetest fruit, calling to each other, losing sight of each other and meeting again, fearing, worrying, and again laughing out loud with delight.

Tired and satisfied, Eve knelt down on the bank of the streamlet and drank from it. And then Adam knelt, and she scooped up the water, and he drank from her cupped palm that was sweet with the juice of the berries.

And then, radiant like the sun, brimming with strength and vitality, they climbed the top of the hill.

Below gleamed the river with the sun's reflection floating upon it like a little boat. Behind stretched the Syrian desert hemmed by an almost imperceptible black line along the distant horizon. Before them spread an undulating plain, its monotony relieved by the young verdure of trees and bushes. And far beyond rose the giant blue mountains capped with dazzling white and streaked with dark shaded gullies and crevices. A gentle breeze drifted from there towards them, scattering little puffs of clouds over the vault of the sky.

Trembling with the novelty of delight and expectancy that sprang from their very hearts they pressed close against each other.

Eve could find no words yet. And when Adam spoke it seemed to her as though it were herself speaking, for their thoughts and feelings were one.

"Look! This is the world we never knew but saw in our dreams behind the walls of Paradise.

"We have sinned, and we have been driven from Paradise. With bleeding feet, and sweat-covered bodies we shall walk the earth in search of food and shelter.

"But shall we therefore grieve and return to implore that the heavy gates may open to us again? It would be vain. Jehovah's anger lasts a thousand years, but our lives are brief.

"Yet are a thousand years behind those walls worth one single day in these free expanses?

"We have spent but one night on this vast earth, yet it has been worth all the long years behind the walls.

"We knew not light from darkness, fear and despair from courage and hope, pain from relief, sweat from cool waters, weariness from rest. We knew not what love is and what doubt, desire and alarm, the anguish of loss, and the joy of gain. . . . We were like an empty vessel that is now brimming over with the gushing waters of seven streams.

"We are exiled. Jehovah in his great anger wanted to smite us with loneliness. But look about you. The winds have brought some seeds, and these slopes are decked with green. Soon the whole earth outside the walls of Paradise will blossom forth. And I saw just now two gnats in the air above. And two little fishes straining upstream. And those two birds—I think they are already looking for a nesting place. This is but the beginning. Soon the inhabitants of the earth will follow those of air and water. Jehovah in his anger did not think of the example he set to all living creation in banning us from Paradise.

"Paradise will be deserted, and Jehovah will wander alone among withering bushes and dying trees. And there will be nobody to sing His praise or fear Him.

"But we shall walk this boundless space. We shall climb to those blue mountain tops whence we shall see even farther. And the farther we see, the higher shall we aspire. By night we shall step across the moonway to the other bank of the river. By day we shall sail upstream in the sun's reflection. Thus we shall move on and on for ever.

"And if we suffer hunger, and thirst, and weariness—what of it? We know now that there is rest and relief. We shall not fear Jehovah's ever-present eye, nor his anger. We ourselves shall conquer, and we ourselves command. My arms will support us by day, and your hair will warm us by night.

"We have lost Paradise. We shall gain the earth!"



(A Story of Two Lives)

1

Milija of the Brivuls' farm was her father's only daughter. Peteris of the Velens' farm was the elder of old Velen's two sons, and as the younger one Valentin was afflicted with St. Anthony's fire in both his legs and thus hardly mattered, Peteris had good reason to consider himself the one and only heir.

Their farms did not exactly border on each other, but were not far apart. Wedged between them was the Rimshas grove, the pagast meadow and a strip of marshland, on which stood the Mikelens' rettery. On a bright morning, especially in the autumn, you could hear and see from one farm what was going on at the other. From the Velens' you could view the Brivuls' hill crowned with a clump of mountain-ash. While if you looked from the

Brivuls' farm across the edge of the Rimshas grove you could see the Velens' well with its long pole. Peteris Velen would stop in the middle of the yard, shading his eyes with his hand and gazing towards the stacks of rye on the Brivuls' hill.

"Looks like the young storks have flown from their nest at the Brivuls'! Fancy that!" he would say to the shepherd boy.

And if Milija Brivul happened to be out-of-doors early in the morning she would joyfully announce on her return:

"The young cockerels have started crowing at the Velens'!"

On finishing the parish school Milija had gone to Riga, where she had studied sewing and domestic science, all but completed a course in bookkeeping and shown herself an accomplished pupil at Neiman's dancing classes. She never missed a lecture on agriculture, dairy farming or gardening arranged by the Central Cooperative Society. On her father's farm she experimented with asparagus and tomatoes, and in the spring she ordered tea-roses from Vagner's Nursery. With the farmers' wives she could discuss the latest methods in producing cream cheese, and with the farmers themselves—the Economic Society and the Central Cooperative Society, always, of course, siding emphatically with the latter and also with the East Frisian breed of cattle, in conformity with local tradition. She was generally considered a clever and ingenious young woman. And as she was twenty-four, and had a round face with an almost imperceptible sprinkle of freckles just above her cheek-bones, and a tiny little gap between her lower teeth, and wore a yellow silken coat, Japanese fashion, fringed about the hem, and fine stockings that reached above her knees, she was agreed to be not only the most beautiful and well-to-do but also the first girl in the pagast.

This view was held in the first place by old Brivul himself. When he met an acquaintance, his third or fourth sentence would be something like: "My Milija's brought a new hat from Riga—with horns sticking out like this."

Or: "My Milija is going to act Male Dižudra on the stage."

Or: "Peteris Velen came to see my Milija last Sunday."

And the acquaintance would quite naturally fall into conversation about Milija's hat or her part in the play, but above all about Peteris.

"Hm, is that so? Well, I suppose he can do that now, he's got more time on his hands. That cripple of theirs is getting on his feet. They say he's already able to take the horses out to pasture. The other day he was seen hobbling over to the shop past the Mikelens' rettery without his stick."

But old Brivul would not have that.

"He'll never be much of a walker. Won't be long before he's laid up again for a fortnight, and they'll have to shift him and lift him. It all depends on the weather. He may be all right while it keeps dry and sunny. But as soon as we get a bit of rain and cold, he's done for. There's nobody who's ever been cured of St. Anthony's fire."

But the other would not give in so easily.

"Nor anyone who's died of it. He can last for another ten years, and that's a fact."

At this juncture old Brivul would stoop to pull up the crumpled top of his boot. "You don't know what you're talking about! Ten years indeed! Two or three, if that. When his bones start popping out of his skin he'll soon crack up."

Unable to counter this the other one would venture a new argument.

"Hm.... They're having a spell of ill luck this year, the Velens, poor blighters. Last year they lost their bull-calf, and they'd intended it for sale. Now they've missed

their second payment term with the Agricultural Bank. That's no joking matter."

But Brivul stood his ground.

"It's all because that old dunderhead insists on clinging to the reins instead of passing them on to Peteris. Two hundred and twenty acres! With a little more brains you could certainly make something out of that!"

Realizing that old Brivul was not to be shaken the other one would change his ground. He would screw up his eyes fastening them on the Velens' well and the birch-grove beyond and, as though he had only just made a discovery, he would point at it and say: "My, you can see every bit of it. If it weren't for that grove, you'd have it all spread out before your eyes. It's not a mile off. It's that rettery that's in the way, otherwise you could step straight from your meadows on to the Velens' rye fields."

Brivul would burst out laughing for a reason known only to himself.

"The rettery! Five hundred would buy the whole bog with all there is on it, if you find a chap willing to open his purse."

And the other one would say with a chuckle:

"What's five hundred to you? The flax is doing fine this year—looks like a cabbage field. It all goes to Milija anyway."

Here Brivul would diplomatically break off the conversation. He sighed. "I wish my mistress were stronger. It's hard on the girl. And I'm not so young as I used to be. Last Monday I was very nearly flung out of the carriage by that new black horse of ours when the Mikelens' dog started barking right in front of him. Dogs make him as mad as hell."

And the conversation would drift to horses and dogs.

On Sundays Peteris Velen would often chance upon Milija. The reason was that he had never been so keen

on swimming as he was that summer, and as everyone knew, the river was deepest beyond the Brivuls' hill near Apseni. He set out in the afternoon dressed up in his new coat and tie, and with a towel slung over his shoulder. The shorter way lay across the Apseni pastures, on the far side. But the drier one led through the Brivuls' meadows skirting their rye field. So he chose the latter, plodding in his boots through the thick grass, and taking a look at the rye as he went. He did not glance the other way, knowing that at midday all the Brivuls' people were having a nap. After a good swim he took a lot of time and trouble putting on the shirt his mother had starched stiff for him, and fixing his tie. Then he climbed up the bank, cut through the alder bushes and turned into the path leading through the Brivuls' pastures. There he caught sight of Milija who, having helped to drive the cattle out, was sitting on the low fence reading a volume of Akurater's poetry. She was not exactly in his path, but it would be uncivil to slight his neighbour's daughter. He lifted his hat in greeting, furtively running his hand over all his buttons to see whether they were all right, and strolled towards her.

Milija sat swinging her leg and slapping her knee with the book.

"Oh, what a fright you gave me! I didn't notice you at first, and all of a sudden I see someone creeping out of the bushes. What have you been doing there?"

"Visiting the ~~mermaids!~~"

Peteris laughed. He was glad he had thought that one up, about the mermaids. Milija laughed too.

"Just like you! The country girls are too coarse for you!"

Peteris lit a cigarette and motioned towards her book.

"What're you reading there? Learning a theatre part again?"

"No, just reading."

He took the book from her and looked at it with a knowledgeable air.

"Ah! Is it nice?"

"Not bad. Nothing special."

She rolled up the book and pulled her skirt over her knees. Peteris was thinking hard of something to say that might continue the conversation in the same spirit.

"We get the *Scoffer's Calendar* this year. Some jokes are so funny, they really make you laugh."

"Alunan's?"

"Yes. . . I suppose so. There's a man with a pipe on the cover, and another one sitting on the ground with a dog pulling at his wig."

"That's it. You ought to bring it along one day. Why don't you ever come to see us? Too busy?"

"I do. I called last Sunday to borrow the meat-chopper. But you were out."

"I had a rehearsal on Sunday."

"Of course, you're always having rehearsals now."

She had jumped off the fence and was brushing down the seat of her skirt with the rolled up book.

"I can't help it. We've got that show on next Sunday. And in a month we're giving a concert in Koknese. . . . You've killed a pig, I heard?"

"Yes. It wasn't much of a one. Too scraggy. Wouldn't eat anything but pure flour. He'd just suck up the liquid through his teeth and leave the rest. So we thought we'd better kill him."

"Of course, what else could you do. . . . You're not in a hurry now, are you? Come over to our place. Our apples have ripened beautifully, those white juicy ones. And you haven't got any this year, I heard."

"We haven't. Only two of the trees have fruit, and that's rotten—all worm-eaten and windfalls. I don't know about coming over, though. I'm afraid that cripple might let the horses into the flax field. It's just by the pastures."

He never bothers to watch them. He's got quite out of hand, the loafer."

To tell the truth, Peteris very much wanted to go with her, but he was afraid they would make him sit down at a table that would be covered with a white table cloth, and he would have to use a fork, and converse with her mother about the wars. Besides, he had left his handkerchief behind, as usual.

But Milija had already started out along the gravel path. There was nothing for it but to follow. He dared not look at her, except out of the corner of his eye. Half-way down Milija stopped and waited for him to come up with her.

"You're going to Riga, I heard?"

"Yes, I think so. That pig we killed, it wouldn't keep in this hot weather. And next week the Mikelens are going to kill one, so I'll take half of theirs. And a few more, that makes it worth it. Meat fetches good money in Riga now."

"Well, if you're lucky. And if you've got your customers. But you have, haven't you? You've been there before."

"I was there last spring. It didn't come up to much that time. The market was flooded with a lot of stuff from Kurzeme. All the inns were crammed. But if you hit the right time it's money for jam. You cash in more at one go than you can earn in two weeks here."

"Do you really! Two weeks? That is money for jam. I say, if I asked you to bring me something from Riga, would you do it? I need it for the concert. I can't get anything in our little shop here."

"I will! Of course I will! Only write down what you need."

At the Brivuls' things went off much better than he had expected. He had a chat with the master of the house about flax and cattle-breeding. With the mistress he discussed Austrians and Serbs who were preparing to

make war. Milija bustled about the kitchen and helped at table. Even the meal proceeded without calamities. He did not require his handkerchief until it came to the gooseberry jelly, but his bathing towel saved him. Milija walked back with him along the Brivuls' fields as far as the Mikelens' rettery. Walking behind her, he looked at her more daringly this time. She was wearing a red blouse that showed her bare arms almost to the elbow, and a small apron, no bigger than a pocket handkerchief. There was a little bunch of cornflowers in her hair. His whole being warmed as though he were standing by a hot stove.

Milija was pensive and quiet. Now and again she threw a cursory glance at him that sent shivers down his spine. Desperately he cast about for a word to say but it was no use. So he just smoked cigarette after cigarette. She looked back again.

"Do you always smoke such a lot?"

He tried to turn her serious question into a jest.

"Keeps the flies away."

"But you're smoking non-stop! It stinks to heaven."

With a bad grace he spat into his palm and stubbed out his half-smoked cigarette.

"They're Rigas—six kopeks a packet!"

She made no reply, evidently occupied with other thoughts. They walked a little distance, then she stopped.

"I can't come any farther with you. It's wet there, and I've got shoes on."

"You could take them off."

"The idea of it! I've come far enough anyway. They'll soon be able to see us from the Mikelens' farm."

So that was it. . . .

Neither had anything to say. His eyes wandered across the rising rye field and he fingered a cigarette butt in his pocket. She was worrying the hair-grass with the tip of

her shoe and twisting her apron. Then abruptly she disengaged her right hand and held it out to him.

"I'm off. . . . So you're going to Riga next week. You'll bring me what I asked you, won't you?"

She looked at him. What a look! He grasped her hand, swallowing hard, as though something had got stuck in his throat.

"I will, upon my word! Everything! Just put it down. . . . Everything you want. . . . If you cared to. . . . We're not rich. . . . But that cripple, he won't last long. People don't get well once they've got Anthony's fire. . . . Two hundred and twenty acres. . . ."

She stood listening to him, her head lowered, serious as if he were uttering words of deep wisdom.

"But you'll have to pay him his share. And your father is still pretty strong."

"Pay him his share, my foot! We'll see about that! Am I not doing all the work while he just eats and sleeps? And the old man, he only looks strong. When he's been manuring all day he's done for in the evening. He's so short of breath, and he gets the stitch. . . . Don't you worry about him. . . . It's nothing. . . . If you only agreed. . . . If I only knew. . . . One trip to Riga brings me more than I could earn here in two weeks. . . ."

Fumbling for words he had gone as red as a beet-root. Like a bear's paw his hand was clasping and squeezing Milija's. She shot him a look from under her eye-brows and blushed too. Pulling away her hand she turned aside.

"You must get the contract in your name."

"I will! By hook or by crook, I'll squeeze it out of that old fool."

"Well, mind you do. . . ."

Milija turned her head and threw him a smile before she retraced her steps back along the path they had followed.

Peteris covered the rest of the distance almost at a gal-

lop. The mud came splashing up from under his boots. His feet caught in the long hair-grass. The sun was beating down upon him. Peteris did not care. As he dashed across the yard past the lime-trees he almost tripped over the cripple, who had stretched out his body in the shade and with trousers tucked up above the knees was exposing his poor legs to the blazing sun. Catching sight of his brother, Valentin started up in his petulant, effeminate voice:

"God knows where you've been gadding around! The horses have trampled down all the flax. As though I could wade in there. . . ."

"Stop squealing like a pig!" Peteris managed to shout back as he headed for the servants' quarters.

Sam the farmhand was asleep on his bed, his bare feet propped up on the footboard dotted with flies. Peteris pounced on him so violently that his sleep was gone at once.

"Come on, you loafer! We're going to the pub!"

Sam was rubbing his eyes bemusedly.

"To the what? What're you talking about! Why pub? What pub?"

"The pub, I'm telling you, because today we've got to drink until our heads steam. Five rubles is no money today. Get your boots on. It's my treat! Fidralala!"

He collapsed on the bed to get his wind while Sam was hunting for his boots.

Milija walked home in a thoughtful frame of mind, absently fanning her face with a wild sorrel plant she had plucked at the roadside. Lapiniete, the ditch-digger's wife, just chanced to be standing outside the bathhouse. She had come to weight down the trough so it should soak in the pond. She looked surprised at the sight of Milija.

"Those damned kids! Go boating in the troughs and push the weights off. Now they're as dry as firewood. Of course they'll be leaking."

"You ought to catch those kids and soak their bottoms in the pond, that'll teach them."

"I'll warm their sides for them one day. . . . Wasn't that Peteris Velen?"

Milija turned her eyes on the apple-tree behind the fence.

"Seems to me they've been in that big apple-tree again. Look at that lower branch, there's no fruit on it at all. Can't catch them out, the rascals. . . ! Did you say Peteris? Yes, that was him."

"You saw him off?"

"Yes. As far as the rettery."

Lapiniete wiped her wet hands on the edge of her petticoat, came up close to Milija and also gazed at the orchard.

"I'd pick them off if I were you and make some jam. It goes nicely with pancakes to put before a visitor. As it is, you're just wasting the fruit. . . . What did he say?"

"Nothing much. He's taking meat to Riga next week."

Lapiniete threw her a suspicious glance and said with a dry laugh: "A fine meat-trader who buys curds by the pound at the cooperative store!"

Milija did not answer. Lapiniete hesitated a while, then started again.

"He still wears those red top-boots of his?" she remarked with a giggle.

Peteris' high boots that were almost rusty with age were known as "red tops" throughout the pagast. But Milija did not laugh, and replied with studied gravity:

"A man wears what he has."

"What he has! As though he couldn't have something better! With a farm like his. But of course, if they only get down to manuring when other people have done ploughing and harrowing. . . . Nothing comes of itself."

Now Milija answered severely, as though she had been charged with Peteris' defence.

"Peteris isn't to blame. His father is an old dope, and he clings to his power. Besides, he's got that cripple on his hands, who's more dead than alive."

That made Lapiniete prick up her ears. She must have said the wrong thing. Perhaps she had better try it the other way round.

"Yes, of course, it's that father of his. He should have left off long ago, the old ape. The one who does the work ought to have the run of things."

Milija made no reply. They were walking slowly uphill, keeping side by side. Lapiniete walked for a while in silence, then suddenly took the plunge:

"Is it all arranged between you?"

Milija sniffed at the sorrel blossom as though it really had a scent, brushed a fly off her elbow, and then answered:

"Not yet. But it's heading that way."

The woman's attitude changed at once. Even her face changed, and her voice.

"Well, what's right is right, that's what I say. Time you settled down. It's no good going on like this. With your father getting on in years. And you need a man's firm hand to keep the farm going.... But we rather thought it would be that clerk...."

"The clerk! Why, that rotter! He can only fool around. If he'd had any serious intentions he'd have said so long ago."

"Ernest Kocin also calls round quite often."

Milija gave an angry sniff.

"They're only renting their farm. Who knows whether the owner will agree to let them buy it next spring."

"They're already bragging of it, but you can't tell, you're right there. I've always said to you, and I'm saying it now: don't you go marrying just anybody that comes your way. You're the first girl in the pagast and

your man has got to be the first man. It wouldn't look right otherwise."

"Peteris Velen isn't just anybody. They've got 220 acres and his father's giving the contract to him. One trip to Riga, and he's got more in his pocket than he can earn here in a fortnight."

Lapiniete laughed guardedly.

"Of course, yes, we know. But he's so clumsy. No manners. Don't you think you need somebody more genteel?"

"Pooh, and those fine young gentlemen, what's good about them? Besides, he's got education. He's been to school in town for two years. He can do sums with decimals."

Decimals were beyond Lapiniete's competence, but at least she realized that the matter was fixed and settled. And she was not fool enough to spoil good relations for some whim of her own. With a wave of her hand, she nodded and beamed at Milija.

"God's truth, God's truth. You're a sensible girl. That's what I've always been saying. Don't you try to teach her, I said. She knows what's best. She'll get the best lad anyway. Two farms like this—gracious me, it's going to be a real estate! They'll die with admiration and envy...."

Bending closer to Milija, she dropped her voice to a whisper: "But mind he gets rid of that Mare Saušna! There may not be anything behind it, but you can't shut people's mouths."

They had reached the top of the hill. Milija stopped and, looking towards the roof of the house, answered in the same low voice:

"Yes, he must do that."

She turned as if to go, but then looked back at Lapiniete.

"You're not out of cereals yet, are you?"

"No, thanks ever so much. But maybe you could spare

a bit of cabbage for our supper. We've got a scrap at the bottom of the barrel, but it's all rotten."

"All right. Bring a pot along and come over to my cellar."

2

I'll get it!—Peteris had promised, but it was not so simple as all that. The old man was not to be moved. Try as he might, pleading or swearing, Peteris always got the same reply:

"Fiddlesticks! You've made it all up to trick me. I don't believe a word. It's not the first time you've found a so-called bride for yourself. And in the end you're always left with nothing better than your Mare Saušna—and you're the laughing-stock of the pagast."

Putting his hand on his heart, and adding a quiver to his voice, Peteris said:

"But I'm telling you, you old devil! She promised me!"

But it was no good. Twice Milija came in person to show that the matter was serious, once for a copy of the *Scoffer's Calendar* and once with a basketful of apples. The old man and the cripple finished the apples between them, but would not hear of foregoing the contract.

"You think that one will look after me and mend my clothes, like Mare does? Bah, she needs a chambermaid herself. You'll lounge around in bed with your wife, while I starve to death, or go to the alms-house."

Choking with fury, Peteris shouted:

"Dolt that you are! I'm telling you, you'll get a guarantee that I'm to provide for you to the end of your days, and pay you a hundred rubles a year for drink and tobacco into the bargain!"

"You can go hang yourself with your hundred rubles. Who are you to give guarantees? I'm the master here."

When anger failed, Peteris tried kindness. He spoke gently to the old man, and did him little services. He

brought him vodka from the inn, and then the old man would get drunk and tell stories from the Turkish war and kick Mare out of the house. But as for Peteris' affairs, he feigned utter ignorance. While suffering from the hangover he would pretend to have forgotten all about it, and Peteris had to start ten times over again to bring the matter back to his mind. Then he would merely blink and grope for his pipe in his trouser pocket.

"You'd do best to put it out of your head. It's no use. I've got to think of that cripple of ours too."

It was more than Peteris could do to go on pleading humbly. He pounded the table with his fist, flung the wine mug into one corner, and shrieked:

"We'll pay that beggar of a cripple his beggar's dole! Brivul has money in the bank—he isn't such a fool as you are. He could buy you up together with all your junk!"

Not a day, not a single day, passed without scenes like this. Peteris shouted, the old man shouted, and the cripple shouted. And even Mare Saušna, who was almost one of the family, occasionally shouted too, for she was aware that her rights were in danger, and determined to stand up for them. The row would reach its height if Peteris came home drunk. Then the servants would have to intervene with threats of leaving, whereupon the noise would subside, but not the quarrel, which continued the more bitter for being subdued.

There is no telling where all this might have ended had it not occurred to Brivul to interfere. He began to make regular calls—at first of a Sunday, then more often, sometimes bringing a bottle in his pocket, sometimes without. Old Velen was awed by his rich neighbour, and once he was drawn into serious conversation it was not so difficult to get round him. A week before the concert in Koknese they all went to Riga together. They got the old man as drunk as an owl, so that upon his return he

had only a hazy idea of what had happened to him. But when he had slept it off, he got so mad that he almost jumped at Peteris' throat.

"You give me that scrap of paper this minute! I haven't signed a thing, and you're not going to get anything!"

Peteris, however, neither swore nor lost his temper. Now the boot was on the other foot, and he knew his rights. He patted the old man on the shoulder.

"Well, that's fine, isn't it? Why not go to the land authorities and complain to the gentlemen there?"

Old Velen went nowhere. But more and more often he would slip across to the servants' quarters to talk of his predicament and ask for advice. For a while he continued to kick, but Peteris had taken over very decidedly and was running things as he wished. He ordered the fodder crops to be cut—far too early, the old man thought!—and rye sown in their place.

"You've gone raving mad. You're ruining my farm."

But Peteris would thrust his hands in his pockets, close one eye and spit luxuriously almost on the old man's foot.

"*Your* farm? Could you be so very kind and show it to me—*your* farm?"

The old man would glower at him with bulging eyes, but bridle his temper and fall silent. Having tried everything and realized that he might as well bang his head against a brick wall, he concluded that there was nothing for it but reconcile himself to his fate. And he sought comfort in putting on airs in the servants' quarters:

"There's no reason why I should stick up for my rights! I'm not much of a worker now, anyway, so why shouldn't I just take it easy for a bit? Let him have a shot at it, if he's so clever and so keen."

But his listeners took a more sceptical view.

"If he lets you just take it easy! No father's ever had an easy time under his son's whip. You'll see if he doesn't put your crust of bread a little out of your reach yet."

The old man grew apprehensive, but did not lose heart.

"Just let him try. There's still the pagast court to appeal to. I've got my corner under the roof and my piece of bread guaranteed to the end of my days."

"Don't you see how he's already making that cripple work?"

"He is an idiot to let him! Brivul's going to pay him out four thousand on St. Martin's day."

"Is that stipulated too?"

To tell the truth, old Velen remembered nothing very definite about those guarantees and stipulations. Something had been said, something promised, but had it been put down in writing? His doubts weighed on him more and more heavily. So as not to make it look as though he had stupidly let the farm slip through his fingers, and so as to allay his own doubts, he asserted very convincingly:

"Yes, it's all there on paper."

Meanwhile Peteris took over and began to feel increasingly at home in the role of master. He would not touch the plough, nor even give a hand in the manuring, nor take the horses to pasture on Sundays. It's mine, my farm, my horses—these and such-like phrases came glibly and peremptorily from his lips. Especially so at the inn, which he visited every other day. And every other day he called at the Brivuls'. On Sundays he would first go to the inn to screw up his courage and loosen his tongue.

Lapin the ditch-digger was sprawling under the willow-tree outside the bathhouse. He had grown very self-assured and cocky with his superiors since his wife had become friends with Milija. He only raised himself to a sitting position to shake hands with the young Velen. The latter jestingly pulled Lapin's hat over one ear.

"Lounging about like a gent!"

"I heard people say it was Sunday today."

"So they say. What about Monday? You coming over to my place?"

"What for? To dig a grave for old Velen?"

The joke appealed to Peteris and he gave a loud guffaw.

"We'll wait a bit with that. First I need some ditches through the fallow field."

Lapin shrugged his shoulders and yawned covering his mouth with the back of his hand.

"They give you nothing to drink at the Velens' except buttermilk, as if a man were no better than a calf!"

"Nonsense!" Peteris answered huffily. "That may have been so in the old days. But now, if you spend one week at the Velens' you won't leave your wife alone for three days."

It was Lapin's turn to appreciate the joke. Both laughed. And then Lapin said seriously:

"Can't next week. I've got to put in another week's work here for my lodging and the fodder I got."

"Ah well, in that case I'll have to make the old man take the shovel."

Lapin gave another yawn.

"Why not? Let him get on with it."

At the Brivuls' Peteris was received as the daily visitor he was, in fact, almost as one of the family. The mother who was on her way to the cellar for some sour milk merely glanced at him over her shoulder by way of a greeting. The master of the house lay stretched out on his bed, arms folded behind his head, smoking. Milija was in the back room dressing for her concert rehearsal and almost jammed his fingers as she angrily pushed the door to when he tried to open it. Peteris, who was feeling rather sore at heart as it was, grew even angrier. He sat moodily on the bench by the long servants' table, brushing away the flies that swarmed over it.

Old Brivul cleared his throat and spat abundantly on the floor.

"Finished manuring?"

"Not yet. I'll be through by Wednesday, or Tuesday night if everything goes well."

"Can't see why you should be messing around with it so long. If I had your four horses. . . . Well, and how's the old man?"

"All right now. Settling down to it. He's realized that kicking and raving won't get him anywhere."

Old Brivul rolled over to knock out his pipe against the leg of his bed.

"He's done kicking, you say? And what's he running around for spreading lies? We made him drunk, he says, and cheated him out of his farm?"

Peteris blew out his chest.

"Cheated him? The bloody swine!"

"And then he talks all sorts of rot about the thousands he says I'd promised to pay to that cripple of yours. What thousands, I'd like to know? Have I ever borrowed from you?"

"Pooh, why should you care? Let him jabber. Even the dogs won't listen to him!"

The mother returned from the cellar and sat down at one end of the table, skimming the milk and listening.

"It's all very well for you to say 'don't listen,'" she put in. "We can't help listening. And why should we have to hear such talk? If you can't make him shut up, we'd rather have nothing to do with the whole business. Why should we let any old idiot cheek us, as if we were beggars?"

The door opened, and Milija put in her head.

"Mummy dear, could you just come in and fasten my belt for me, and have a look if the petticoat shows. Please, darling!"

"I'm coming, my pet!"

Throwing down the spoon, which immediately attracted a crowd of flies, she hurried out of the room. Peteris gave

a smirk. Mummy dear—darling—please—thank you. . . . It was not the first time he had noted their sugary endearments. All blah! He was not quite certain whether it was intended to demonstrate their own refinement to him, or to set off his churlishness and ill-breeding. You just wait till I'm in the saddle! I'll show you refinement!

But the mother turned back at the door.

"And there's one more thing. If that Mare Saušna hasn't left the Velens' by tomorrow, you'd better not show your face here. We're not going to be the world's laughing-stock."

Peteris had grown as red as a beet-root again.

"What has Mare done to you? Is she eating your bread? Where am I going to get a pair of hands in the middle of manuring? She works like a cart-horse."

Mamma did not even deign to answer. Her demand was final. Papa spat once more and ~~turned~~ ^{rolled} over on his back.

Peteris remained seated at the table gazing sulkily at the flies. It gave him malicious pleasure to watch them gorge themselves on Mother Brivul's cream. Good luck to them! They could eat the lot for all he cared! Putting on airs like a bunch of bloated barons. Nothing could please them. And he secretly reflected on how he would get his own back once he was in the saddle.

Another hour elapsed before he was admitted to Milija's room. She was still preening herself before her dressing table, and the large mirror ~~reflected~~ ^{showed} an angry face. But was she dressed up! A real princess she looked. All rustling with silk, pretty as a picture! It was too much for him. The time had come to assert his rights. He put his arm about her waist. But her fingers decked with rings struck him so vigorously in the face that he winced with pain.

"Milija, you're crazy."

"Well, you should know where to keep your hands. I

won't have it. I'm not even sure you've washed them today. And take your hat off when you come in here."

He took off his hat and looked round for somewhere to sit. But there was only one chair in the room and that was piled with Milija's discarded dresses and underwear. So he remained standing and said sulkily:

"So now you're going to teach me what to do and what not to do."

"I am. You've got to be taught. You've no manners at all. I was really ashamed of you at the ball."

"That's why you would only dance with those fine gentlemen."

"You don't dance, do you?"

"I'm not your toy dog."

"Let me tell you this: if you mean to go on drinking yourself to such a state, we'd better stop the whole thing. People are already pointing their fingers at me. Swilling like a hog till you don't know yourself what you jabber!"

Peteris said nothing. He knew he had behaved very foolishly at the ball. But why had he got himself so drunk? Only because Milija had danced and flirted with all sorts of fine young gentlemen, taking no notice of him whatever. He had meant to show off his beautiful rich fiancée. Nothing had come of it, and he had been bursting with bitterness ever since, like a dried-up puff-ball.

He stood leaning against the window-sill watching her efforts to fix the curls at her temples. When she inclined her head he could catch a glimpse of her bare neck and shoulder. His body was tingling and itching as though he had been dragged through the nettles. Isn't she high and mighty! So he's not to touch her with a finger. And who might she be getting all dolled up for, he'd like to know.... Conflicting emotions stirred in him as though somebody were vigorously mixing sugar and pepper.

"You're blocking the whole window, like a dratted

cloud. I can't see a thing. Won't you find room somewhere else?"

He jerked himself aside and deliberately put on his hat again. Just wait till I've got you in my hands, he thought. I'll lead you a dance! I'm damned if I don't!

"Having a good time at your rehearsals?"

She responded gleefully.

"I am indeed. That new school-teacher's wonderful."

Peteris feigned surprise. It was not his business to know any school-teacher.

"You mean the one with the glasses and the yellow moustache?"

She shot him a withering look.

"The things you ask! As if you'd just come from Africa. Of course I mean him. He can't be compared with that old fool we had before."

Peteris naturally went on pretending that a school-teacher could be of no consequence to him. Was he not a landowner, and Milija his lawful fiancée? He knew full well what his rights were.

Milija had no more time. Her rehearsal would be starting at four. Having said almost nothing to her, and achieved even less, he stepped out of the house at her side, determined to accompany her as far as the Skuju bridge or even farther, down to the mill, and to do his best on the way. Was she, or was she not his bride? He would not stand for any more of this foolery. But there was Lapiniete waiting in the yard, turned out in her best. An old cow like her, with a son big enough to be a shepherd, and she still running to that sing-song. Singing alto-pah, enough to make a cat laugh! He would not dream of dangling behind the two of them. He was not going to play the fool for them. He spat furiously and turned on his heels.

While they were still this side of the hill walking in close embrace, he kept turning his head. The sweet and

the bitter in him was coming to the boil. So closely entwined, like two sisters—goodness! If he could pick up a stick and bring it down on both of them. A clear vision of those parts of Milija's body his stick would come in contact with made him feel so hot that he pulled off his coat. Soon, however, the bitter got the upper hand again. His gorge rose as he recalled the day's humiliations, and all he had previously endured. Who was he, after all—her betrothed, or a milksop and a fool? He must not touch her! Never once had he kissed her yet! Not he, heaven forbid! But all those fine gentlemen could cuddle her to their hearts' content. And on top of it all he had to listen to her grumbling and God knows what. . . .

He was snorting with rage when he swung into his own yard. The old man was just slinking out of the servants' quarters. No doubt been gossiping with the women and bewailing his fate. And old Brivul would come down upon him again like a ton of bricks. . . . He waited for his father to approach.

"Don't let me catch you going there again! Don't let me hear another word from you—not another word!"

But the old man was up on his hind legs too. *

"You snot! Are you trying to tell me what to do? Are you going to teach me? Who's the master here, I should like to know?"

For a split second Peteris' fury choked utterance. Then, stamping his feet, he thrust forward his arm and pointed at the dog.

"Look, that's who you're master of! No, not even that! You're master of your own lice—that's what you are! I'll pack you off to the alms-house, both of you! I'll drive you out into the forest, like the dog you are! Him trying to set himself up in my farm! Him!"

The old man's eyes bulged, and he stretched his neck as if he were suffocating.

"You, you... I'll make Lapiniete's youngster master if I care to. I've got the right, I can do it."

To hear himself compared to that beggar of a shepherd boy was too much for Peteris. Flinging down his coat and stamping his feet, he roared:

"Get to hell out of here! Get out by tomorrow! You're not going to foul my house any more, not one corner of it! Tomorrow you're taking the spade and you're going to do the ditches in the fallow. I'm not going to feed you for nothing, not I!"

Heads were peering out at them from the servants' quarters, so Peteris picked up his coat and went indoors. He still said nothing to Mare. But on Wednesday afternoon, as soon as she had done with the manuring, he told her in so many words that it was St. George's day* for her. Needless to say Mare's reply was more voluble. She held forth in such terms that all the servants made a dash for their room, and Peteris himself hid in the outhouse. In a voice that reached half the pagast she carried on all the way to the Mikelens' farm, as she sat perched on the chest that stood on her bare bed in the cart. . . .

Arm in arm, Milija and Lapiniete were walking to their concert rehearsal. When Peteris was out of sight, Lapiniete gave Milija a tug.

"Your man looks glum today."

Milija pouted.

"My man? He isn't mine yet by a long way."

Lapiniete threw her a quizzical glance. "You could never tell," she thought and gave her guarded laugh.

"Why, of course not. I didn't mean anything. But you might have made him polish those red top-boots of his. He looks like one of those filthy little Poles on the rafts."

* April 23 when the farmhands' agreement with their landowner usually expired. -Tr.

"He certainly does. But you can't teach him anything. Just look at his shirt front and his tie!"

"True, true! Even mine looks smarter when he dresses up. How can a young man be so careless about his appearance?"

Milija walked in silence for a little distance before she spoke again.

"Can you imagine, he tried to touch me! So I said: you keep your hands off me."

"Did he? Well, they're all like that. He thinks if he's your fiancé he can do anything. You let him have his way once and God knows where it'll lead. He'll have his fun and then jilt you."

"Jilt me—he! As though I needed him! As though I'd picked him out!"

Lapiniete was beginning to put two and two together.

"That's what I've been thinking all along. But what business is it of mine? Of course, the farm's worth something, and that's a fact. No denying that. But him. . . . There's many a servant boy that can cut a better figure. How could you carry on with him, I wondered."

"It's not my choice. Mother wants me to, and father wants me to. The farm's quite a big one, and it's in his name now."

"But he's still got the old one on his back. And that cripple as well. I said to my man one day: our Milija, she'll enter that home, I said, and it'll be like going to an alms-house. She'll have her work cut out nursing them and feeding them."

Milija twitched at her silken shawl and sighed.

"Can I help it if I only meet the like of him. And I'm getting on for twenty-five."

"The like of him? Don't be silly! What about the school-teacher, he's struck on you, isn't he?"

"He may be struck on me. But if he'd have to marry me, what would he say to that, I wonder?"

"You're talking nonsense. If I were in your place, I wouldn't so much as look at Peteris. What d'you need his property for? You've got enough of your own. And a school-teacher's wife, that's quite another thing. What's wrong with him, tell me? Isn't he handsome enough, and well behaved?"

Milija gave another pull at her shawl and tittered.

"Except that he's half blind! Those goggles of his! And those long tufts of hair behind his ears!"

"Come, now! What's wrong with glasses? Where are you going to find somebody perfect? You listen to me. Hang on to that school-teacher, and leave Peteris to Mare!"

"Yes. That's another thing. How am I to be sure he won't pick up with her again. And the way he drinks, drat him. . . . Something terrible. . . . But it's too late now. Everybody knows, and everybody talks about us."

"Let them. You're not married yet, are you? I'm telling you, spit on him unless you're really tied up already. You can still get the best lad in the pagast for yourself."

Milija said nothing, but grew very thoughtful.

3

Peteris had pinned all his hopes on the Koknese concert. There, he thought, he would show that school-teacher and his like that he could wipe the floor with them. He would make proper headway with Milija. He would take her for a walk along the highway or along the river bank. Then lead her farther away, where nobody could see them. They would go back together, and he would take second-class tickets. Half a ruble here or there did not matter. From the station he would walk her home again. . . .

He had a new suit made for the occasion—there was still plenty of homespun left over from Mare's times—and got brand new boots from Riga, and a slouch hat with

a peacock feather at the side. What with some twenty-five rubles in his pocket. . . . However, things took quite a different turn from what he had hoped.

Mikelen had a bottle of vodka with him on the train, and Bert the tailor had also brought along his share. It was hot in the carriage, and Peteris gulped down his drink. By the time he got off at Koknese he was in a fairly mellow state and while he was trying to find a seat at the concert he had a little brush with a policeman. In the front row just before him sat the school-teacher, who did not sing with his own choir. He was criticizing Reiter's manner of conducting at the top of his voice and making himself generally conspicuous. That got Peteris' back up. Mikelen nudged him to keep quiet, but Peteris had never been an easy person to hush, let alone that day. And now he was joining in with the choir, or trying to conduct together with Reiter, and presently he lurched forward shouting in the school-teacher's very ear:

"If a man's soused, I won't listen to him at all."

The choir was singing softly at that moment so that Peteris' words carried far and wide. There was a young lady at either side of the school-teacher, and they heard best of all. And as soon as the song was over the teacher went to find the policeman who dragged Peteris away. He clung to the birch-trees that walled in the concert ground, and clutched at Mikelen's coat, but it was of no avail. He was hauled off and given such a shove towards the Perse river bank that his new slouch hat, feather and all, nearly dropped into the water. Peteris went to the buffet and got himself dead-drunk. After he had smashed a jug and two wine glasses and paid eight rubles and some kopeks for the damage, he accosted a gentleman in a broad brimmed straw hat. Poking his finger at the hat, he repeated: "That's what we fill with potatoes in the autumn. Potatoes, yes, that's the thing."

The gentleman measured him from head to foot, and

with a shrug of the shoulders straightened his hat and stalked away. So Peteris joined an elderly man who was sitting by himself drinking tea. He helped himself from a packet of cigarettes on the table and advised him:

"Shouldn't put the sugar in the tea. I always have it separately. Tastes quite different that way."

The man stood up for his point of view, so they had quite an argument. But Peteris soon tired of it. He rose and walked back to the green enclosure to find a way of slipping into the concert ground without the policeman noticing him. For it had come to his mind that he ought to get hold of Milija and carry her off to the station before that sticky school-teacher had managed to take possession of her. The concert was over, however, and he found everything in a muddle and nobody paying him any attention. He caught sight of Milija on the rostrum, doing her best to flirt with the conductor. Lapiniete was standing nearby smiling as she watched the couple. She was dressed in national costume. Milija was wearing a green silk dress and the shoes he had brought her from Riga. He elbowed his way through the crowd and, slapping his knees with his peacock-feathered hat, shouted:

"I wouldn't give five kopeks for a concert like this! Calling it singing! I've got a fiddle of my own."

Nobody took any notice of him. He mixed with the crowd singing loudly and making a terrible exhibition of himself. People edged away from him, anxious to leave him alone. Several times he spotted farmer Mikelen, but by the time he had elbowed his way through to him he was gone. Twilight had fallen when he saw that the school-teacher was with Milija all right. He could not make out whether they were dancing or just taking a walk, but their heads were almost touching. After the warning he had got from the policeman he did not dare approach them, for he could feel that someone was keeping an eye on him. At about midnight he noticed the school-teacher at

the far end of the buffet treating Milija to lemonade. When Peteris got there they had disappeared in the throng. In vain did he search for them all over the dancing floor and in the bushes along the Perse river bank. He reached the station in time to see them get on the train, but while he was getting his ticket their compartment was packed. He squeezed himself into the one next to theirs, and all the way he heard the same songs they had sung at the concert, and squeals of laughter. He could distinguish the school-teacher's voice, and Milija's giggles. He had a bottle with him from which he drank offering it round to anybody who cared to share it with him. Though his heart was torn with anguish he laughed and bragged:

"My ninth bottle tonight! If by any chance there's a school-teacher or a clerk here, let him come and show if he can do better!"

It was a mystery how that school-teacher had managed to have such a smart carriage at the very station. He helped Milija in and they drove off together. Peteris pointed after them.

"See the young couple? They're having their wedding and christening all in one. You invited? I am!"

He was given a lift by farmer Mikelen, whose farm-hand had driven up to meet him, and who repeated to him the gossip Mare was spreading about him. She had been all over the pagast announcing that she was going to have a baby, and he, Peteris, was responsible. Far from denying anything Peteris made it out to be a grand joke, and described the adventures he had had with Mare, bellowing with laughter. But when left to wade home by himself through the marshland, he fell into such a mood that he nearly turned back and set fire to the Brivuls' cowshed.

By Tuesday he could endure it no longer. He dressed himself up in his concert clothes, boots and all, and set out for the Brivuls' farm, intent on reading a proper ser-

mon to that wench and the whole lot of them. But the mother met him in the yard.

"What do you want?"

What do you want! Had she gone crazy? Was he not her daughter's fiancé any more? But Mamma's attitude and angry voice overawed him. He submitted.

"Is Miss Milija at home?"

"Miss Milija is at home. Did you want anything from her?"

That was too much. Did she think him a fool, or just anybody? He would not let them play fast and loose with him.

"I do!" he snapped, trying to pass her and make for the door. But she planted herself in his way.

"You do not. Milija told ~~me~~ to tell you that if you're such a drunkard you may go back where you've come from. She is not going to see you."

"So I'm a drunkard, am I?"

"You are, and everybody's laughing-stock. The way you carried on at Koknese! You're just a pig, that's what you are. We don't want to see you again."

He slunk away down the hill as though cold water had been poured over him. Lapiniete whom he met on the way laughed outright.

"My, aren't you dolled up. You gave me quite a shock. Who's that fine gentleman, I thought. Must be a bridegroom."

Peteris would not stoop to talk to the female. He just spat and went on. But when he turned to glance back at the bathhouse he caught a glimpse of Milija's red blouse through the fence. And up in the branches of the apple-tree was it not that man with glasses and tufts of long hair behind the ears? Of course it was! Now he was peering through the branches and blinking through his glasses at Peteris.

"Look, Milija! Isn't that the young farmer who has a fiddle of his own?"

"Yes, that's him. The one with the red top-boots."

And both shrieked with laughter. Peteris bolted. Not till he had reached his own meadows did it occur to him to look round and swear back at them. But what was the use; there was nobody to hear him.

The evening saw him smashing bottles at the inn and shouting:

"I'll make them pay for this! I'll ruin them, I'll send them begging! There's a law against fooling a man and disgracing him. They kept egging me on to drive my aged father to the alms-house and give rat poison to my poor crippled brother. And when I said I wouldn't do it, because I have a son's and a brother's heart in my bosom, they picked up this one with the glasses!"

His eyes brimmed over, so firmly did he believe his own words. But presently he was telling with great gusto how Milija had almost forced him into the haystack, and what they used to do together on Sundays when her old people were out, and what he did with her after the Koknese concert on the Perse river bank. No, she was not the sort of wife he would choose. So he had dropped her. Still she was good enough for a school-teacher, a poor fish like him. He'd never known anything good in life, so what could he expect? A woman to warm his back, and a pie to fill his belly. . . . Later in the evening he lay in the hemp field by the inn, crying himself to sleep. He slept like a log till the early hours.

Some days later he went to the Mikelens' farm to fetch back Mare Saušna. He drove her first to the cooperative store and then home, picking the way that led through the Brivuls' farm. He sat in front, his feet resting on the shafts, and held the reins with arms outstretched as though he were driving the finest stallion. Mare was perched on her chest, which stood on her empty bed. She wore a

white kerchief on her head, and her breast was puffed out with pride. This time the blow struck home. For some reason Milija took it as an insult and got terribly wrought up. Clutching Lapiniete by the arm she dragged her out into the yard.

"Just look what a couple of fools! Himself on the shafts, and that cow in the cart!"

Lapiniete also considered it a travesty directed against her friend, and got equally annoyed.

"Take that nag of yours by the tail!"

"Ho-ho!"

Mare mocked back with malicious glee, while Peteris rapped his whip handle on the bed shouting:

"Bow-wow! Come on, doggie, get her!"

They drove past laughing, and Milija threw herself down on her bed, writhing with sobs. All day long her mother was by her side swathing her head in towels soaked in water and vinegar.

But Peteris did not stop at that. The wound had been too deep. Whomever he met, even a stranger, he would proceed to tell him about the school-teacher who was living at the Brivuls' just like a Turk, with both mother and daughter. The mother, she was the faster of the two. Mare was a great help to him in his gossip. When Milija once went to Riga, Mare hurried off to the Mikelens' farm with the news that things had come to a bad pass. If Riga could not mend matters, well, then it was good-bye to both Milija's honour and the school-teacher's job. The pastor had already made inquiries, and who knew what the inspector would have to say to such Turkish goings on.

For a while Peteris seemed appeased. But then the old wound began to smart again, and he strained his imagination for new ways of retribution. He drove poles into the road along which farmer Brivul had to drive. He stopped up the ditch that watered the Brivuls' meadows. True, his

own hay lay soaking in water, but there would be no second mowing for Brivul next year. He found out which way the school-teacher took from school to the Brivuls' farm, and put his saw through the plank-way across the river at Apseni. But it so happened that the school-teacher had stayed with the Brivuls that night, and the first to cross the plank-way in the morning was old Mother Celiene who fell plump into the water. The shock gave her a fever that kept her in bed for a whole week. It almost came to a terrible row, for everybody knew who the culprit was. Fortunately for him nothing could be proved. Mare swore that Peteris had spent the whole night by her side. Some time later Brivul's three horses and foal had their tails chopped off to the very bone while at pasture.

"Farmer Brivul has put hares to the harrow," Peteris laughed, pointing them out to every passer-by. On market day Brivul, who had left his horse and cart outside the inn, found the harness cut into strips and one wheel thrown into the well. But Peteris was insatiable. For three days he plied Big Brencis with drink persuading him to watch out for Milija on her way from the school and give her a good hiding. Embracing him with brotherly tenderness he whispered in his ear:

"But do it prop'ly! So she can't sit for three days. If you do that I'll give you three rubles."

Brencis promised, but being of a slow nature did nothing for many days. When at last, well fortified with drink, he did try he almost got himself into a real mess. The teacher had a gun with him, and pointing it at Brencis, forced him to confess the whole story. Whereupon he gave Brencis three rubles for himself, and half a ruble for Peteris to drink away his disappointment. Peteris almost exploded with fury.

"The worm! The socialist! So he's got a gun, has he! I bet he hasn't got a licence! I'll report him to the police!"

But the long and the short of it was that Milija was

lost to him beyond repair. The old man and the cripple had to sustain the whole weight of his fury. The father went about in rags and tatters, the cripple had to pick up his crutches and hobble to the pastures, because the shepherd boy was put to the harrow, and Mare was a harsh supervisor.

Meanwhile Milija Brivul was having a good time. The school-teacher was a person of refined manners and treated her like a real lady. Peteris' boorishness made his superiority the more striking. He never entered the room without knocking, leaving her plenty of time to undo the top button of her blouse or put forward a silk-stockinged leg. He even begged pardon if he brushed against her chair, and would not hang his hat on the peg without first asking for her permission. He was so gallant, so well behaved. He would kiss her hand, and her mother's hand, to the latter's particular delight. As to Milija, he started with a hand-kiss, but by and by grew more intimate and daring, and she more amenable. And why not? Did it not comply with the rules of good behaviour, which the school-teacher knew inside out?

It was about a month since the war had broken out. People talked of nothing but the war. The cattle was being requisitioned, the young men called to the colours. Father and Mother were upset about the young stallion that had been taken from them, but Milija found all this new bustle and excitement much to her liking. The school-teacher and she would go to the station to watch the trains carry off the cattle and recruits. Sometimes she was lucky and saw an officer too. On their way home she would chirrup like a sparrow that had just fed on a wheat field. The school-teacher, on the other hand, had grown more subdued and thoughtful of late.

"I don't know what's going to happen next. Only five age groups left till mine."

"You've got second class. They won't take you."

"You never can tell. They say they're already calling up the younger ones who've got second class. Is that the right thing to do? What's the regular soldier for, if it comes to that? We'll see if it's legal or not, and whether they've got the right."

Milija did not care. She had her own point of view.

"But it isn't so bad to be in the army. The uniform looks lovely."

The teacher realized that she was thinking of the officers, and since teachers were usually drafted into the medical corps he fell into an even deeper gloom.

"Bullets don't care about uniforms. Bang—and it's all over!"

Milija screwed up her eyes and tossed her head, feeling hot and cold shivers running through her body. Bang—and it's all over!... How dreadful! How beautiful! She squeezed herself closer to him. What an attractive man. Today she was walking by his side, but next week perhaps—bang, and it would be all over.... The school-teacher was also beginning to find the whole thing interesting. Perhaps this very minute death was lurking somewhere behind the hill? There was no immediate danger, of course. If they did call him up, he might still be disqualified. He was short-sighted, though not quite enough so. Well, and even if they took him, they would not send an educated person like him to the firing line. And he could always apply for a commission. A uniform was certainly something worth considering. Having weighed up all these points, he became gravely wistful, and sentimental, and most interesting. Halfway down the road they broke into song, singing in two voices "As I was going to war..." and other songs that were in tune with their sentiments and the occasion. They arrived home in the twilight, and by the time they had finished their supper and had a chat with the old people it had grown quite dark. Though the moon was up, mother would not let him go back to school.

"You never can tell. Lapiniete says she saw that oaf Peteris coming up the hill a little while ago."

"I'm not afraid of Peteris or anybody like him," said the school-teacher stoutly. "Pity I haven't got my gun on me."

But mother persisted.

"You see, you aren't even armed! I tell you, you'd better stay. You can go back tomorrow. What's the hurry?"

"There isn't any. But I might just as well go, there's really nothing to it."

He only gave in when Milija came to her mother's aid.

"Really, you could stay. I'll let you have my room. I still have a bed made up in the outhouse. It's been there since the summer."

"Won't you be cold there?"

"No, I've got a quilt!"

She folded back the blanket on her bed, arranged the pillows, and showed him where he could put his clothes and hang his socks. The top of the stove was warm from the kitchen range, she told him. Presently she noticed that he was at the window.

"What are you doing there?"

He felt slightly embarrassed.

"Nothing, I just wanted to see. . . . Can one open this window?"

"Oh, but you won't be hot. The sun hardly reaches this room, the trees are in the way. . . . You can open the right side. Only careful, the hinges are rather rusty."

When she bid him goodnight he kept her hand in his for a long time. He kissed it, and held it again, then kissed it a second time. She had the impression that he was about to say something, so she waited. But when he said nothing and lifted her hand to his lips for a third time, she disengaged it and left.

The fleas were biting old Brivul and would not let him sleep. He got up and went outside. The dairy inspector

who had come to them last Monday was still wandering about the yard, much to Brivul's surprise.

"Why don't you go to bed? Are you cold in the loft? You can take my old fur-coat."

The dairy inspector gathered his little beard in his hand and pressed his thumb to his chin. He had a huge wart growing there, which he was in the habit of fingering.

"No, I'm not cold. I just came out to see whether we're in for a morning frost. The potatoes are still in bloom, it would be a pity if they got nipped."

Brivul gazed at the white mist that was rising from the bog like a cloud.

"No, it's going to be misty, that's all. May spoil the buckwheat blossoms. The field's right by that blasted bog this year."

"Why doesn't he dig a ditch, I can't understand. He'd cover the expense in three years' time, and he wouldn't have to invest much. . . . Has the school-teacher gone?"

Still staring at the mist Brivul said: "Maybe. . . But if he's got no ready cash at all. . . . No, he's staying."

The dairy inspector thrust his hands into his trouser pockets and tried to laugh.

"Upon my word! He's almost one of the family."

"He isn't, but he's smart!"

"A school-teacher. What's a school-teacher? Not much money in the job, to be sure. And whether you keep it or not is up to the inspector."

"The same as any kind of job. His father's got a farm near Talsi. A horse, two cows, and some land—about one acre. And what an orchard! Takes apples and cabbages to Turkums for sale."

"An orchard! Don't you believe it."

But there was no discouraging old Brivul. He went on, working himself up to ever greater enthusiasm:

"For a woman it's really a godsend to get a husband like him. No dung, no smoke. As we were saying, Mother and

I, a muzhik's lot is the last lot under the sun. You run round in circles all day, and where do you ever get? Why, the fleas eat the life out of you. But with him it's boots on your feet even on workdays, rugs on your floors, coffee, everything. If you're bored at home you go out visiting. Anyone will say—please, do me the honour, be so kind, everything. . . .”

He laughed, feeling for his pipe. But there was no pocket in his underpants, he had left the pipe at home. The dairy inspector stamped his feet as though he were feeling chilly.

“Oh, it's gone as far as that, has it? Ah well, in that case. . . .”

Brivul was shivering.

“Real nippy! Perhaps there's going to be a frost after all. . . . Go to bed. That old coat of mine is right there on the cross beam.”

As he reached the corner of the house he saw a figure in the garden. It was very much like the school-teacher's, but when he looked closer it disappeared in the bushes. How was that? The school-teacher was indoors asleep, he knew. He went inside and knocked on Milija's door. He seemed to hear someone rattling at the window and asked timidly:

“Aren't you asleep yet?”

After a short interval came the grumbling reply:

“No. I'm not sleeping yet.”

His wife woke up with a start and muttered angrily:

“What're you knocking for, you old fool?”

Brivul lay down by her side and whispered to her:

“But I did think I saw him prowling about in the garden.”

“Gosh, you're just an old ass! What should he be doing there in the middle of the night?”

Since he had no answer to that he soon fell to snoring. But now it was Mamma's turn to find no sleep. What, in-

deed, could he be doing in the garden? First thing in the morning she opened the door to Milija's room. The bed was untouched. The window ajar. The teacher gone. In the yard she found the dairy inspector squatting on a stone, looking irritable. With a dirty smirk he motioned to the garden and said:

"Prowling about. . . . I don't think he's been to bed at all."

The school-teacher doffed his hat with an elegant bow:

"Good morning and good-bye! I've got to go now. There may be a message for me at home."

Poor chap, he was so worried about that mobilization. Didn't even wait for the coffee. Milija pulled the blanket over her ears when her mother entered the outhouse. She would sleep a little longer. It was nine when she got up, looking tired, and thoughtful and subdued. The dairy inspector threw her quizzical glances, dropping ambiguous remarks.

4

Even before the school-teacher was called up Milija had begun to cool towards him. And she grew cooler and cooler, until she hardly wanted to talk to him. What was a school-teacher if you came to think of it? Perhaps if he got a commission. . . . But she was none too sure he would.

The dairy inspector was not half bad. He came from a rich farmer's family in Birži District. He wore a shirt every day, and had a pair of laced boots in his chest and a pair of yellow shoes with broad toe-caps. He subscribed to two newspapers, and himself contributed articles to the agricultural journal, which he consequently received free of charge. It was in fact his talent as a writer that first drew Milija's attention. She would read his articles thinking what a handsome man he would be if only he dropped that habit of fingering the wart on his chin. Father and

Mother took to him for all this habit. He could talk so cleverly and comprehensibly and was not the least bit stand-offish. To add to his attractions, he had been exempt from military service since the war began due to some minor trouble, and was not subject to conscription.

Milija did not even come to the station, and the school-teacher parted without a proper farewell, feeling deeply resentful and determined never to write to her. His letters were not missed. Milija walked about on the dairy inspector's arm, laughing, and beaming. Father and Mother were equally happy, and old Brivul would brag in the inn:

"What a man! So clever, so thrifty. We get thirty litres more milk now than we used to. I tell you, since he came we've been simply swimming in milk. Nowhere to pour it!"

Peteris Velen was fuming.

"Thirty litres! No wonder, with hulking great cows like his, and the troughs bursting with fodder, and more than three acres of carrot fields. He'd get those extra thirty litres inspector or no inspector."

To vent his spite he left the Central Cooperative Society and joined the Economists, missing no chance to throw mud at the Centralists. He and Mare went out of their way to besmirch Milija, the dairy inspector, the old Brivuls and all and sundry at the Brivuls' farm. Before one piece of scandal had made the round of the pagast, the next was launched. Everybody knew full well what was eating Peteris, yet they lent a willing ear to his gossip and passed it on duly garnished. Once Peteris actually attacked the inspector in the middle of the market and almost beat him up. They locked him up for four days, but he emerged even more furious and brazen. Milija, who was not over-sensitive by nature, tried to turn a deaf ear to all the talk. Sometimes, however, it would drive her to tears. There was not a person in the wide world whom she hated more bitterly than Peteris. Every evil under the sun she wished upon him. But what could she

do? Upright men were sent to the war, while scum like him were left at large to spread their lies and slander. The dairy inspector consulted several lawyers but they could see no way of helping him. One day Milija caught sight of Peteris by the rettery weighing down the flax. She threw a shawl about her shoulders and walked over to him. She would have it out with him once and for all. What did he want of her?

Taking no notice of her, he shouted at his father who was tugging vainly at a soaking wet log.

"Can't you bend your back a little? Or have you got a poker stuck into you?"

Milija waited until he turned her way.

"Tell me, what do you want of me?"

Peteris spat.

"Hell! You didn't half give me a fright! Of you? Nothing at all. I haven't been asking you for anything, have I? Bread and meat I've got enough and to spare. Maybe you're in need? Go ask Mare, she'll give you a little."

Milija, who had come resolved to be serious and dignified found herself losing her own self-control. Her heart was brimming over.

"You can go hang yourself with your Mare! I am asking, are you going to let me alone or aren't you?"

Peteris laughed.

"Now, listen to her! As if I'd ever touched you! I wouldn't dream of such a thing. You may keep half a dozen inspectors at your home for all I care!"

"I can, and I will. That's got nothing to do with you. You'd better look after your Mare, instead of poking your nose into other people's lives. Mind your own business."

"Oh my God! Now she's going to teach me how to live! Who're you to talk? Get out of here, you pagast whore!"

He had been holding a shaft balanced on one end and now let it plump down with such vigour that Milija's feet were sprayed with mud. Then he began to throw flax about

so savagely that she took to her heels. When she was out of his sight she burst into tears of anger and humiliation.

There followed a short interim during which they left each other in peace. Peteris drove from market to market buying up cattle and taking meat to Riga. When winter came he found himself some kind of war work. Mare could not think of any fresh tricks on her own. Besides, she had plenty to do looking after the household and chasing around the old man and the cripple. The dairy inspector had ensconced himself so snugly at the Brivuls' farm that he would not think of leaving. The loft no longer suited him and he moved into the house. Father and Mother had to shift their bed into the other corner of the living room. A sack was stuffed with fresh straw and covered with two sheets and a new blanket from Milija's dowry. It was placed along the warm wall adjoining the kitchen, and there he would sleep till after breakfast time. Then he would look in at the cowshed and return to his bed where he spent the best part of the day. He had grown pink-and-white with all the milk and good food, and his beard fell in beautiful curls, and his hair, which he kept greased with cream, was sleek and shiny. First thing in the morning he would come out in shirt and underpants and exercise his muscles with a pair of old dumb-bells, while Mother and Milija stood admiring his strength and skill. After that he would have a proper wash, spluttering as he dipped his head into the wash-bowl, and Milija would wait towel in hand till he was ready. Then Mother would bring the coffee pot and the roasted chicken. He could not eat pork, it disagreed with his stomach. Neither could he stand rye bread, so three times a week they baked wheaten cakes at the Brivuls'.

The following summer was less peaceful. The Germans had broken into Kurzeme. Refugees came streaming across the Daugava, trampling down the fields and bringing foot-and-mouth disease to the cattle. Another horse and

two cows were requisitioned from the Brivuls. Two cows were taken away from the Velens as well, but Peteris managed to keep his horse by pressing twenty-five rubles into the veterinary surgeon's hand. Old Brivul found it easier to bear the loss itself than his anger and envy at his neighbour's good fortune. In general the war was beginning to make itself felt quite heavily. Taxation, cartage duty, all kinds of difficulties. The old Brivuls whispered guardedly to each other that they ought to get rid of the dairy inspector. He was no use about the farm. All he did was moon around and flirt with Milija, keeping her from doing any work. Who could cope now with his daily chicken broth and meat jellies. But Milija, when she heard it, merely glared and went pouting to her room, where the inspector was already waiting for her, cards in hand. Cards, nothing but cards, from morning till night. Would they never get tired of it? Other worries were beginning to weigh upon the parents, but they would not dare mention them to Milija. Father looked absorbed, Mother sighed and kept her ear on Milija's door, clearing her throat if the silence there lasted too long. She soon fell into the habit of staying in the room adjoining Milija's, shifting chairs and bustling about. Sometimes Milija would put out her head and give her a sharp scolding. The inspector would also raise his voice:

"I beg you not to disturb us."

The mother was unable to disturb them, and so was Peteris, but the new vicissitudes of fortune did.

The Russian armed forces that had been routed in Kurzeme came passing through more and more frequently in their retreat. Some nights every building at the farm was packed with soldiers, the officers lounging comfortably in the living rooms. Milija walked about with her head in the clouds. Dressed up in her best, she came out to serve the gentlemen, and while they ate, stood admiring their handsome uniforms. The dairy inspector would in

the meantime hang around outside or in the kitchen looking huffy, and he would sulk for many days after. But Milija appeared little concerned. She skipped about the house wondering which of the officers had been the handsomest and most chivalrous. For a week she would bask in happy memories ignoring the inspector. What was a dairy inspector against an officer in uniform with stars and shiny buttons? She flew at her father and mother when they complained of the trampled fields and the damaged meadows, or a stolen axe. How could you think of a trifle like that after lovely hours of laughter and loud gaiety?

New troops came from Russia to replace the scattered regiments. Cossack transports encamped on the Rimšas fallow land. Their staff quarters were at the Rimšas farm, but the officers and the band were quartered at the Velens'. All the Brivuls' fields were trampled down. The Cossacks marauded the entire district, ravaging the orchards, clearing the carrot fields before they were even ripe. Old Brivul, mother Brivul and the dairy inspector lived in a permanent state of fury and excitement. The old man would stalk through his fields, stick in hand, trying to keep off the horses. But what was the use? It was obvious that Peteris Velen was driving them there deliberately. What else could he be popping up for several times a day? Nobody else's fields suffered as badly as the Brivuls' did. One morning old Brivul burst into the house purple and speechless with rage.

"We're done for! That's the end of us! The entire rye field's trampled to the ground. No bread next year. If things have come to such a pass life isn't worth living. Do you call this an army? Milija, you go straight to the Velens' farm, this minute, let those officers come and reckon up the damage. I'd like to see if they're really going to ruin a man in cold blood. If they don't pay on the nail I'm going to Riga to the governor himself."

But Milija was not in a mood to go.

"Ha, governor indeed! Well, go ahead, but leave me out of it."

This time, however, the old man was rabid.

"Don't answer me back! I'll get the whip, see if I don't! What're you here for? For the dairy inspector's bed? I'll send you packing together with him."

The night before he had, indeed, come upon them while they were fooling around, and just at the moment when she had dropped down upon his bed. So now she could do nothing but obey. She dressed up carefully and went to the Velens' farm. Peteris was standing in the doorway looking as proud as a peacock.

"Goodness gracious! Where are we off to? What's the dairy inspector going to say to this?"

"Shut up! Let me pass!"

She wanted to push him out of her way, but he would not budge.

"Come, come! Let's get it straight first. Aren't you trying to break into other people's houses?"

"Get off! I've got to see the officers."

"Ah, you have, have you! Mare, come and look, a sweetheart for our gentlemen!"

He thought it was Mare stepping out of the house, but it was a tall officer, well past his prime, with a yellow moustache and a small bald patch at the back of his short cropped head. With his hands in the pockets of his enormously broad trousers, he stood scrutinizing the strange woman over Peteris' shoulder.

"What can we do for the young lady?"

Peteris started, but then burst out laughing.

"She's looking for officers. Must be one of those nice girls."

Milija could not control herself.

"Sir, this man is insulting me."

Without removing his hands from his trouser pockets the officer elbowed Peteris off the threshold.

"Get off, you oaf!"

His eyes fastened themselves on Milija, and smiling amiably, he stepped across the threshold towards her.

"I am sorry. This house is full of ruffians like him. I scold them every day."

Her initial purpose had gone clean out of her mind, and something else flashed upon it.

"Well, why do you stay here? Come over to our place. We've got plenty of room."

She wriggled her shoulders, and smiled, trying hard to look alluring. The officer pulled one hand out of his pocket, twirled his moustache and smiled back at her.

"Is it far from here?"

"No, not at all. See that farm over there? That's ours, the Brivuls'."

The officer bellowed with laughter.

"Brrr-ivul, Brrivul. . . . The devil himself would twist his tongue over your names. D'you have eggs and butter?"

"Indeed we have! We've got seventeen broody hens."

The same evening the dairy inspector betook himself back to the loft, now sharing it with an orderly. The bed in the living room, on which an additional pillow appeared, was assigned to the officer. It had seemed to Milija, when she saw him at the Velens', that there was a wedding ring on his finger, but it was there no longer. He referred to himself as an old bachelor and was very chatty and amiable. He told anecdotes, and her parents laughed together with Milija though they did not understand a word he said. When evening came he roared at his orderly and bundled him out of the room, and then sat down to supper. The old couple did not dare to sit with him and had theirs in the kitchen, using the range for a table. But Milija he requested to sit opposite him. Radiant with happiness, she not so much ate as served him. He

had a hearty appetite. First he consumed a loaf and a half of wheat bread, with a lot of butter and seven soft-boiled eggs, deploring the absence of mustard in the house. Then he started on his tea. When he had nearly emptied the kettle, there would be no more boiling water, for which Milija would give her mother a severe scolding. Having mopped the pouring sweat off his face with a towel he began to undress for the night. Since his orderly was no longer available he sat down on his bed and held out his legs to old Brivul. The old man pulled off one boot, then the other, and placed them neatly at the foot-end of the bed. Mother Brivul stood by giving orders. The officer was asleep the moment he hit the pillow, and at once fell to snoring. At first it sounded like the screeching of a timber saw, then came a rattle as from a threshing machine, followed by long high-pitched whistles. The noise kept Milija awake for a long time. Burying her head in the pillow she laughed quietly to herself. How amusing!

Life at the Brivuls' took a new course. Not one horse dared to trespass on their fields. The Cossacks no longer made free with the orchard. The officer saw to it that the strictest discipline was observed. True, he did not pay for the damage done before, but he issued them chits that they could cash somehow and somewhere at a later date. Papa and Mamma were appeased and well satisfied. The old man took great pride in *his* officer and never missed a chance to brag about him. He would nudge his neighbour in the side.

"See our officer passing there?" he would say. "And that's our Milija. What a wonderful gentleman! A real marvel he is. His soldiers, they daren't breathe a word. A sock in the jaw for the merest trifle! But with us—grandma, granddad, that's how he speaks to us. And he's such friends with Milija."

They were friends with Milija indeed. While Mother

had her hands full roasting chickens and boiling eggs, Milija would sit with him in her room playing cards. Or else he would stretch out on Milija's bed, resting his boots on the foot piece, arms folded under his head, Milija sitting by his side, and tell her anecdotes from military school, or stories about the Kuban, where everything was much better and more beautiful than it was here. Then they would take a turn in the garden, or pick apples and have all sorts of fun. When the early barley had been cut, old Brivul brewed two barrels of beer. Mother killed a pig and six chickens. Officers came along from the whole district, at least ten of them, and they ate, and drank, and sang all night, like at a wedding. Mamma was run off her legs. Papa threw off his coat and continued in his shirt-sleeves. The dairy inspector never stopped running to the cellar for more beer. Milija and a few other farmers' daughters kept the officers company and enjoyed themselves enormously. Their shrieks of laughter carried far and wide. At midnight the officers decided to call in the band from the Velens' farm. All the women in the farm were roused. Lapiniete was dragged out of bed in her underskirt and a cotton blouse. They danced till the small hours. It almost came to blows between the Brivuls' officer and another. The other one was younger and more attractive, and Milija, who was slightly tipsy, was glad to dance with him and flirt a little. The one with the moustache would not stand for that, and started swearing. The other one stood his ground, though he was one star below him in rank, and it was with the utmost difficulty that a brawl was prevented. They calmed down only when Milija sat herself on the moustached officer's knees and put her arm about him. He sat rocking her and calling her his little dove, and finally burst into tears.

On the following day dead silence reigned over the farm till noon. The air was thick with cigarette smoke.

The floors were bespattered and littered with fag-ends, the tables splashed and covered with flies. The officer lay in his uniform, face downwards, on the bed, in a dead sleep. Milija's door stood ajar. She was sitting up with a blanket round her, suffering from a splitting headache and nausea. The dairy inspector alone was pacing the yard, glaring furiously at the windows and listening to the coughing and spitting and muttering as those indoors began to stir to life.

Brivul came out looking crumpled with sleep, his beard matted, his eyes blinking in the sunlight. The dairy inspector approached him with large strides.

"Still asleep?"

Brivul blinked faster and squinted at the house.

"No, I think they're getting up."

The dairy inspector spat and drew up closer to him.

"I think, I think. . . . What's the matter with you? Are you the master of the house, or is it someone else? Drinking, and fooling around, and fighting all night long! Nobody can get any peace. Is it a home, or is it a bawdy house?"

The old man scratched his head. Headache and nausea had made him think, too, that something had gone wrong, but he could not make out who was to blame for it.

"Ah, what can I do about it? They just come and do what they please. Can I say no to them? Who'd listen to me?"

"You're a milksop, that's what you are! And that daughter of yours, you've given her so much liberty that she can't be much worse than she is now. D'you think she isn't going to come to a bad end? Soon every dog will bark at her, you'll see."

Her hair unkempt, her face creased with sleep, dressed in a lace-trimmed night jacket Milija leaned out of the window.

"What's going on there? Who's that shouting?"

The dairy inspector gave a furious leap in her direction.

"Had enough sleep? Enough dancing? Enough flirting? You don't half look a sight! As if you'd been dragged through the chaff. Shame on you, to carry on with those!"

Milija's head disappeared, and from the room came her voice:

"Kuzma Dmitriyevich, he's using bad language and insulting you."

The dairy inspector got a proper shock when he saw the red face with the sprawling yellow moustache. In his shirt-sleeves and braces the officer leaned out of the window.

"You swine, you scum! I'll call my orderly to deal with you. I'll call my Cossacks to come with their whips! They'll give it to you, you socialist swine! I give you one hour to get out of here!"

The indignant dairy inspector darted to his loft, hauled down his chest, and dashed to the cowshed, the outhouse, the cellar collecting his implements together. By and by he cooled down. As he went about his business he kept an eye cocked at the window in the hope that Milija would appear and ask him to stay. But outside stood the officer spluttering as he washed, and Milija was standing next to him barefooted, towel in hand, and did not turn her head once. So he heaved his chest on to the cart, clambered up on his old sack of straw and waved his hat.

"Good-bye, Mother Brivul. I'm leaving. I'm sorry if I gave you trouble."

Mamma yawned clapping her hand over her mouth.

"That's all right. Good luck to you. You're coming back, aren't you?"

"I shouldn't think so. I don't think I'll manage to. . . . Now I'm no longer. . . . Now you've got those. . . ."

He broke off partly because the officer's epaulettes flitted past the window, and partly so that the mother should not detect the tearful quiver in his voice. Milija laughed as she pushed the table straight.

Old Brivul was just coming from the cowshed carrying his fork and shouted over his shoulder to Lapin before he disappeared round the corner:

"Don't dither. We need that horse for the reaper."

Lapin cracked his whip. Once more the dairy inspector doffed his hat.

5

At first Peteris Velen did quite well. While the Cossacks were camping out near the Rimšas grove he kept on friendly terms with the bandsmen who lodged at his house. They would leave him the remains of their bread and other scraps, on which Mare managed to fatten up four pigs. A bakery was started at the Mikelens' farm where he could get five loaves of bread for a few litres of milk. When his officer moved to the Brivuls' farm he got himself the next best thing to an officer, the man in charge of forage, a hearty boozier and a smart chap. Peteris would provide home-made vodka, and they would sit down to it discussing how to get the best out of life. Peteris took it upon himself to supply as much hay as was required. He delivered ten measures and was paid for fifteen. Deliveries of oats came by railway, and many a night a cartload or two would be emptied into the Velens' barn. Peteris' cows were soon fat and glossy, and his sheep soft and frizzy. The pigs waded in grain. Peteris bartered his old jade for a beautiful Cossack horse that could be put to both cart and plough. Later in the autumn he managed to buy six old nags, on which he made good business since all the best horses in the district had been requisitioned. As a sideline, he had two people keeping watch over the

refugee routes for him, buying up cows and pigs from the Kurzeme refugees. He sold the meat to the army commissariat, and what was over he took to Riga. True, every time he went to Riga he blew a lot of money, but he had plenty of it. He could afford it. He drove around in a peculiar and most extravagant carriage that he had picked up God knows where. He got himself a pole-cat fur-coat, an astrakhan hat, high top-boots and a gold watch. He knew where foreign brandy and port was to be had in Riga. A hundred rubles were no money to him. He had grown well-padded and rosy-cheeked, and his hands were soft and white. He ate a chop every day, and plum jelly, and drank cocoa. He slept till past breakfast time if he pleased, and his manners were now exceedingly refined. Mare walked about the house in a red knitted jacket and a tiny lacy apron.

But with the advent of winter came all kinds of setbacks. First he caught some disease in Riga and had to drive to town about five times before he got rid of it. The Germans had reached the Daugava. The railway was reluctant to take civilians, and for a cross-country drive you needed all kinds of permits. Then at about Christmas time, without notice or warning, a new call-up was announced, catching Peteris unawares. To get exemption, which of course he did, cost him all his ready cash, two pigs, and a calf. And even then there was no real safety in it. They were already checking on the territorials who had formerly been exempted from service. Taking the warning, Peteris joined a military road-builders' organization and moved to Jugla District. For a whole month he worked as a timber carter, labouring hard under strict supervision. The engineers, the technicians, the brigade leaders treated the carters worse than slaves. At night his horse stood shivering in a shack rigged up out of fir branches, while he himself slept in a stuffy, dark dugout and ate mouldy bread, tainted meat, and rotten herring.

Within a month he contrived to strike up a friendship with his brigade leader, and return home on the sly sending up his old father in his stead. But the first pay-day brought it all to light. Again his last sucking pig and a cow went to the winds not to speak of all the fuss and worry. His astrakhan hat and top-boots were still his, but the fur-coat and gold watch had gone the way of all his valuable belongings in the course of these perturbations. So had his rosy complexion. Peteris grew thin and as ragged and haggard as all the other carters, and as full of hatred and unrest.

In the spring fortune smiled upon him once more. He managed to get in with those who carted products from the Riga storehouses to the district where he worked. It was impossible to check too closely on his time, and Peteris occasionally managed to loiter around for half a day at a time. By the summer he had become more intimate with the manager of the storehouses and with the manager of the district cooperative, and sometimes wangled a sack of grain or peas, a side of bacon, or a sack of sugar for himself. The town was already feeling the pinch, so that, when sold under the counter, these products fetched a good price. He threw in his lot with a refugee woman from Kurzeme who had two children, a husband at the war, and a tiny vegetable shop in a basement. She did the selling for him at a handsome profit. Peteris settled down with her, and between them they sought to forget the warrior who had fallen into enemy hands and was probably pining away in some German prison camp.

The Velens' farm was steadily running to seed. The Cossacks had long been gone. Close to the third line of entrenchments, the pagast was teeming with infantry and artillery forces. A regimental headquarters had been set up at the Brivuls', staff headquarters at the Velens'. Masters and servants were driven into the servants' room. The cripple was now completely bedridden. Nobody could

sleep at night for his incessant groaning. The old man was almost blind. Mare had started befriending the regimental clerks thus helping the household to go to pieces. When Peteris turned up one day and wanted to take her to task he just escaped a beating. All the soldiers were on Mare's side, and it was no wonder she was ~~so stuck-up~~. So Peteris gave it up as a bad job and returned to his Kurzeme friend.

Next autumn he was down on his luck again. His cheek passed all bounds, and once he took a whole sack of granulated sugar to the little vegetable shop. The money he earned on it somehow slipped through his fingers and he found himself unable to pay the store keeper and the cooperative manager their due shares. So one fine day he was taken into custody and put under lock and key. He knew too much, however, that might have compromised some high-standing personalities, so they let him out within a fortnight. Meanwhile his Kurzeme friend had sold the horse and cart. Peteris became a jobbing carpenter—and his heart filled with even greater bitterness and hate.

When the Revolution broke out he was among the first to revolt. Who would think of remembering now all the escapades of his unsavoury past? The workers were at the end of their strength, sick of the war, full of hatred against their rulers, whom they blamed for their sorry plight. Peteris was elected first to the District Soviet, then to the arbitration committee, and finally as a delegate to the constituent ¹⁹¹⁸ council. He was sent to town and paid a salary according to the district rate, with additional remuneration for meetings. All he did now was go from one conference to another, attend workers' and soldiers' meetings or hang around in the park, to kill time. By and by he improved on his state. The district technician who was half German by birth had a big house in Bruninieku Street. To dodge military service he had enrolled for war work. Peteris protected him against the workers' wrath

by diverting it upon others from whom he had nothing to expect. The technician escaped by the skin of his teeth, but was sacked from his job, and his record being none too clear, he was compelled to go into hiding. So he engaged Peteris fictitiously as his house manager, registering his own part of the house as a flat in Peteris' name, though in actual fact Peteris was allocated only one small room, the other five being inhabited by the technician's wife and children and aunts. Peteris enjoyed lolling about on a soft couch and spending the evenings reading newspapers by electric light. Even more enjoyable was the knowledge that this silly woman with all her children and expensive furniture was under his guardianship. From the very start he got on well with the chambermaid, who would stealthily supply him with food from the master's kitchen and occasional bottles from his sideboard. Sometimes she spent a night in Peteris' room and that so intoxicated him with the sense of his own power that it was all she could do to dissuade him from getting up in the middle of the night to survey *his* flat and its lodgers. With the chambermaid pressing her hand over his mouth he would brag at the top of his voice:

"I can evict the lot of them! I'll make them pay for the use of my furniture. They'll pay me every kopek, the beggars!"

Only rarely now did he visit his Kurzeme friend. The chambermaid was younger and plumper. Besides, he had a suspicion that the Kurzeme woman was in the family way again. She would keep whimpering, and recalling her lost husband, and had quite neglected the shop. To be on the safe side Peteris made his visits less and less frequent till he discontinued them altogether. Once he chanced upon her in the street, and she overwhelmed him with remonstrances and threats, saying she would drown herself. But he took her aside and said:

"Do that, by all means. As a matter of fact, it's the

only thing I could advise you to do. Your husband will kill you anyway when he comes home. But whatever you do, leave me alone. Where's my horse? Where's my cart? Ah! I see you're coming to your senses! You know I can have you put in gaol so you won't see daylight again!"

He was wise enough to tell her nothing about his new way of life. He was rid of her and lived well.

Once he came home in high spirits from some soldiers' dance. He had brought a friend along whom he had picked up there. They had had some drink, so they needed more now. He roused the chambermaid and ordered her to entertain his friend while he went to see whether there wasn't a bottle or two stowed away in the sideboard. He found two, took them, and turned to rejoin his visitor. But the sideboard door slammed with a terrible bang. Not that he had taken particular care to make no noise, for was it not his flat, his sideboard, his wine? One of the old aunts appeared in the doorway, scantily dressed, scared and angry, and at once let loose a flow of invective in broken Lettish:

"What are you doing here? The cheek of it! In the middle of the night you frighten people and go stealing from the master's sideboard!"

Peteris rested the bottles on the sideboard, and, putting his hands in his trouser pockets, said:

"Cheek yourself! An old woman like you coming and thrusting herself on me! And put this in your pipe and smoke it: there isn't a master here, nor a master's sideboard. Everything's mine. I can throw you out of here. Put that in your pipe."

He ushered the old lady into her room and slammed the door behind her. Then he took his friend into the dining room where they feasted until the bottles were empty. In the morning the technician and his family made a dreadful row. He would not stand for such impudence any longer! When Peteris refused to leave he appealed to

the militia and the court. But Peteris had a legal document in his pocket. His proprietor's rights were officially endorsed. He was going to make use of them. After a lot of begging and imploring the technician and his family were granted half the rents for the house and the three bottom rooms of the flat. In the other three Peteris intended to settle comfortably with his chambermaid. As for the Velens' farm, he had forgotten it. What was the good of it now. His prospects of a comfortable livelihood were better by far in town. But the Germans attacked and invaded Riga. Peteris realized from the faces of the technician and his aunts that German power augured him no good. Stealthily he packed his belongings, counted the rent he had collected, and without a word to his chambermaid disappeared from Riga in the wake of the retreating Russian army.

6

It would be too much to say that it particularly gladdened the Brivuls to see the Velens' farm run to seed; they simply found it fairly pleasing. The old man was suffering from some lingering ailment and rarely ventured out, but though his speech came wheezily and haltingly he was always ready to discuss his neighbours.

"That's what happens when the father is an old dun-
derhead and is in a hurry to hand over the whole business to the young one. Now neither of them has the benefit, and that slut lords it there and flings everything to the winds. Why not? Easy come, easy go."

"How did it all come about?" people would ask. "They said at the time that he'd done it with your consent."

"People talk a lot of nonsense. As if I needed his farm. Thank God, I've got my own. It's true, Peteris was after my Milija in those days. But our Milija doesn't need that sort of chap. She wouldn't look at him. Our Milija,

she can choose from the finest and best. Thank God, our Milija's got enough to choose from."

She had indeed. In the autumn, as soon as her officer had left together with his Cossacks, an infantry regiment came and established its headquarters at their place. Six officers with their orderlies, a cook, two carriages, two coachmen, four draught horses, two riding horses. The house was so chock-full you could not move indoors. The old parents retired into the servants' room, which they shared with the coachmen. The orderlies and the cook were crammed into the kitchen. All fires were kept burning from morning to night. The last log of firewood was used up, as well as the orchard fence, all shafts, and even the props for drying clover. Everything burnable they had wrenched out and chopped up. The large room where the officers lived had to be kept as hot as a bathhouse, the tea-kettle was always on the boil. How to procure all the wood? Old Brivul had long given up worrying. Huddled up in his fur coat he would hang about in the servants' room by the stove, getting in the women's way. By Christmas two sheds had been demolished and burnt up on the Velens' farm, and one on the Brivuls' farm. The fodder had been either requisitioned, or stolen, or simply taken by force. It was a blessing that the coachmen occasionally let them have an armful of theirs. But they demanded milk in return, and bacon, and where could you get it? The three cows that were still left to them were so lean you could count every rib in their bodies. The horses, gaunt and matted, had hardly strength to move, and Lapin cursed as he struggled with them driving out every other day to do his cartage duty. The pigs had been killed a long time since and the chickens were gone and forgotten. Mother Brivul fought tooth and nail for the three lambs she had so far been able to rescue.

Milija took no share in her parents' worries and troubles. The house was in a turmoil from morning to

night, but it offered her a lot of amusement. She would sit at table with the officers, drinking tea and playing cards. One of them had a balalaika. She learned all sorts of soldiers' songs and joined in their singing, tapping her feet and whistling as they did. Almost every day she went out for a drive—in autumn in a carriage, in winter in a sleigh. The adjutant, a Caucasian with black frizzy hair and jet black eyes, would put his arm about her waist underneath the rug, and this was very agreeable to her. All the officers were so civil, vying with each other in little services and gallantries. She got so used to these, and to all the bustle that when the regiment was transferred to the Daugavpils front in the spring and the house stood empty for two weeks she almost died with boredom. She never stirred a finger to help about the house and lazed around in bed till after noon, looking through her album in which she had already eleven officers' photographs, and two group pictures with herself in the centre. In one she was wearing a short white dress, and she was sitting on a large boulder in the middle of the river while one officer was holding her parasole, and another was balancing her hat—the one with the two horns—on the point of his sword. The other showed the whole staff of the headquarters, with the colonel in the centre against the background of their house. She was sitting on one side, wearing her fur-coat with the little white collar, and the adjutant was at her feet, his head resting on her knees. It looked lovely, but she could not live on memories alone. She shut the album angrily and pushed it away under her pillow. Hearing her mother moving noisily in the living room, she reclined on her pillows, and when her mother continued bustling around she cried:

"Mamma, can't you be quiet!"

Her mother opened the door.

"Aren't you getting up yet, my pet?"

Milija turned to the wall.

"What for? It's cold and empty in the house."

"There's a soldier come over from the Velens'. Lapin's out. We can't understand him."

A soldier. . . . She should worry! Milija lay a little longer but then decided to get up and see. It was a clerk from the machine-gun unit trying to buy some cream. Cream! Did he think it grew on trees? The women went for him like vultures. But he stood calmly stroking his moustache and gazing at Milija. He was an N.C.O., with a white and yellow circle on his tunic. He would only talk to the young lady. The other women did not concern him.

This was how the clerk from the machine-gun unit first came to the Brivuls' farm. His rank was nothing to write home about. At first she would come out to him with her nose in the air. A clerk—after she had known lieutenants and captains. After the commander himself had feasted here with her! But the clerk knew how to treat young ladies better than many an officer did. He had served as a salesman in Moscow, in Perlov's famous teashop, and had seen quite different kinds of ladies. Without putting it in so many words, he made this clear enough to her. And since their past lives had a lot in common they soon got on swimmingly. Before long they were such intimate friends that for the first time in her life Milija shed tears when his company was transferred to the Ikškile positions opposite Death Island. And the clerk wept, too, kissing her and swearing revenge if she were unfaithful to him. Milija felt she would never love anybody again and would remember him till the day she died. However, her feelings lasted only until the dragoons arrived and a young captain of the cavalry was quartered in the living room. He was a nobleman from Petersburg, a count, in fact, and unbelievably rich. He had his own camp-bed and mattress with him, his sheets were made of fine linen, each piece being marked with his coat-of-arms, and he had two leather

suitcases bound with nickel-silver. As he opened them she glimpsed a multitude of shiny knick-knacks for tending his moustache and his nails, for shaving and similar needs, and the perfume he used could be smelled even in the kitchen. He was courteous, but very proud. He slept on his own sheets, and used his own towel. He paid at once for whatever he took, and would not admit any familiarity. The women of the house were only allowed to do his washing. His tea was made by his orderly in a nickel pot. He would nibble at a biscuit and sip brandy from a slender-stemmed glass. He was never seen drunk, he never hit his orderly, never swore at his soldiers, who had quite a different respect for him from the kind soldiers usually have for their superiors. Milija would devour him with burning eyes from a distance. She adored him like some superior being, like a creature from a different world. Her heart gave a leap when she heard the click of his spurs outside the door. An occasional closer look from him, a nod of the head, leave alone a smile, would send her into ecstasies for the rest of the day. She almost fell out with Lapiniete because of him. She had come into the servants' room and was looking out of the window, watching a soldier holding the reins of his fiery bay horse. Suddenly she grabbed Lapiniete by the sleeves.

"Look, look! Here he comes. He's stopped. Now he's moving again. Oh, he'll mount it in a minute!"

Lapiniete gave one look and pulled herself free.

"Phew! You gave me quite a start. I thought there was something the matter. As if we'd never seen an officer!"

Milija looked her full in the face as though she had suddenly gone out of her mind.

"An officer... you idiot! What's in an officer. Look at him! Look the way he's holding his reins. Look how he sets his foot."

Lapiniete was staring at her.

"You're stark mad. Let me tell you, you'll come to a bad end with all your officers."

Milija's eyes brimmed over.

"You're mad yourself. Officers.... He's a captain of the cavalry, he is... and a *count*. His sheets are made of fine linen with coats-of-arms. Two suitcases.... A golden cigarette-case...."

"What of it? That's just why he won't even look at the likes of us."

This was more than Milija could bear. She burst out crying and wailing at the top of her voice. It took Lapiniete all day to bring her round and sooth her. But when the dragoons were recalled to headquarters for some special assignment Milija was unconsolable for three days. Her mother was seriously alarmed and thought she might die. But she survived. She had grown almost as plump and fat as her mother, and no grief could get the better of her. It only made her eyes look sore and her flabby jowls appear even flabbier.

Old Brivul died in the early summer. Milija did not mourn him much. She had her own worries. And soon the usual bustle and flurry and merriment began anew. Life swept her on and she had no time to think. Mother and Lapin saw somehow to the remains of their former household. For two weeks Milija drove about in a car with some military road engineers. When these left, a company of sappers arrived with their carts and spades, and mines and other paraphernalia. They took Milija to the front-line positions one night, and peeping through a chink in the dugout she could watch the Germans fire green flares across the Daugava, and could hear the terrible intermittent rattle of machine-gun fire and the hissing of a grenade high above their heads. It was superbly exciting. The following night she shrieked in her sleep and jumped out of bed, so that the tall ensign had to come and comfort her. Then an observation bal-

loon was sent up from the edge of the forest just by the Velens' farm, and the captain in charge kept promising to take her up and let her see Jelgava through field-glasses. But the balloon was too much threatened by the German air force so they had to remove it to safer positions.

A Ukrainian regimental HQ was the next to lodge at the Brivuls', in a word, life continued a crazy hurly-burly right up to the outbreak of the revolution.

The beginning of the revolution was to Milija's liking. Meetings, and speeches, and demonstrations with red banners, and songs, and arguments. Milija was in the thick of events. She learnt all the revolutionary songs and always stood closest to the speakers. "...And the last fight let us face," she chanted in her resounding, though now slightly husky contralto, and again tears sprang to her eyes.

But this initial revolutionary gaiety soon blew over. The soldiers flatly refused to fight any more, maintaining that the Germans did not want to either. Milija sided heart and soul with the officers, who wanted to fight to the bitter end and were convinced that the Germans wanted the same. It pained her to watch the irreverence displayed by the soldiers towards their officers more blatantly every day. They would not salute them and shouted scurrilous remarks after them when she passed in their company. She could no longer venture out with them. So she sat at home sharing in the grief of the officers who were no longer free to take a step without the soldiers' Soviets. She listened to them quietly cursing the laxity in discipline and the mounting impudence of the men, and waited with them for a new upheaval and the restoration of the tsarist régime. She could not understand herself for having been able to walk around with a red flag and sing about the last fight. She felt convinced that the war against the Germans had to be continued.

What other point could there be in the existence of an army and officers?

Things at home fanned her hatred against the revolution. Lapin had been elected to the Pagast Soviet, and his behaviour had become most provoking. He called them bourgeois and blood-suckers, and spoke of land distribution. The headquarters were transferred farther away from the front line, so for a whole month she was pinning away in solitude. Lapiniete had got all stuck up and glared rather than looked at her. She had become such friends with Mare Saušna that they could not pass a day without each other's company. Mare would come stalking in as proud as a general. You had to keep out of her way lest she should step over you. Milija wept every day with rage and humiliation, which was not even assuaged by a letter from the adjutant from the Rzhev hospital. The memories of blissful moments in the past which he recalled did not help her. And crumpling up the letter with all its thousand kisses she flung it into the stove.

Then Kerensky's commissar arrived from Petrograd and took up lodgings in the Brivuls' living room. At first he spent days and nights at meetings and the front-line positions, and at the division committee. But by and by he began to turn up earlier and spend more time at home. For lack of other listeners he would pour out his heart to Milija about the blind fanaticism of the Bolshevik agitators, and about the catastrophic state of Russia. He unfolded to her the whole programme of the Socialist-Revolutionaries, promising to the Latvians autonomous rights and liberation from the yoke of the barons, if only the Latvian riflemen stood firm, if only they did not allow themselves to be misled. Milija had never seen a Latvian rifleman. Nor had she suffered under the barons' yoke, and as for autonomous rights, they meant nothing to her. However, the commissar managed to bridle that crazy Lapin and his pagast committee to some extent,

which Milija acknowledged by paying him a certain amount of respect, though he had neither uniform nor sword. What he did have was a pair of mournful eyes and a shock of hair like an artist's. He had entered into a mésalliance with a rich Jewess, and lamented his ruined life, frequently mentioning his three daughters who were doomed to grow up under the supervision of a lascivious mother. Milija warmed to his sorrow, and when, overwhelmed with grief, he threw his arms about her and pressed his face to her bosom, she stroked his thick hair and consoled him as best she could.

But a fatal day brought the collapse. The Russian armies were put to flight, and towards evening, while the machine-guns were still spluttering behind the forest, the German cavalry appeared, strange-looking men in bluish uniforms and narrow forage caps or steel helmets. Their horses were huge and ferocious, and they had automatic guns fastened to their saddles. The men were emaciated and ravenous. Within half an hour they had rummaged through all the cattle sheds and the granary and the cellar. The last pig was soon sizzling in a pot over their camp-fire. The Lapins had run away together with the Russians, so that Milija and her mother were alone at home. More dead than alive with fear, the mother crouched in a corner. But to Milija the Germans were kind. They bowed facetiously, clicking their heels, and then slapped her on the cheek and called her to join them at the camp-fire, where they treated her to dry biscuits and some strong drink out of tin flasks. They spoke in rolling guttural intonations, and you could not understand a word they said. But there was one among them who spoke broken Lettish and who had authority over the others. His manner was overbearing, and in the evening he ordered Milija to show him to his bed.

They left in the morning to be replaced by others, and

then others again, and so it went on. They strayed about incessantly in small groups. Every edible creature was killed and devoured, the farm was cleaned out completely. The new arrivals would shout threats at the two women, charging them—as far as they could make out—with having hidden away the food and stayed behind to spy. Milija and her mother lived through many days and nights of mortal terror, unable to sleep and half starved. Special detachments arrived to cut down the summer crops, and pick the flax, and grub out the potatoes before they were ready, heaping everything on their huge carts and driving it off. The livelong day and all through the night there were processions of cattle passing the Brivuls' farm, and carts heaped with furniture, and machinery, and crockery, and all kinds of agricultural implements taken away from the peasants or collected from deserted farmsteads. Presently a cart drove into the yard, Milija and her mother were made to get on it alongside a host of other people, and allowed to take with them no more than they could carry. Mamma packed up a ham she had managed to hoard, a loaf of bread, and three pairs of stockings. Milija made a bundle of two of her best dresses and three blouses, and put a hat-box on her knees. Beyond the Apseni pagast they joined up with a line of other carts that were similarly loaded with people, and the whole procession drove into the forest, flanked by soldiers with fixed bayonets, who kept shouting and threatening to fire at anyone who attempted to escape. All the buildings in Apseni were ablaze, and by the time they had cut through the clouds of smoke that were rolling across the highroad the people in the cart were almost choking. Looking back at the edge of the forest Milija saw the Brivuls' cowshed go up in flames, and the roof of their house beginning to smoulder.

The majority of those who could be of any use to the Germans were driven to Kurzeme to do forced labour. Milija and her mother were among those lucky few who were taken along the Bikernieki road to Riga and then dropped on the Petrograd highway to continue as they pleased, foraging for themselves. From six in the morning till twelve at night the two women tramped the dark, muddy road slipping into every gateway and knocking on every window where they saw the flicker of a light. Mother groaned as she dragged herself along. Milija was beyond caring. At last they were let in at a door from which a whole bunch of people came out to stare at them by the light of an oil lamp. They slept in the little kitchen, and sometimes in the lumber-room among water pails and damp firewood. Every morning the people would have turned them out but for their supplications and finally they were allowed to remain in what was more like a sty than a human habitation with only one living room and a kitchen.

When the ham and the loaf of bread they had brought with them were eaten they were in bad straits. The master of the little shack, who was a carter, had been ~~robbed~~ ^{robbed} of his horse and cart by the Germans and had neither job nor income. Then he got a job at the district police station, and he occasionally brought home some food, scraps of which would fall to Milija and her mother. But they were bitter to swallow, these scraps. When drunk the carter held forth in foul language about the spongers he had on his back. In the presence of both old women he would make insolent passes at Milija, after which his wife would nag at her all day long. Then, by a whim of fate, Milija ran into a girl-friend who had been with her at an officers' ball in the country. Through her she made the acquaintance of a plain-clothed policeman, whose

main task it was to catch out the peasants taking milk products and other foodstuffs to and from Riga along the Petrograd highroad or the Bikernieki road. He was a Latvian but would speak nothing but German. Having neither home nor family, he came to live with the carter. At first he slept in the tiny lumber-room together with the old mother and the boys, but soon he contrived to get a warrant on the strength of which he evicted the carter and his wife from the living room and settled there himself. He was neither proud nor mean, and if he had had a good catch there would be a bowl of steaming hot potatoes on the table and a plate of meat. Milija would sit on the bed and watch him eat, while her mother and the carter's family would peep in at the door. When he could eat no more, and had examined every bit of meat to make sure he had not left any of the tender parts, he would call to Milija:

"Come along now. There's still plenty for you."

Milija at once took his place. There really was some food left, and she took a piece of meat with both her hands and dug her teeth into it gnawing it clean to the bone.

Meanwhile the policeman sat on the bed hiccuping and poking his teeth with the nail of his thumb as he watched her. Though considerably thinner and decidedly the worse for wear, she was still rather young and pretty. When she had finished, there was still a scrap of meat left on the plate and some potato in the bowl, so they let in those who were poking their heads in at the door. The two of them then sat on the bed watching them fall to, almost snatching the bits from each other's hands. When everything was devoured they left the room, and he said to Milija:

"You stay and clear away the dishes."

She collected the dishes and was about to leave when he stood himself in her way and locked the door. She got

into a flurry, because he was very repulsive to her, and yelled and finally forced the door open. But how long could it go on like this? There was not a job to be found, and even if there were, she had got out of the habit of working. The bread you got on your food cards was mixed with saw-dust and rotten potato and had sometimes such a nauseating smell that you could not take it into your mouth. The two dresses and blouses as well as the hat were sold, and she walked about looking like a beggar. And there was nobody you could get anything from, nobody who could do more than grub up enough potatoes to feed his own body. The Germans had confiscated everything, they had their spies everywhere, were prying into everything. The plain-clothed policeman, on the other hand, always had enough to eat. And so, he got his own way with her.

More than once Milija came very near to jumping into the Daugava or throwing herself under a railway engine, but soon after Christmas she and her mother got themselves employed as dishwashers at a soldiers' canteen. The wages were next to nothing, and the work was back-breaking. But you could bag a piece of bread now and again, or get a plate of thin beet-root soup. The two women took part in the demonstration demanding peace and bread. Milija got through it safe and sound, but her mother was run over by a German security policeman on a bicycle and was laid up till April. As soon as she recovered a little they set out on their way to the Brivuls' and in three days they were back home.

All that was left of their farm was the little bath-house and the cellar underneath the outhouse. The bath-house was occupied by the Lapin couple that had returned from Russia, and had also somehow got by a horse, and brought back the Brivuls' cow they had taken with them. With the help of the *Amtsvorsteher* Milija dispossessed the Lapins of the cow, and the three of them—the two

women and the cow—took up quarters in the cellar, where the wind blew through the holes the fire had burnt in the door, and the rain seeped through the roof. They dug up a little garden plot and planted two pounds of beans and the few potatoes the Germans had left in the field. They made soup out of sorrel and goose-foot, and put the oat and barley rations the Germans allowed them through the coffee mill, and quarrelled day after day with the Lapins, who could not get over the loss of the cow and were itching to oust them and keep the place to themselves.

Thus they existed throughout the period of Soviet power in Latvia. But together with the hordes of von der Goltz came the tall ensign. He had done his share in Yudenich's armies and covered the whole way from Estonia to Germany. Sick and tired of vagrancy and roughing it, he did not follow the Germans to Cesis and back across the Daugava, but stayed behind in the cellar with Milija and her mother. He had a horse and a bit of money, and when Bermont's armies were driven out of the country, he married Milija and took to farming. To Milija he was neither particularly attractive, nor really repulsive. But who was she to pick and choose at a time like this? And could she have managed without a man? Mamma was particularly in favour of this marriage, for with the ensign as her son-in-law her hopes revived of reverting to the good old times. Every other day she would call at the Velens' farm to speak of her great prospects to Mare, who was living there with Lukstin the tailor in a little shack they had put up out of boards ripped off the trench walls.

"His father's got a small estate in the Smolensk gubernia. One hundred and fifty dessiatins, and three horses, and twenty milch cows. As soon as the roads to Russia are open he'll go there and bring some back for us. He wants to take up horse-breeding, and start a small peat industry. . . . He simply worships Milija."

Mare took a rather sceptical view of the whole thing.

"We've seen them before, this kind of horse-breeders and peat producers. He'd better get a couple of cows and plough up some more of the fallow land, so you're not left without bread again next year. It's not so easy to feed three mouths.... They say he's got a wife and children in Russia."

Mother Brivul got all flurried on hearing such dastardly slander.

"Of all the lies! As though he wouldn't have told us so. He just worships Milija, and he's very good to me too."

She made the round of the pagast contending with these malevolent rumours.

The ensign tucked up his sleeves and set to work. To start with he turned the Lapins out of the bathhouse and made them live in the cellar, charging them such a rent that he and his family were provided with bread and their cattle with fodder. For the time being he shelved his plans for horse-breeding and peat-producing, for he had a whole succession of other plans, one excelling the other, and every new day added a new one. He leased all the meadows and best fields partly for money, and partly in return for half the yield, leaving only a tiny plot for himself. The first summer he put about two acres under cucumber, the next he tried tomatoes and then chicory. Neither the cucumbers, not the tomatoes, nor the chicory brought in anything, so he sold the Brivuls' birch grove as a felling site and cashed in a handsome sum, which he invested in three pairs of boots for himself, and a raincoat, and a hunting rifle, and a spring carriage.

His kindness towards Mamma did not outlast the wedding, after which everything changed—his voice, his manner, his attitude. Was he the master of the house, or was he not, eh? Or was he to be ordered about by women-folk? If they wanted to eat their bread, they had better

not laze about over the stove. The master knew everybody's duty.

"It's not our way of life, that the master should work and the women bask in the sun. In our parts the master's the master, and a woman's a woman."

He was inexorable in his principles. He himself never stirred a finger, because he had never done any work in his life and did not know how to. Milija put the horse to the spring carriage and he drove off to see various neighbours on business. Mamma grew haggard and slovenly and complained of pains in her side and nausea. Milija had a child and would do no more than look after it. When the baby began to squeal in the little bathhouse, the ensign took to staying away most of the time. He would come home and have his meal, then sling his rifle over his shoulder and go out hare hunting. He arranged a private den for himself in the loft, and every morning Milija and her mother would come and listen at the door to find out whether he was there or whether he had spent the night elsewhere.

It was not so often now that Mamma managed to slip across to Mare and pour out her heart.

"The way he swore at me this morning! The way he swore! I've never heard such language in all my life!"

"That's the last straw!" she said on another occasion. "He's beaten her! My dear, with his own boot. You should see her poor back. And as if she'd done anything wrong! But just like that, for no reason at all. He didn't like her tone of voice, and just went off the deep end. He's a real brute, he is!"

Milija, however, never complained. Nobody ever heard a bad word from her about the ensign. Asked how she was faring, she would answer that everything was fine, couldn't be any better. She did not even put her foot down when in the middle of the summer he made some kind of contract with the Lapins, sold the horse, the cow, the

spring carriage and ordered the women to make ready to move to Riga, where he had got a job as a tram conductor. He would earn some money, he said, and then open a tobacco shop in Alexander Street.

They lived in a basement in Jauna Street just by the Daugava market. At first it really seemed a little better than before. For some time, the ensign would come home straight after work, very pleased with himself, telling them how much money he had made selling used tickets. But very soon he got as tired of this as he had got of all his previous ventures. He would come home drunk, complaining how unfair his bosses were and of the unbearable working conditions. From the bottle he brought with him he drank and offered to his wife. Her child had died and she was expecting another in six months. She drank with him willingly and got so used to it that she took to stealing the bottle from his pocket. Then one day they got to know that the police were after him for the building material the government had allotted to the Brivuls' farm, and which he had sold. So he disappeared in the dead of night without a trace. Rumours reached them that he had secretly crossed the frontier and made for Bulgaria where Wrangel was ~~mustering~~ forces for a new intervention against Russia. But nobody could confirm this with any certainty.

Milija and her mother might have gone back to the country. But how would they launch a single-handed struggle against the Lapins who were back in the bath-house and had made a new cowshed and boasted they had bought the Brivuls' farm off the ensign? Milija might have found herself some work in Riga—she was still young and strong enough to work. But she had grown so utterly slovenly and listless, as though she had been put through a mill, and then churned six times over. There was not a scrap of will left in her, nor a trace of commonsense. As long as her mother held a job packing old rags they had

enough for a meal a day, and an occasional drink into the bargain. But when the mother broke down and was unable to get up from bed they lived for two days without sustenance of any kind. At about ten in the evening Milija went out into Elizabete Street and walked towards the park. Till twelve o'clock she strolled back and forth between Alexander Street and Suvorov Street, but nobody accosted her. When the opera and theatre public had dispersed she finally chanced upon a gentleman in a cloak and opera-hat. She took him home, but not before she had made him get a bottle of vodka at the hotel. At home she sent her sick mother into the kitchen and entertained her guest in the little basement room.

In the morning she could have died from her splitting headache and terrible nausea. But since she did not die, she had to get up and try to live, though she did not know why and what for. Putting the empty bottle in a corner of the room, and leaving the paper with the scraps of sandwiches on the table, she unlocked the kitchen door and went out into the street. There was a public house right on the corner, with a green and yellow notice board. This she entered and asked for a half-bottle. She had money. She could afford all the drink she wanted. As she sat in her corner she wondered why the bottle neck trembled and clinked against the glass.

8

The summer of German occupation Peteris Velen spent near Cesis working for a rich farmer. But when the Germans reached these parts they began to chase him down, for the technician had not forgotten him. He escaped to Gulbene District and got himself a job as a lumberjack. A tree crashed down upon him cracking three of his ribs, so all through the Soviet period and the Bermont rule he was more or less bedridden, spitting

blood and consulting physicians and quacks. He was still very thin and shaky when he returned to Veleni, only to find himself in a quandary. Mare and Lukstin the tailor had started building and, for better or for worse, were taking care of his old father, who was almost blind by now. The Germans had deported him to Riga, and later on, when he had got out of the asylum, he had served at an inn, assisting the street-sweeper. What had become of the cripple during that time nobody knew. Peteris left the Velens' farm to Mare and her tailor and went to Riga for a year. Somebody he knew from the old days, when he used to come to Riga to sell meat, got him a job as a night-watchman at the market. It was not a good job. Walking about all night exposed to the cold ruined his health completely. Everything he earned was spent on doctors and medicines. To make matters worse, he somehow got himself charged with some crime and was locked up for six months.

He left prison with neither money nor shelter. He could not even go to the country. And if he did, what would he do there all by himself? The street-sweeper his father had worked for put him up for the night, but in the morning told him to get out and never show his face there again; his master was very particular. Peteris stepped out into the street. He stood five minutes at one corner, ten minutes at the next. Moving along slowly he gazed at the rich display in the shop windows, his mouth watering. The gnawing pain in his side would not stop. A pinkish fluid gathered in his throat. His mouth felt parched as if he had not tasted water all day. On the corner there was a public house with a green and yellow notice board. He entered it. There was a woman at the corner table with a half-emptied bottle in front of her. He recognized her at once. It was Milija Brivul. Lounging up to her, he doffed his hat.

"Good morning, Milija!"

She looked up, and with her old flirtatious little toss of the head replied:

"Good morning, Peteris!"

They shook hands as though they had only parted the day before. Peteris was seized by a fit of coughing, but when he got over it he puffed out his chest.

"So you're in Riga?"

"Yes, and you?"

"So'm I."

She motioned towards a chair. "Sit down, unless you're in a hurry."

"Thanks, I might, just for a moment."

She filled the glass, and they drank in turn. The bottle was almost empty.

"Want some more?"

"Not a bad idea. But I've no money."

"Oh, I have! Two hundred or more. I'll call for some."

She called for another drink. Peteris fell greedily over the food they were brought. He had kept his hearty appetite. But he could not take much drink. After the fourth or fifth glass his ears were roaring and his tongue was thick. But he raised his glass with his old flourish and looked into Milija's eyes as he drank. She pulled her kerchief tighter about her head, trying to look as pretty as she could. When he had finished she asked:

"What are we going to do now?"

"Stupid!" Peteris even shrugged his shoulders. "We're going to the country, of course!"

"That's what I think too."

And it really seemed to her that she had been thinking of it all the time.

"Mare and the tailor have settled down at our place."

"And the Lapins at ours."

Peteris indicated with a nod that he knew. She did not have to tell him that. He put the stopper into the bottle.

"Can't drink any more. Take it home. Have you got a home?"

"I have. Just round the corner. Have you?"

"No. But I've got a father. Almost blind now. We'll go to your place."

"Certainly. I've got my mother. She's ill. . . . You go and bring him over."

He opened the door and waited for her to pass, and she bobbed a curtsey as she did so. She hung on his arm, and he led her along like a gentleman, staring proudly at the passers-by and making them step out of his way. Why not? Was he not Peteris Velen, and his fiancée the first girl in the pagast?

. . . The two old parents were sitting side by side on the iron bed. The young ones side by side at the table on which stood the bottle they had brought from the pub. A weak bulb veiled with cobwebs cast a circle of light on to the centre of the basement floor leaving the corners in the dark. Mother Brivul was pressing her hands against her sides. Old Velen was rubbing his fists against his eyes that saw everything as through a haze. Mamnia tugged him by the sleeve.

"You've taken our meat-chopper."

Father Velen spat. "And you've broken a prong on our harrow."

Peteris put down the half-emptied glass. His ears were roaring, but his heart felt light, and he was in high feather.

"What I say is, we've got to buy that stretch of marsh-land. Why should there be this wedge between our lands? We'll have one big field to plough."

Milija was of the same mind.

"We'll have it irrigated, and it'll make a fine meadow."

"A meadow! We'll turn it into a cabbage field, why a meadow. . . . And that tailor, I'll send him packing, the

beggar. Who's given him permission to build there, I'd like to know."

Milija banged her fist on the table.

"The Lapin had better collect their junk. I'm going to keep my home clean."

Peteris bent closer to her.

"And mind, no more school-teachers and dairy inspectors. We've seen the last of them."

"Let them go hang. And I'm not going to stand for Mare Saušna dangling after you."

"To hell with her, I say!"

And remembering that they had only met the day before, he bent closer still and kissed her. She blushed with happiness. He too was a little overcome and puffed out his chest.

"Two farms put together.... Why, it's going to be a real estate. A real estate!"

1923



He had come out into the porch of his little house. It was June 6 and sweltering hot although it was still early in the day. An old jacket was slung negligently over his shoulders showing a grubby shirt. His head was bare, and the large bald patch that was stranded across with grey hair glistened as though daubed with glue.

Sunshine flowed peacefully through the deserted street. On the street corner opposite behind the Town Hall loomed the tail-end of a demolished barricade, one of the last to be taken on May 26—a dog-cart turned upside down, the remains of a wardrobe, and fragments of a polished door. Clémence Perrier's eyes were turned towards it, and he was smiling. Good shots, those Versailles lads! On the 28th he had seen four bodies still lying there.

A window was carefully opened in the house opposite his, and Mme Lysandre peeped out timidly. She looked right and left, then straight ahead nodding to M. Perrier.

"Good morning, M. Perrier. Are they taking any more people away?"

She spoke in a hushed voice as though afraid of being overheard. M. Perrier's smile broadened.

"Nobody so far. Not so many left now. They've bolted like rabbits from a cabbage field, those gallant heroes! Makes you laugh, Madame Lysandre, doesn't it?"

But Mme Lysandre nervously waved her left hand so that her wide sleeve slipped down to her elbow baring a plump arm, as white as though it had been dipped in milk.

"Oh! M. Perrier! How can you! It's horrible! Why, I can still hear those machine-guns rattling in my ears. At night I bury my head in my pillow, but I can't go to sleep. Such a lot of shooting still. . . ."

With a little shriek she ducked under the window-sill, leaving her sentence unfinished. A volley resounded somewhere in the distance, followed by three or four single shots, and then by another two. To show how little he was impressed, M. Perrier stepped down into the street and, shading his eyes with his hand, scanned the distance with the air of an expert.

After a little, Mme Lysandre's head bobbed up again, even more timid than before.

"What was it? Why are they shooting?"

M. Perrier did not at once take his eyes from the horizon, to let Madame gain conviction of his authority.

"Must be round the corner of Belleville Street. That's where the military court has been set up, and they shoot and bury these dogs right there in the garden. I went there yesterday to have a look. But I couldn't get anywhere near the place. The railings are just jammed with people. Some take sandwiches along and stay all night so as not to miss the morning show."

Mme Lysandre shook her head.

"Good gracious, how horrible! I can't bear the sight of blood!"

"Why? It's the blood of those swine! What did they themselves do? Didn't they shoot hostages without a trial? Didn't they mean to starve us all to death, to kill the lot of us? You know, Madame, when they lead them past here I feel I could stab any one of them with my own hand, just to see him collapse right here outside my window, and the flies settle on him as though he were a dead cat on a garbage heap."

Mme Lysandre sighed.

"People have become so cruel. They can't all be guilty. Many must have got in among them by mistake."

"Nobody is sentenced without evidence. Each crime is properly investigated. They must be stamped out as enemies of civilization, of every respectable citizen.... Don't you read the *Figaro*? Just a minute, I'll get it...."

He dived into the house and re-emerged flourishing a newspaper.

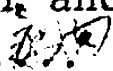
"Listen to what Thiers himself proclaimed on the 22nd of May at the National Assembly: 'Justice, humanity, order, and civilization have triumphed again.... But our children and the future of France demand utmost ruthlessness to the bitter end....' And listen to this: 'These people murdered and plundered for the mere pleasure of it. Now they are in our hands—are we going to say to them: Mercy!? These monstrous women stabbed our officers with their own hands. Now that they are in our hands—are we going to say to them: Mercy!? What is an insurgent? A wild beast, and no better than that. Therefore, onwards, true hearts! Courage! One last thrust, and we shall destroy for ever this democratic international scum!'"

M. Perrier banged his fist on the newspaper.

"That's what they say, Madame. And there's more. Pity you should take so little interest in the press and in

literature. Some days ago I read a great saying: 'While we sit in judgement over the federates the knife should never leave the executioner's hand....' What do you say to that, Madame? And our famous Dumas junior! They say he is now writing on the zoology of our so-called revolutionaries, and he says that their females, when they are dead, look very much like real women. And Alphonse Daudet, and Ernest Daudet, and Claretie, and Sardou, and Mendès! All these great patriots and glorious sons of our people stand as one man for Thiers, and Mac-Mahon, and Galliffet."

Mme Lysandre sighed again.

"All I'd like is to sleep soundly again, and be able to open the window in the morning. Those horrible flies come crawling in everywhere and get into everything. Yesterday my omelette smelt of carion, and I had to throw it away. And the unbearable stench. 

M. Perrier sniffed the air.

"Yes, it isn't pleasant. The trouble is, they bury them right here. In the little garden outside Bern's café there are supposed to be more than two hundred of them. If you walk from here to Champsfort's millinery and turn into the yard you can see all the arms and legs sticking out. They couldn't dig deep enough because of the thick roots of the chestnut trees."

He interrupted his speech and stepped back into his porch. From Montmartre came a rumble and clatter, and presently a cart as huge as an omnibus rattled by. It was drawn by a large and cadaverous horse, and holding it by the bridle trotted a tattered, haggard, barefoot man. His companion, similar in appearance but for a pair of boots on his feet and a hoe over his shoulder, was walking beside the cart. Two carabineers brought up the rear. The cart was inadequately covered with motley rags that exposed a filthy, solid mass.

M. Perrier followed it with his eyes until it turned the corner.

"You see, Madame, they've started removing the bodies, soon all the smell will be gone. There are thousands working at the Père-Lachaise and Montparnasse cemeteries. In the Parc Monceau just opposite Les Invalides the rain has washed up all graves, and the bodies are baking in the sun like herrings on a pan. Three hundred corpses were fished out of the Chaumont ditches, and they lay there decomposing for a whole week. You couldn't pass the place even if you held your nose. Last night I saw a fire blazing above the town. I thought to myself, those damned insurgents are at it again, but it turned out they had poured petrol over a pyre and were burning the bodies. In the St. Antoine suburb they're thrown into trenches they dug themselves, and in Charonne and Bamiolle they drop them down the wells. Girardin has written about it. There's no need to worry about epidemics, he says. Their filthy blood will fertilize our fields.... That's how it is, Mme Lysandre. Soon you and your young mademoiselles will be able to work with your windows open and smile at the passing officers."

He had noticed the fashion plates that Madame had pinned to her window again, and he rubbed his hands together and laughed.

"May God grant it. Clarissa returned yesterday. We're waiting for the customers. Jeannette hasn't come back yet. I don't believe it, but Clarissa assures me she was straying about in the Bois de Boulogne with the revolutionaries."

"Quite likely, quite likely indeed. The other day near Lamiyette, on the way to Versailles, I saw three of her sort in a crowd of insurgents. They were all tied together with a rope, and their breasts were bare, and they were all plastered with blood and dirt. They were supposed

to have been with the men on the barricades. They've all gone raving mad."

"What about you, M. Perrier? Why aren't you opening your shop?"

M. Perrier looked back at the white wall with its inscription in blue letters: Wine, Liqueurs, Fruit, Delicatessen. It looked strangely forlorn above the shuttered windows. He turned away.

"I got up at six this morning intending to open. But it isn't so easy. In the first place, I'm all by myself. You may know that my Lucien's gone over to the insurgents. Or perhaps he's hiding somewhere nearby. They couldn't hold it against me, of course, but still. . . . If anybody should come in and ask about him what am I to say? How can I answer for him? And do I have to? He's neither a relative of mine nor a friend. Besides, I'm worried about Auguste. He was with the Versailles army, I know that for sure. Now they're in Paris, all of them, but he hasn't turned up. If he were here he wouldn't have made me wait."

"Ah, don't worry so much. They've got plenty of work on their hands outside Paris, too. Auguste is a good son, but he's a good soldier too. You may be sure he's dealt with a dozen of those revolutionaries."

M. Perrier's face lit up again.

"I'm sure he has. It's always such a pleasure to talk to you, Madame Lysandre. Would you do me the honour to come over to my place at about five in the afternoon? I've still got a bottle of old Bordeaux hidden in the cellar, and some Dutch biscuits. . . ."

But before Mme Lysandre had time to say yes or no a rapidly moving crowd appeared round the corner. M. Perrier stepped out of their way into his porch again.

Six hussars in double file with rifles at the ready were followed by an officer on a white horse with a leather whip in his hand. On either side of him was a man in civilian clothes. In the middle were five emaciated, ex-

hausted-looking men dressed in rags and tatters. Two of them had grey beards, while one was a lad of about fifteen. His face was streaked with recent tears and he kept swallowing hard as though he were choking. One of the bearded men had his hand pressed against his chest. The sleeve was soaked in blood, which was trickling slowly on to his blue blouse and knees. His eyes were deeply sunk in their dark sockets and his mouth was contorted with pain. The other three tottered along supporting each other with their shoulders and trying to keep clear of the horses' hoofs. But they held their heads high.

The officer was talking to the men in civilian clothes and they passed M. Perrier without seeing him. But M. Perrier stood transfixed, fascinated by the white horse's legs that were spattered with blood to the fetlock. When they were gone he began to gesticulate madly to Mme Lysandre.

"You saw that, didn't you? They must have crossed La Place Voltaire. It's flowing with blood. They know no mercy, those gallant boys...."

And suddenly, dashing to the middle of the road and flapping both arms like a drake trying to take off, he yelled in a shrill, unnatural voice:

"Long live our lawful government! Long live Thiers!"

And immediately he darted back again and across the porch into the hall of his house as though he had forgotten something that he needed urgently. He did not notice one of the men in civilian clothes look round, stop, say something to the others, and walk back towards the house. The man stopped to read the inscription on the wall, looked in at the open door, then went over to the barred gate and rattled at it as though to make sure the house had no exit at the back. As he was passing the porch again M. Perrier appeared in the doorway.

"Why, it's you, Jonard! Hullo! What're you doing here? Haven't you opened your meat and fish shop yet?"

M. Perrier knew that Jonard had served in the social security delegation of the Federate Central Committee as recently as April last. He had wormed his way into it with the help of a prefect of the police he knew, also a secret agent of Versailles. M. Perrier also knew that it was at the surrender of the Issy fortress that Jonard had changed sides and become one of the best and most assiduous among the spies engaged in hunting down the revolutionaries. But he did not wish to bring it all up, or to mention the fact that he had just seen Jonard driving the prisoners along. It struck him as rather odd to see Jonard stop in the middle of the road frowning at him as though he had never seen him before.

"Won't you step inside? I've still got some good old Bordeaux in my cellar, and some Dutch biscuits...."

But with a last look at him and at the wall, Jonard turned on his heel and was gone without uttering a word.

M. Perrier's arms spread out helplessly and he muttered in a voice the other could not have heard even if he had listened:

"I've got all sorts of things stowed away. I hid everything from those bastards. They couldn't get much out of me. I've always been on the side of law and order...."

Jonard disappeared round the corner. Mme Lysandre's window was shut. Deeply perplexed, M. Perrier returned to his hall.

He felt baffled and vaguely apprehensive. Why this odd behaviour?

Was not he, Clémence Perrier, a loyal citizen, among the first to welcome the government armies at the gates of Saint-Cloud? Suddenly his excitement turned into anger. The blackmailer! The speculator! What did he think he was? He of all people, who used to supply rotten fish to the pensioners at Les Invalides. M. Perrier unlocked the door into his shop. The heart-shaped holes in the shutters admitted dim shafts of light. In the semi-darkness

the empty shelves behind the counter looked eerie. Actually, M. Perrier had nothing to do in the shop, but he did not know how else to occupy himself, so he set to sorting out the empty tins, rotting oranges, and old paper bags.

There had been some light coming in at the open door too. Now a shadow fell across the floor, and the sound of a footfall was heard. M. Perrier turned round. Several figures loomed in the doorway. He bent forward to see who they were and froze to the spot. Four bayonets gleamed faintly unmistakably pointing at him.

"Hands down! Silence! Get out!"

The voice had the twang of rusty iron. There could be no question of disobeying. M. Perrier automatically did exactly as he was told, keeping even his head rigid.

In the corridor he was surrounded by four soldiers in red trousers and a man in civilian clothes.

"Clémence Perrier?"

"That's right. Everybody here. . . ."

"Shut up. Speak when you're spoken to! Wine and fruit dealer?"

"And delicatessen. You can read it on the wall."

"Why is your shop closed?"

M. Perrier found difficulty in answering this at once. He raised his hand to scratch behind his ear, but it was struck down with a heavy rifle butt.

"You've been warned! No moving! If you try again we shall use the bayonet! No ceremonies with these bastards!"

M. Perrier could not believe his ears. No, it was his eyes he could not believe. This was the same Jonard whom he had known for years, cross-questioning him as though he were an utter stranger, as though he were one of *them*! He was about to say so, but the slightly squinting wicked grey eyes checked his speech. And four bayonets were pointed at him menacingly.

The cross-examination continued:

"You gave your furniture to the insurgents for barricades?"

"They took my chest of drawers and the wheel-barrow from my yard."

"Where's your son?"

At this M. Perrier made himself as tall as his moderate stature would allow him.

"You ought to know better. My son serves in the government forces. Where have you sent him? I've been expecting him home."

Jonard's lips curled into a terrible smile as he nodded to his companions.

"What cheap comedians they are, all of them. They think they're dealing with idiots. Take him outside. We'll see whether there's anybody else hiding behind these shuttered windows."

At first M. Perrier was utterly dumbfounded. They pressed him with his back to the wall, two of the soldiers so close in front of him that their boots touched his feet and their bayonets almost stuck into his sides. There he was, like a bug plastered to the wall, his glazed, unseeing eyes turned upon Mme Lysandre's window. The blazing sun was beating down upon his bald head. It was some time before he grew aware of the sweat that was dripping off his face into his shirt collar. Eventually his stupefaction passed off. The first thing he noticed was Mme Lysandre and Clarissa peeping from behind the curtain, then the baker's little girl darting by on the other side of the pavement with an empty basket hooked on her arm. Finally his look encountered two pairs of angry eyes that seemed to stab at his face. He became aware of a smarting pain in the wrist where the first blow had fallen.

His anger was gone too. He could think calmly and weigh his chances. Had he the right to feel irked about a slight misunderstanding at a troublesome time like this?

It could occur so easily in this crazy whirl of events. How those smart lads had fought to free Paris from the federate savages! Their females stabbed our officers in the chest. . . . How could you expect them to observe delicacy of manners? Those confounded brutes were to blame. M. Perrier's hatred of them grew fiercer than ever.

They were going to take him away now, that was obvious. Very well, he would not resist. No question of insubordination to government orders, or to those who carried them out. But as soon as he got there he would demand to see the officer, or the commandant, or whoever there was in charge. . . . Ah, he could do better. He used to supply General Galliffet himself with wine. He would say—I am not merely a loyal citizen, I am even a royalist. I forgive these two boys, and those other two as well. My own son's a soldier, and for all I know he may also have committed a mistake in these days of turmoil. I forgive you, Liberators of Paris, in the name of my Auguste. And when they had saluted him and gone, he would turn to the fifth man. "I'm afraid, Jonard, I cannot say the same to you. Not to mention the times when you forged signatures and sent tainted meat to Les Invalides, I must say you are simply unworthy of the office entrusted to you. I cannot allow you to continue in it. You will forgive me, but I must send you back to your meat and fish shop. . . ."

A low moan brought him back to reality, and he realized that it had broken from his own lips. Red-hot coals seemed to have been heaped upon his head. His wrist was smarting. The voice with the twang of rusty iron came from the porch.

"Any other hiding place here? Out with it!"

M. Perrier smiled, and thrusting his hand in his trouser pocket produced a tiny little key.

"This is the key to the cellar. The stairs are at the back of the house, level with the kitchen. You'll find the trapdoor in the left hand corner underneath a wine barrel. It's

covered over with sand, just lightly, you don't need a spade to remove it."

When Jonard had taken the key and disappeared in the house M. Perrier shouted after him:

"Careful how you lift it! One hinge is broken and it may come down on you."

He smiled contentedly at his own cunning. He had not told them what was hidden in the right hand corner under a pile of empty cheese boxes. Why should he show them everything? At five Mme Lysandre was coming for Bordeaux and Dutch biscuits. . . . What time would it be now? Better not ask *them*. M. Perrier glanced at the sun. Might be eleven—certainly not more than twelve. . . .

"Hands down! Attention! Forward march! Fire if he tries to run!"

Again M. Perrier obeyed the orders purely automatically. The four guards had closed in on him. Their bayonets glinted at either elbow. Their heavy soldiers' boots thumped at his very feet. It was difficult to walk. Yet as they turned into the middle of the road he glimpsed Mme Lysandre's face, as white as the curtain that was hiding it. Very calmly, and imperceptibly, he gave her a slight nod. At five, over their wine and newspapers, there would be plenty to tell. . . . No harm in a little adventure like this. . . .

M. Perrier walked between his guards, his head proudly raised. But when here and there he caught sight of a face peeping out timidly from behind a window-frame he felt ill at ease. For all he knew some stranger might take him for a criminal. . . identify him with them. Damn those federates and revolutionaries! By now he hated them with every fibre of his body.

Every time his foot twisted on the cobblestones and forced him to stop, a painful prod in the back urged him on. It was something hard, perhaps the muzzle of a revolver. What if the revolver went off? Where would the bullet hit him? The thought made him shudder. But he did

not dare look back and warn them. It was probably forbidden by law to look back. Good lads, they did as the law bid them do. This federate rabble carried all the blame.

Now the road was climbing and M. Perrier recognized one of the rises near Montmartre. They did not go much farther. Halfway up they stopped outside an elaborate building with a balustrade in front of the first-floor windows. The basement windows were barred with twisted iron rails and half sunk below the pavement, which higher up the street covered them completely, leaving a narrow area in front.

The guards swung round and M. Perrier with them. The iron-bound gate opened with a clang. He stepped into a yard that was hollowed out and filthy with horse dung. It was crowded with soldiers and armed civilians. Nobody made way for them, nobody took the slightest notice of them. M. Perrier looked about in vain for somebody he could ask where to find the officer or commandant. They did not give him much time to look. He found himself outside an open window sunk halfway below street level and ~~cordoned off~~ by armed soldiers. The cordon parted. M. Perrier stopped in bewilderment. He wanted to turn round, but a powerful shove in the back sent him staggering into the space between window and pavement. Pressing his palms against the roughly plastered wall he managed to keep his balance.

"In you go, you dog!"

The words were followed by a heavy blow in his back, and a smart slap on his bald head which made his ears tingle and sparks dance before his eyes. With a gasp M. Perrier toppled into a deep dark hole. He felt himself land on something soft, he rolled over it, slipped into a hot and stinking gap, and—felt nothing more.

M. Perrier opened his eyes. About a metre and a half above him curved a grey vault thickly covered with dust

through which a large fat spider was creeping. M. Perrier wondered whether it would stop for prey or head straight for the dark corner. Before he could make sure, a stabbing pain in the back of his head made him turn over on his side. As he moved his head a wisp of clotted hair snapped away from the flagstone, causing a scorching pain that seemed to fill his whole head and neck.

When he had turned on one side he realized what had woken him. A man lay close by, his head wrapped in a coat, his leg twitching as though to the rhythm of some strange music, each time thrusting his knee into M. Perrier's side. It was a bruised, sore, filthy leg only half covered by a torn trouser leg. Nauseated and dismayed, M. Perrier was about to turn over, but checked the movement with a moan. Tears gushed to his eyes. His head was like lead. On his right, some inches off the ground, two glazed eyes were staring at him.

"Stop fidgeting! Lie still!" he heard somebody say, but the voice seemed muffled in a haze. Presently he saw a large dirty hand wipe a dark stain off a forehead crowned with a mop of bristly black hair. Carefully M. Perrier touched the flagstone on which his head was resting. It felt warm and wet.

The mouth underneath the glazed eyes opposite curled into a grin.

"They've made a proper mess of you, haven't they? What did they get you for?"

Without deigning to reply, M. Perrier clenched his teeth to stifle a groan. This must be one of those accursed revolutionaries. Why tell him that it had been a misunderstanding, that soon an officer would come, or the commandant, to apologize and set him free? He would forgive those soldiers, but not Jonard. . . . His thoughts reverted to the old story and this brought him oblivion.

By and by the noises round him began to penetrate his consciousness. A hollow drone mounted to the cross-

vaulted ceiling, reverberating from every corner, then ebbed away again. There was a steady hushed murmur, like water lapping about a stone, punctured by groans and suppressed cries that might have been sobs. M. Perrier raised himself on one elbow. The vaulted section that was barely wide enough for four was chock-full of people. Some stood leaning limply against the wall, their bodies bent into its curve as though their backbones were broken, their hands groping for balance. Others were cowering at the wall, yet others embracing their legs, their faces pressed against their knees. But the majority were lying, on one side, or bundled up, or face down with hands outstretched on the stones, or on their backs as motionless as corpses. Opposite the window he could distinguish their faces, but farther away they formed a ghastly tangle of twisted forms and protruding limbs in a dark cave that seemed to extend into infinity.

The pungent, nauseating stench that beat into his nostrils and irritated his throat made M. Perrier sneeze. It was composed of human excrement, and sweaty bodies, and something resembling the acrid smell of a slaughterhouse, and of suburban garbage bins. The air was cool and humid, as in an old well. Beads of cold sweat stood on M. Perrier's brow. He had to clench his teeth to keep them from chattering.

The glazed eyes were watching him with unconcealed interest.

"How did you get here? I bet you supplied the Central Committee with food from houses abandoned by the bourgeois. Or did you serve as a janitor at the security committee? Fellows like you were clever at sneaking into places. And those idiots there let all sorts of bourgeois and provocateurs slip through. I s'ppose you were too slow off the mark to switch over to the other side. Or didn't you give away enough federates? Too late now, my boy! Now you're for it, we're all in the same boat. . . ."

M. Perrier's mind was weaving strange patterns. He saw himself standing in the sun outside his own house looking at Mme Lysandre's window. He remembered the Gates of Saint-Cloud where he had hailed the Liberators of Versailles. . . . The bitter hurt, the deep injustice of it constrained his throat. Then he remembered that he had promised Mme Lysandre to treat her to wine and biscuits at five. If he didn't get home in time she would be vainly knocking on his door. . . . M. Perrier gave a nervous jerk, but the immediate pain in his head forced him to keep still.

"Tell me, friend, what time could it be?"

The man glanced at the window from which a steady draught was blowing.

"Just before you woke a clock somewhere chimed three. Must be about four."

Through the hum and mutter of voices you could hear something like the chiming of a clock. But before he could finish counting it was drowned by a sudden noise in the yard. Angry curses, and heavy thuds broke through the clatter of hoofs and the rumble of wheels. The glint of bayonets flitted past the window.

M. Perrier heaved a sigh.

"Tell me, friend, how could I get to the officer or the commandant?"

"The commandant? You want to see the commandant? Are you all right up there?" and he tapped his finger on his forehead. "You can't get anywhere from here. Except, of course, to the Trocadéro, Versailles, or whatever slaughter-house they're going to take you to."

M. Perrier averted his eyes. Must be one of those thugs who have nothing to expect but a bullet or the gallows. But how humiliating, how terribly humiliating that he, a respectable citizen, should be bundled together with the cut-throats and vagabonds of Paris; that nobody should

take care of him, nobody come to free him. It was four. At five Mme Lysandre would be knocking on his door. . . .

The man on his other side was thumping him with his knee again. Furiously he flung himself on his back and at once a thousand little needles seemed to prick the back of his head.

"You ought to bandage up that mug of yours," his neighbour was saying. "You look a bloody mess. That was some whack they gave you. Where did they take you? . . . See if there isn't a handkerchief in your pocket. I'll give you a hand."

M. Perrier did not deign to answer. This fellow might imagine himself his equal. He lay gazing at the vaulted ceiling. The spider had re-emerged from its corner and was crawling back and forth. It had finished the warp of its web and was carefully filling in the weft. A pains-taking job. In the beam of light from the window the flies were gaily buzzing and flitting.

M. Perrier dozed off, but not for long. A terrible din started in the third or fourth section of the cellar. A key grated in the lock. The door opened with a creak. A throng of prisoners crowded the narrow doorway and those inside were roused. The sheaf of light that suddenly broke into the cellar fell upon glinting bayonets. An order was shouted angrily, followed by ugly curses. The thumping of rifle-butts mixed with cries of protest and groans. A group of prisoners were driven outside into the yard. Something heavy was hauled upstairs. Hussars' swords clattered over the stony steps. For a split second an officer's hat appeared in the doorway, and M. Perrier's heart beat faster. But it disappeared, the door closed, the key turned with a click. The muttering and whispering started again. M. Perrier's neighbour put his lips close to his ear.

"The third batch today. The first time we could hear

the report even from here. They must have done it right outside in the yard. Listen, we may hear it again."

Everybody was listening. All noises subsided into a gentle rustle, like the sound of a shower in a quiet avenue. But the volley did not come. The murmur rose gradually again, cut through by sobs and groans. Again his neighbour's lips almost touched M. Perrier's ear.

"Speak quietly, there are spies here. We found one out this morning. He kept cursing Thiers and Mac-Mahon, and all the other Versailles leaders. Some fools followed suit. They were taken out this morning."

The man's ceaseless talk infuriated M. Perrier. What did he, M. Perrier, wine and delicatessen merchant, care for the riff-raff of the Paris suburbs, the revolutionaries who had well deserved their bullets! He had always been a supporter of law and order, and of the rightful government. A misunderstanding could always occur....

Yet there was a gnawing sense of injustice in his heart. He clenched his teeth and closed his eyes.

When he woke again the window gleamed a leaden grey. The darkness was solid and heavy and seemed to press down on his chest. His stomach felt shrivelled up, his insides were writhing, and he had terrible heartburn. He was ravenous, like a savage, like a beast, yet all his life he had been moderate about food and drink. It made him feel ashamed of himself. But he was unable to fall asleep again. His neighbour had turned over on the other side and was probably prodding somebody else with his knee, for now and then an angry growl came from over there. It was quieter in the cellar than it had been during the day. The leaden twilight had closed all lips. M. Perrier's ear caught a crunching noise on his right, as though his neighbour were chewing something dry behind closed lips. Must be a biscuit.... M. Perrier's mouth watered. There was roast chicken in his pantry at home, and half a bottle of white wine.

He inclined his head towards the sound.

"Don't they give any water? And something to eat?"

The munching stopped. His neighbour laughed without opening his lips.

"It's only my second night here. I haven't noticed any signs of food or drink, but I'm sure it's just that the Versailles gentlemen haven't had time to send along the white bread, and roast, and wine. Tomorrow we're going to have roasted snipe for breakfast with spinach sauce and a bottle of champagne a head. Thiers is going to send it from his own table."

He gave a horrible chuckle, but suddenly checked it.

"Are you very hungry? I haven't got a bourgeois supper, but if you like. . . ."

Something hard and dry slipped into M. Perrier's hand. As he raised it to his mouth he could smell mildew. It was a bit of dry wheaten bread, sour and tasteless. It did not crunch in M. Perrier's mouth because he had no more than three teeth he could use properly. He rolled it over and over with his tongue until the spittle had soaked it, then swallowed. But his hunger grew more intense, and his thirst was terrible.

It was very dark now. One by one the prisoners dozed off. Some snored, others cried out in their sleep and jumped up. Many kept tossing about moaning quietly and scratching themselves, devoured by insects. M. Perrier was stiff in every limb, as though a heavy cart had crushed his body. For a while he squatted on the floor clasping his knees with his hands. Then he stretched out on his back crossing his arms on his chest and tucking his hands into his armpits underneath his jacket. The window was barely visible against the dark wall.

When he woke for the first time a clock was chiming. He counted ten, but had probably missed the first strokes. It had started to rain. He could hear the patter of rain-drops on the pavement and the gurgle of water running

along the wall and into the yard. Those who were sleeping at the window were grumbling and muttering and trying to edge away. But there was not an inch of free space, and nobody to take pity on them.

The second time M. Perrier woke in the small hours. His teeth were chattering with cold. A damp, icy flood of air was streaming in through the dark blue square of the window. Outside the guards were probably being changed. He could hear a command, the clicking of spurs, the clatter of swords and rifles, and the thud of heavy steps.

Then he sank into a dead sleep that was heavy with nightmares. Mme Lysandre had come, and they were drinking wine and nibbling biscuits so that the whole room resounded with the crunching. They ate and ate and never had enough. The crunching grew louder and louder, almost bursting his eardrums.

He woke with a start. In his sleep he had drawn close to his neighbour, curling himself into the curve of his body. He had woken because his neighbour had lifted himself off the ground and was kneeling on all fours. His bristly beard and face were covered with sand, his eyes were puffed, his purple face bloated, his dirty shirt open at the chest.

There was no crunching of biscuits. The door at the far end stood open again and a yellow streak of light fell upon the sleepers. In it a group of soldiers were driving two prisoners from the back of the cellar towards the exit, prodding them with their bayonets and thumping them with their rifle-butts. The prisoners were shackled together and they dragged each other along, stumbling over the sleepers and pulling themselves up again. The chain clanged and clattered, sometimes gently like the whimper of a dying child, sometimes sharp and sudden, like the yelp of a tormented dog.

"Good-bye, comrades! Long live...."

A heavy thud stopped the cry. The door fell to. You

could hear the men clumping up the stairs. Then just opposite the window, a volley resounded followed by the brittle crack of a revolver.

The prisoners in the cellar held their breath. A rat was heard scraping in the corner. M. Perrier's neighbour was kneeling on the ground, his forehead pressed against the flagstone, his hands stretched before him like a Turkish dervish. Now he rose, shaking his bristly mane of hair.

"Another roast for M. Thiers' table. That's the breakfast we send him."

M. Perrier turned furious eyes upon him. Jacobin! Damned revolutionary! You should be denounced for this! The thought sank into his brain like a weight of lead giving him no peace. If he denounced him he might get out of this sooner. . . .

He tossed about till midday revolving various plans in his mind. He was aching in every limb, his ears were roaring, his whole frame was shaken by convulsions. The thirst was unbearable. His tongue lay thick and heavy in his mouth. Suddenly a frenzy of fury lifted him to his feet. Tottering, clutching the air, he tried to balance himself in the narrow space between the one with the twitching leg and the young lad with flaxen hair.

"Bastards! Goddamned Jacobins! Because of you a respectable citizen has to suffer, wallowing in the dirt like a pig. . . ."

His voice sounded hoarse and thick. He did not recognize it himself. A heavy boot caught him in the hip, and he lurched forward over two bodies and hit the corner that was wet with last night's rain.

"What's that bleeder jabbering about? Must be a spy. Hit him on the head!"

But they did not do it. M. Perrier looked too miserable and pathetic. He collapsed helplessly into a puddle, clasping his knees with his hands and pressing his chin upon them.

Towards evening some of the prisoners were driven out into the yard. They were obviously chosen at random. M. Perrier was among them. Nobody knew what was in store for them. The gendarmes huddled them together in a bunch, freely dealing out blows and curses, and chained them off, holding their revolvers and swords at the ready. Soldiers sauntered by—smoking and scoffing at them. Men in civilian clothes popped up everywhere watching and listening. It was apparently on their instructions that two of the prisoners were separated from the crowd and driven off behind the house. When they resisted, blows were showered upon their backs.

M. Perrier was right in the middle of the group. He saw some officers passing by, but their faces were so haughty and cold with hatred that his courage failed him. Besides, there was no hope of pushing through to them. The slightest movement provoked merciless beating. The guards seemed to be waiting for an opportunity to wield their swords and rifle-butts. The young flaxen-haired boy had his nose and upper lip slashed with a sword, and together with the gush of blood he spit out two teeth. And nobody said a word in protest. The hussars laughed, clicking their spurs. The officers looked round with nothing but a flicker of contempt in their eyes.

M. Perrier had enjoyed watching the shooting of prisoners in the garden of Bern's café. But now that he was one of those who were being treated like cattle, he grew sick at heart. Yet he felt a certain relief as he drew a deep breath of the comparatively fresh air. He even composed himself to some extent when they were bundled out of the yard and driven downhill along the street.

If only they didn't lead them past his own house and Mme Lysandre's windows! But he saw that they had started out along the same route they had come. He tried to hide in the crowd, pulling his head in between his shoulders. As they passed his house he saw that the win-

dows stood open and the shutters had been removed. He could see the empty shelves in his shop, and a pile of rubbish in the middle. A corporal was lounging in his soft leather armchair on the porch, smoking a cigarette and flirting with Mme Lysandre and Clarissa opposite. Clarissa had donned a new blue blouse and was leaning with her breast on the window-sill, laughing and flashing her white teeth. "The hussy! A fortnight ago she took food to the federates on their barricades," he thought vaguely, and at once forgot about her as he gazed and gazed at his house, twisting his neck to see, until a revolver in front of his eyes forced him back to reality and he marched on in step with the others.

He was choking with suppressed tears. In his own special chair—with those filthy boots and a cigarette in his mouth! Even Auguste had not been allowed to use that chair when he had come home on leave. And here was he being marched along with the riff-raff of the Paris suburbs! If only he could meet somebody who would free him! This couldn't go on. Clinging to this hope, he cast his eyes about.

They were marched along crooked lanes and straight avenues. At first one thought possessed them all: where were they being taken? But starved and exhausted and wet as they were, they soon tired of thinking and shrank into themselves, listlessly dragging their feet with neither hope nor a desire to resist like so many cattle driven to the slaughter-house. The blows and curses were of little avail. The prisoners had grown impervious to them. Their progress gradually slackened.

The street was broad, yet presently the gendarmes started kicking and pushing them into the curb. A carriage came driving down the road carrying a general. The glossy, dun-coloured horses were trotting at an even pace. The general was obviously in no hurry. He had an extravagantly dressed lady at his side with a shaggy

little dog in her lap. All of a sudden an inhuman cry broke from the group of prisoners.

"Your Excellency! I'm innocent! Where are they taking me?"

A short fat figure with a bald blood-stained head was frantically straining towards him. The general threw him a cold cursory glance and, bending towards his lady, tickled the little dog behind the ear with his gloved fingers. The dog showed its teeth. So did the lady.

M. Perrier got away with a couple of blows in the chest and a specially painful one in the jaw. Then all attention was diverted by another incident. While the gendarmes were craning their necks towards the general, like a flock of geese towards a passing dog, a prisoner in a blue blouse had flung off his clogs , jumped over a low fence and darted across the little garden behind it. Three or four shots followed him, but since he was only slightly wounded if at all he made the fence on the other side and vanished in a dark side-street.

Pursuit was useless. One prisoner more or less made little difference anyway. Who was going to count them? A volley of invective and a shower of blows came down upon the other prisoners. The sun was dipping behind the tops of the trees, but the air remained unbearably close. A mist was rising from the puddles that had gathered the night before. A horrible stench of decay, sometimes fainter, sometimes heavy and astringent , came from the basement windows, the gardens, and the inadequately covered trenches behind the barricades. The prisoners were weary, their guards were weary. In the Champs Elysées they stopped to rest.

As though by command, the prisoners dropped down on the ground. Some lay flat on their backs utterly motionless with closed eyes and open mouths, as though they were dead. Others cowered on the ground looking

into empty space with bleary eyes. The Parisians interrupted their walks to come up and look at them.

A grey-bearded gentleman in a top-hat slapped a bewhiskered gendarme on the shoulder.

"Good work! That's a fine catch you've made. But why do you lead them like that, in a crowd? You should have tied them together and shackled them! About half an hour ago there was a batch of them passing here all tied to one another with a rope. Like pigeons on a telegraph wire—ha-ha! And the hussars had whips. Makes all the difference to their feet!"

Taking the cigarette from his mouth, he bent forward to inspect them closer. A grey-haired old man was sitting on the ground, his single bleary eye glued upon him, the other tied with a red rag. The face underneath the top-hat grew crimson.

"You swine! You scum! You cut-throats with your Delécluzes, and de Moulins, and Vermorels, and Verlaines! A red rag! The cheek of it! He still mocks at us, even now!"

He brandished his walking stick, aiming its metal point at the old man's good eye, but missed it, leaving only a red scar on the grey cheek. The gendarmes pushed him back, laughing. A young mademoiselle in high-heeled shoes with a parasole over her shoulder and as red in the face as her papa was prancing about like a young goat, yelling:

"Where are you taking these dogs? Why don't you shoot them on the spot?"

Moved by so much patriotism, the bewhiskered gendarme saluted her.

"Gladly, Mademoiselle! But everything in its own time. Death is nothing to these savages. They'll swallow their bullet as though it were a titbit from the table of a bourgeois."

Tears welled into Mademoiselle's eyes.

"What a pity! I've never seen these dogs die!"

From across the road a boy and a few prostitutes were whistling and pelting the prisoners with sand and mud. The guards did not interfere.

M. Perrier's teeth were chattering, he was shivering all over. He had crouched down on the pavement, hiding behind the broad back of a worker, distracted with fear. His cheeks were hollow and almost sticking to his gums. The flies were buzzing about his bald head, but it did not occur to him to drive them off.

They marched on. More and more onlookers were gathering along the pavements. Intoxicated with her victory, Paris felt exalted at the sight of her prisoners. Everywhere stood little groups of laughing ladies and gentlemen, enjoying themselves as though they were watching a travelling circus. The cafés were crowded. Drunken gentlemen came tottering out to splash red wine into the prisoners' eyes. Carried away by the general frenzy, the gendarmes swore, and cursed, and dealt blows right and left. A shot was fired. But nobody bothered to turn round and see who it was that had remained lying in the road with the crowd of idlers pouncing on him like birds of prey upon a carrion. Perhaps he had been bold enough to push away the fist that was aimed at him; or defiant enough to spit in the face of his tormentors and then calmly face the gendarme's weapon. Or perhaps he had simply had no strength left to keep up with the others and had collapsed on the bumpy road.

When they turned into the Versailles road they realized that they were taken to the Versailles prisons. A faint glimmer of hope lit the lustreless eyes. They would be brought before the military court. Whatever it was worth, it would give them the benefit of a trial. The sore, stiff, mud-covered feet moved quicker. The bowed heads lifted a little.

M. Perrier was gasping for breath. The blood had rushed to his face, fiery spots were dancing before his eyes, and he felt very giddy. If he dropped under the feet of the marching crowd it would be the end of him, so he propped his shoulders against those of his neighbours and kept pace automatically. They would never sentence him at Versailles. He hadn't done anything. Once more he recalled Thiers' words about fair trials. Once more he believed. He must not drop on the way, he must hold out a little longer!

Outside the Lamayette fortifications they were suddenly stopped again and hustled into two long lines. They looked about them in bewilderment, trying to guess at the reason. Presently a general appeared on horseback followed by a group of soldiers, rifles slung across their shoulders, two officers in front. It was Galliffet. He dismounted from his horse and paced slowly down the file of men. He was wearing a brand-new suit, apparently straight from the tailor's, and shiny patent leather boots. His white-gloved hand was swishing a riding whip. His face was composed, even kindly, and showed marks of fatigue. But his look was icy, searching, and alert, as it scanned the face of each prisoner in turn.

It seemed as though he were looking for somebody he could not find. Or perhaps he did not know whom he was looking for. Halfway down the line he stopped abruptly in front of a squat, bare-headed man with a bristly shock of black hair and vicious, savage eyes, who looked the type of a coal carter or garbage collector.

With a little sneer, the general swished him on the shoulder.

"My friend, what have you done with your hat? You must have had urgent business to do. Or were you in a hurry to get to Versailles together with the others?"

As the general stopped in front of him a bluish shadow

seemed to flit over the man's red face, and his knees shook visibly. His shoulder sagged under the light weight of the whip. But he collected himself at once and drew himself up straight. Little green flames blazed up in his glassy eyes.

"No, Monsieur, I had to take ammunition to the barricades on Boulevard Saint-Marseille."

The harsh defiant voice carried right down the lines of men. Galliffet's eye-lids twitched nervously.

"Ah, frankness is a commendable quality. But why do you have such black and bristly hair? You are not a Frenchman, surely. You must be Italian or Spanish."

"No more than you're a hero, Monsieur!"

The general flushed and made a brief gesture. The gendarmes fell upon their black-haired victim. Everything went dark before M. Perrier's eyes. He could have snatched his own bare head off its shoulders and hidden it under the prisoners' feet. But Galliffet was too excited to notice him as he passed, especially since he stood in the second line.

The very last in the line was the young boy with the flaxen hair and slashed face. He, too, was hatless. The whip swished down upon his head.

"Where are you from? You couldn't manage to make revolution in your Poland or Denmark, so you've come to amaze Paris with your horrible curls? Off with him!"

The boy drooped like a reed. But the guards were already on the spot pulling him up with hard hands and cruel kicks. A moment later they were propping him against the wall beside the black-haired man, who stood firm on his feet, with his arms folded. His eyes rested contemptuously on the swooning boy, then turned upon the soldiers whom the officers were already placing into position.

"Cowards! What're you trembling for! Fire away!"

"Forward march!" And the other prisoners were hustling

a little farther up the street, so that they could not hear the black-haired man's final curses. Only the shots reached their ears from the back.

The sun had set. Darkness was falling quickly. The prisoners dragged themselves along, too frightened almost to breathe. Any moment they might be stopped again and spaced out into lines. But there was no further delay, and very soon the lights of Versailles came into view.

There are four prisons in Versailles—the Stables, the Castle Hothouse, the Saint-Cyr-l'Ecole manège, and the Satory Docks. Many of the prisoners had been to Versailles before and knew it well enough, but in their present state of utter exhaustion, and the black darkness about, they could not make out where they were being led. They must have entered a narrow passage, for those at the back had to wait for the ones in front to proceed. Presently they found themselves wedged between what seemed to be a fence and a wall. Ahead, in the darkness, dimly outlined against the overcast sky loomed the silhouettes of huge buildings.

No sooner had they stopped than the men in front were jostled back, and those at the back driven forward with merciless blows and kicks, until they finally realized that they were being herded into a building. Groping along the wall they found a door, but in trying to enter came up against the bayonets of the guards inside. The few who managed to slip in were swallowed up by a solid mass of people. The air was sweltering hot, saturated with noxious smells like the poisonous fumes from a huge and invisible furnace. Those who had remained outside were luckier. Dropping down on the damp, cool ground they at once fell into a dead sleep. Some came upon a puddle and fell over it like wild beasts, jostling and pushing each other to lap up the slimy, sickening, stinking liquid.

M. Perrier was asleep before he hit the ground. It was a strange state of semi-consciousness rather than sleep. Part of his feelings remained alert, some threads of thought hovered in his brain. The silence of a grave seemed to enclose him, with only the beats of his own heart pounding like the blows of a hammer against a metal rod. Gradually these abated too, and he felt as though he were dying. But there was no fear in him, nor any will to resist. A heavy indifference was smothering his consciousness like a thick quilt.

Towards sunrise the prisoners were awakened by the sound of shots above their very heads. They sat up straight thinking they were being fired at.

"Down, you dogs! Down! Anyone who stirs will be shot!"

They fell flat as though they had been mown down. But their blurred eyes had seen enough. The camp commandant Captain Aubras had arrived with a fresh detachment of guards to relieve those who were tired out with escorting and executing. And while they were at it they had shot three of the prisoners there and then by the wall, either because they had already been sentenced, or because they had made an attempt to escape, or annoyed the guards. Possibly because Captain Aubras was feeling bored after the long night and wanted his morning entertainment, or had been haunted by nightmares and was getting his own back now. Who could tell? Nothing was impossible here.

M. Perrier had seen as much as the others. He had seen two of the men crumple up where they stood, and the third lurch forward very slowly, clutching at the wall with both hands as though determined to keep upright at any cost. Now he could be heard rolling about on the ground and groaning, his boots thudding on the flags like the beats of a battledore. This went on for a long time; to the prisoners it seemed an hour. At last the

thudding stopped, and the groans gave way to long drawn-out yelps. It was unbearable. The prisoners pressed their fists to their ears, but the yelps recurred at very long intervals, and there was no way of escaping them.

M. Perrier also pressed his fists to his ears, yet could not shut out the sound. His flesh felt bruised, his limbs twisted, the soles of his feet were burning like fire. But he was not thinking of this. The most terrible thing was that he had not died, that his head was clear and he could think. He thought and remembered, remembered and thought, distracted now and then by the piercing yelps.

The whole previous day rose before his eyes, with all its injustice, and humiliation, and fear, as though he had only just lived through it. He remembered that his dream had taken him to his own porch where he had flirted with Mme Lysandre's Clarissa, who had been leaning out of the window smiling at him. Those horrible dreams! Clasp- ing his head in his hands he wept bitterly.

When the salty tears trickled into his mouth and he swallowed them he realized that his tongue was swollen with unbearable thirst and his jaws were twitching convulsively. There was a stir of movement around him. The prisoners were allowed to rise, and M. Perrier tried to get up on all fours.

There was a sudden commotion among the prisoners on the edge of the crowd. They had discovered that the slimy water in the puddles they had drunk from the night before had a pinkish hue. Others before them had washed their wounds in them. Now something even more sickening occurred. A thick-set, bald-headed little man crawled up to one of these puddles and flinging himself down on his belly began to sip.

"Blast him! He's drinking his brothers' blood!"

But M. Perrier had already shrunk away, wincing and shuddering as though he had taken a mouthful of burn-

ing oil. He dragged himself back to the wall and leaned against it. The man they had shot in the morning was lying nearby face downwards. He had stopped yelping, and his body was rigid, but his legs were still twitching.

Somebody sat down at M. Perrier's side.

"He doesn't feel it any more, does he? He's unconscious now?" M. Perrier asked.

The man hesitated before he muttered:

"Maybe not. We'll know when our turn comes. They've invented this to torture us who're still alive. Death's the least of it, but this sort of thing. . . . I'll not be able to bear it. I'll go mad, you'll see."

M. Perrier tried to clasp his hand.

"Why d'you say that? We're in prison. We'll have an investigation and a trial. They'll let us go."

The man moved closer and looked into his eyes.

"You seem to have gone crazy already."

Actually, M. Perrier himself no longer believed in what he was saying. His faith in the court, in justice, in his own innocence remained unshaken, but there was something underlying it now that he could not explain. He felt as though his nerves had gone flabby, like soaked yarn, and the entire web of his old recognitions had become thin and frayed like an old rag. Even if they set him free now he would not be able to go on. He had suffered too much and seen too much.

He huddled up limply as though his bones were broken, and thought hard. The rising sun was beginning to glare with heat again. The long fenced-in yard did not catch the wind, but beyond it he could see the branches and broad leaves of a chestnut-tree swaying and fluttering. The three huge barracks stood sweltering in the glaring sun. Through the railing that covered a gap in the wall he saw the ivy-twined balustrade of an elegant building. Every nook and corner in the houses and cellars and yards was crammed with captured federates and citizens who had just been

picked up in the streets. Cowering, crouching, lying, and standing, all in a state of dull suffering. For some incomprehensible reason they were constantly shifted about, grouped and regrouped. Around them stood guards with cruel, bored and dull faces, ready to fire at the slightest provocation. Gendarmes and spies in civilian clothes sneaked about among the crowd. And like some giant cesspool this horrible slaughter-house resounded throughout the day with curses, and shots, the death rattles of the dying, the groans of the injured and wounded, and the wild shrieks of the insane. Men shot, men dying, men unconscious lay everywhere. Black clouds of flies hovered over the pools of blood. An unendurable stench permeated this cloaca in which human beings wallowed in their own excrement.

M. Perrier could not avert his eyes from the man who lay in a heap, his leg still jerking. How strange. At a distance he used to enjoy watching them shoot the Paris insurgents. A short, brisk report—and they would be mown down if they stood free, and if they were tied to stakes their heads would droop and all would be over. Some died with a last piercing curse on their lips, like that black-haired man at Lamayette. They had had the courage to revolt against the legitimate government, and they knew how to die. But never had M. Perrier imagined it possible that a man could be wounded and left to bleed to death with everybody watching. He closed his eyes. He could endure no more. Another moment of it and he would collapse in nervous convulsions.

At about dinner-time they brought a wooden trough filled with a thickish swill. Only the very healthy and the very hungry could eat it. M. Perrier painfully swallowed a mouthful. It made him even thirstier, but there was no water to drink. As he crouched in the broiling sun he saw nightmares though his eyes were wide open. He was in his kitchen scooping water from a full pail with a white cup and drinking and drinking. . . .

He roused himself with a loud moan and sat upright. Was this a nightmare too? He saw his assistant Lucien, rifle in hand, helping to drive in a new batch of prisoners. It could not be. Lucien had joined the revolutionaries! But thoughts about Lucien were soon driven from his mind by the consciousness of his own sore and aching body. It hurt him outside and inside, and his heartburn was dreadful.

At night they were herded into a cellar, even more terrible than the one in Montmartre. Even darker, even more suffocating and crowded. When they were taken outside in the morning it took them a long time before they could see again. Pushed and jostled by the guards, holding on to each other, they staggered blindly across the square.

M. Perrier found himself just outside the railing in the wall. Behind it was another, smaller yard, equally crammed with prisoners equally surrounded with guards pointing their bayonets at anybody who came too close to the railing or tried to exchange a word with an acquaintance on the other side. M. Perrier gazed at it without a trace of curiosity; he knew nobody. A dull indifference had come over him. His body was still holding out, but his spirit was dying.

Listlessly he watched the guards drive the prisoners away from the wall to the far side of the yard. A group of women was brought in, probably from one of the cellars or barracks. Some of them were fairly well dressed, but the majority were ragged and emaciated, with filthy bandages on their hands and fresh scars across their faces. The skirts of some were slit open in front and pinned together, showing their bare knees as they moved. One was holding a baby in her arms.

The red and hazy sun scorched down on them, the gendarmes jostled them about unable to place them in proper lines. An old white-haired woman with long skinny arms fell prone on the ground. The gendarmes grabbed her under her armpits and dragged her away.

It was about two in the afternoon. In the flats along the Paris boulevards the ladies who had returned from dinner parties and rendezvous towards eight in the morning were still asleep, and those whose husbands had risen from their featherbeds just before lunch were alone. The others began to gather at Versailles to look at the prisoners, just as formerly they had gone to the circus or the zoo. Long rows of carriages stood outside the gates. Some of the ladies would go home and return with their officer-husbands if a particularly interesting prisoner was brought in.

Captain Aubras was expecting his lady-visitors at about two o'clock. At half past two they were at the prisoners' camp. The commandant was walking in front, drawing their attention to objects of interest and explaining them, like an efficient manager of a zoo or a polite host. The ladies followed in a little bunch, clad in gay summer frocks, chattering and giggling and casting curious glances about them. Two girls in their teens brought up the rear, arm in arm, holding one parasol. It was their first visit to this place, and the curiosity in their faces mingled with surprise, fear, and disgust. Each held a tiny scented handkerchief in her free hand and kept pressing it to her nose.

The guards stood to attention saluting their distinguished visitors. The commandant tapped his boots with his whip.

"Attention, you dogs! In line! Pull in your stomachs!"

A cry of horror from one of the ladies made him turn round. It was Mme Fabre, the plump wife of the commander of the National Guard and Chairman of the famous Châtelet military tribunal Louis Fabre. She had almost stepped in muck, and was hopping up and down and shaking herself like a wet hen.

The captain smiled and bowed politely.

"You must be very careful, my ladies! They have soiled every corner here, wherever they've stepped. Just like the pigs they are!"

Screwing up her eyes and tightening her lips Mme Renard, wife of the editor of the democratic newspaper, put her parasol over her other shoulder.

"Oh, but how awfully savage! What utter lack of civilization! How little we have done to enlighten these creatures. We shall have to arrange for lectures on questions of sanitation and public hygiene in the suburbs. What's the good of order in the centre, when every summer the slums are a source of epidemics."

Mademoiselle Moulin, a banker's daughter, dark and thin as a Gypsy, went up to a woman with a torn skirt.

"Why did they arrest you? What have you done?"

"I nursed the wounded in the Place Voltaire."

Mademoiselle Moulin exchanged meaning looks with the others. Nursing with hands like that, and dressed in such a way! They'd all get blood-poisoning! What perfect idiots these people were! But Mme Loriot, whose husband was the mayor of the sixth arrondissement, was otherwise concerned.

"Where did you tear your skirt?"

A flush appeared beneath the dirt on the woman's face.

"The Versailles soldiers tried to rape me."

"What did you say?" cried Mme Fabre, leaning forward. "Our gallant liberators? And you have the face to say such a thing? They jumped into blazing houses to save the children!"

The ladies gathered about the woman. The two young girls under the parasol slipped past them and came close up to her. "Where? Where did you say it happened?"

Suddenly a shrill, throaty voice—unbelievable, almost impossible in this herd of tormented animals—rose from somewhere at the very end of the line.

"Why don't you send those little piglets home to bed? Isn't it enough for the big ones to enjoy themselves here?"

Some of the ladies could not suppress a gasp of amaze-

nient and dismay. It was the sort of incident the commandant feared most. They occurred frequently and were impossible to foresee, let alone prevent. They might create the impression that he was not capable of managing his animals. Surprisingly enough, however, he neither pounced on her, nor ordered the guards to deal with her immediately; probably he feared an even greater scandal. Red in the face, swishing his whip through the air, he shouted:

"Look down when decent ladies pass, all of you!"

A mixed expression of disgust and curiosity shone in the ladies' eyes as they searched the crowd for interesting specimens. All cheeks were flushed. What amazing creatures! Their savage customs and almost unbelievable vices were so exciting to read about in the daily newspapers!

The woman with the child suddenly lurched forward trying to kiss Mme Renard's hand. She must have singled her out because of the Bruxelles lace and her provokingly low-cut dress, and the diamonds on each finger of her hands, that made her look the wife of a Marquis or general.

"Mercy, lady! My child is pinning away. I haven't had a drop of milk in my breast for three days."

Mme Renard put on a grave expression and beckoned to the commandant.

"Listen, Captain. Why do you keep her here?"

But this was interference in his office. Aubras gave a cold shrug of the shoulders. How could he tell off-land? If she was interested she could make inquiries at the secretary's office of the martial court. These women were all prostitutes and murderesses, all in league with the men they had been following around.

"But couldn't you help the child?"

M. Aubras bowed obsequiously.

"They will be shot together."

He was very reluctant to let the ladies walk down

to the far end of the line. But they were very interested in the woman who had shouted a little while ago, and what could he do short of stopping them by force? Mme Fabre went up to her, holding her mother-of-pearl lorgnette by its golden handle.

"What did they take you for?"

Large and powerful, the woman towered half a head above the captain, her muscular arms crossed on her breast, her head bare, a deep scar across her forehead. She was the only one who defied the captain's order and refused to lower her eyes. Now they were flashing sparks of anger.

"To make it possible for you and your lovers to lounge about in your soft beds till midday!"

Mme Fabre again gave a jump like a splashed hen.

"Captain! Have you no bullets for such brazen strumpets?"

Again the commandant shrugged his shoulders and led the ladies away, closer to the railing. There had been cases before, when you could do nothing with them. It was unbelievable how shameless and spiteful these harlots could be. Usually the gendarmes took them away on their first night here. But this one was quite unmanageable. There was an excellent punishment cell here, which the prisoners themselves called the "lion's den." The most powerful and truculent of men could not stand it there for more than six hours. They would come out white as sheets and quiet as lambs. But this woman had been there for twenty-four hours and had emerged as though she had slept on a soft sack of straw in the loft. There was no way of shutting her up. Satan alive, that's what she was. In the barbarous Middle Ages they would have burnt her as a witch. But these were times of humanism, and her impudence had to be temporarily tolerated. A bullet? It could not be done now. True, she had been sentenced, but it had to wait. In the evening

she would be handed over to the patrol. Meanwhile she had to be watched with special care. There might be trouble if anybody were missing. The courts demanded the strictest order. . . .

Mademoiselle Moulin turned away sadly.

"What a pity! I've never seen it done at close range. The papers say they curse God, the government, and Holy Communion before they die. One man is supposed to have sworn at the priest and spat on the crucifix. . . . Couldn't you let us know, M. Aubras, when there's an execution on?"

"With pleasure, my ladies! It is not an infrequent occasion."

"Only not tomorrow! I'm busy tomorrow!" Mme Renard cried.

Aubras took his ladies a little farther. The trough with food had been brought, and the prisoners were jostling for it. Mme Fabre turned away in disgust.

"Like beasts! Just like beasts. . . ."

M. Perrier heard no more. A new batch of prisoners had arrived, and they trod on his feet and pushed him away from the railing.

Throughout the afternoon of June 8 blue rainclouds kept sliding along the horizon. The prisoners lay prostrate in the unbearable swelter. The downpour came towards sunset. They gathered the heavy raindrops in their cupped hands and sucked them up avidly. Where puddles gathered in the dirty hollowed-out limy ground they threw themselves down on their bellies and lapped up the muddy water. Sickening though it was, it slaked their thirst. Those whose insides were parched and ruined threw it up at once along with bloody slime. Yet most men drank and felt temporarily revived. Even the hunger lost its pungency.

But it was not long before the reaction set in. The rain lasted for about an hour and a half. At first its

cool caress fell soothingly on their scorched bodies. But soon they were soaked through, their filthy rags and tatters clung to their skins, the limy earth grew soggy and sticky. There was not an inch of dry ground to sit on. By midnight their teeth were chattering with cold, though they were huddled together like pigs in a pen. A sharp wind sprang up towards morning. The puddles shone pale yellow. The guards trotted to and fro to get warm, clattering their swords and splashing the prisoners with mud, angrier and fiercer than ever.

M. Perrier was squatting on the ground near the railing. He had pulled his jacket over his head and was breathing into it for warmth, yet he was shivering from head to foot. The dampness seemed to be seeping upwards through his body from the wet ground below.

Somebody shook him by the shoulder.

"M. Perrier! Can you hear me, M. Perrier!"

He lifted his jacket and uttered a little cry of horror. For all the dull indifference that was steadily gripping him, his life instinct had not expired yet. A soldier was bending over him, rifle in hand.

"Hush! Don't worry. It's me—Lucien."

M. Perrier stared stupidly at the soldier's face, which looked grey as calico in the morning twilight.

"You? A soldier? How did you get here? I saw you here before."

"I know you did. That's why I've come. I was afraid you might give me away. I escaped from Fort Vincennes when I saw that the federates had lost the game. I invented some kind of story when I got to Versailles, and they believed me and took me into their army. Now I'm afraid somebody might recognize me and give me away. It's teeming with spies here."

"Don't worry, I shan't. What for? You served me well. Help me to get out of this. I'm not guilty."

"D'you think all the others are? Forty thousand prisoners; who's going to check on each one? They're thirsty for blood, that's all it is. I might be able to help you. The nights are dark and rainy now. I know when the guards change and the gates stay open for a little. I'll try to let you know as soon as I can. Only not a word about me!"

But even this promise and the slender hope of escape left M. Perrier almost unimpressed. He had become too sceptical. Sadly he averted his head.

"All right. Give me a sign then. Though I'm not sure I have enough strength left. I've grown very weak."

Lucien bent closer to him.

"Hush, for God's sake! There's one more thing I wanted to tell you. . . . Auguste is here."

M. Perrier started.

"Aug . . . Auguste?"

"Yes. Right there behind the railing. I'm his guard. They're going to relieve me at sunrise. I saw you here yesterday and told him. You'll see him. You can talk to him if you pull yourself up a little by the railing. Hush! Not now. Wait till I'm gone. Don't tell him, but he's done for. He'll be shot in the morning."

He walked off, cursing loudly and splashing the prisoners with mud.

Moving very slowly and cautiously, like a shadow M. Perrier pulled himself up by the railing. An equally grey and bristly face with deeply sunk eyes appeared on the other side of the iron bars.

"Auguste! Aug-uste!"

And M. Perrier could not get another word across his lips.

"Shhhsh! Don't talk. Your voice is so loud. I'll tell you everything myself. I escaped from Belleville and went over to the Prussians, but they handed me over to Versailles, the bastards. . . ."

"How could you do it? Didn't you know what to expect if you deserted?"

"They made me shoot them, women and children too. I can't shoot children."

He suddenly ducked behind the wall. But it was only Lucien pacing up and down at a little distance, rattling his rifle and splashing mud.

Auguste's head reappeared.

"It's all right. It's Lucien. He'll help me to get away. He knows when they change the guards and leave the gates open.... How are things at home? How's Mme Lysandre? Is Clarissa waiting for me?"

"She is, of course she is...."

M. Perrier felt a lump rising to his throat, but Auguste's face lit up with a smile.

"She's a good girl. I promised I'd buy her a coral necklace this summer, and I'll do it too. And I'll take her for a drive in the Bois de Boulogne. I'll save up twenty-five francs and do it. And you'll talk to Mme Lysandre, so she isn't angry with me...."

M. Perrier was weeping. The tears blurred his son's face behind the railing, and he rubbed his eyes with his fists. But when they had cleared, Auguste's face was no longer there. A corporal was shouting something, and the guards were driving the prisoners away from the wall.

M. Perrier stayed where he was, and an hour later he was to witness a horrible scene.

Six or seven prisoners were put against the wall. Apparently they had been sentenced to death. Some walked unassisted to their places, but two had to be dragged along by the guards, and one of them was Auguste. M. Perrier knew it by instinct before he could see him clearly. Auguste was hanging limply in the grip of two gendarmes. A priest approached carrying a crucifix. It was so quiet that the rambling speech of the servant of God reached M. Perrier... "His lash falls upon every rioter and dis-

senter. . . . Harsh is his chastisement, yet it is just. . . . The last hour has come to return and beg forgiveness. . . . Woe to those who harden their hearts. . . . Everlasting fires of hell. . . . Fall at the Virgin's feet, accursed that thou art. . . ."

Was he really going to do it? M. Perrier's breath stopped. Don't give in to them! Be a man!—his heart cried out. But Auguste did not hear. Shrivelling up like a real coward, he collapsed on his knees. His head dropped upon the cross which the priest was pressing against his lips. Shame, anger, and grief darkened M. Perrier's vision. It cleared only when the volley resounded. As through a haze, he saw Auguste fall, his hands catching at air as though trying to hold on to the broken thread of life. M. Perrier caught one more glimpse of the body writhing on the ground before the soldiers' broad backs screened it from view.

Then a marvellous transformation took place in M. Perrier. Everything he had hitherto experienced, and thought, and cherished dropped from him like a crumpled sheet of paper carried off by the wind. The gendarmes. . . hunger and thirst. . . pain and humiliation. . . hopes and expectations. . . . Everything was gone, and he felt as though he stood in cool, lucid emptiness.

He lay flat on his back surrounded by a solid mass of prisoners. A jumble of moans, and delirious mutterings, and confused murmurs filled the air, occasionally cut through by the harsh shouts of the guards. M. Perrier did not care. He lay on his back, his clear, wide-open eyes fixed upon the void above, but what he saw there was a proud and upright man with a bristly black beard, and a woman with arms folded over her breast and eyes flashing hatred and contempt.

On June 9, a kind of show took place in M. Perrier's prison yard. They were not made to stand up, either be-

cause few would have been able to do so, or because the distinguished visitors desired to see the prisoners in their natural condition.

It was the famous writer Daudet. This was his third visit, for he was making a thorough study of the Paris underworld, trying to probe the depth of their moral iniquity, to understand the wild frenzy of the Communards, and to collect material for his latest literary production. Its forthcoming publication had already been advertised in the press, and liberated Paris was expecting it impatiently. Meanwhile the best circles were kept highly amused by his "philosophical anecdotes" published in the *Revue des deux mondes*, on federates in Purgatory. Daudet could count on winning the interest of wide circles of the bourgeoisie.

Holding his slouch hat and pocket-book in his left hand and a pencil in his right, he walked through the yards of Satory stooping even to look in at the barracks and cellars from which came a flood of heavy, pungent smells, the groans of the delirious and gangrenous, and the horrible laughter of the insane. A group of gendarmes headed by the commandant were walking in front, clearing the way for him and drawing his attention to specially interesting types. A host of journalists followed at his heels, all armed with pencils and note-books. Plenty of material here for witty sketches and humorous items.

A painful kick in the side brought M. Perrier back from the world in which he was immersed. ~~He~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~world~~ ~~in~~ ~~which~~ ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~immersed~~.

"Get up! The gentlemen want to talk to you!"

The gendarme drew aside his purple face, and M. Perrier perceived bending over him a gentleman in a long coat with a thick ~~tousled~~ mane of hair, a full beard, and dreamy, half-closed eyes. ~~He~~ ~~was~~ ~~in~~ ~~the~~ ~~world~~ ~~in~~ ~~which~~ ~~he~~ ~~was~~ ~~immersed~~.

"Won't you get up, my friend? We could have a little chat."

M. Perrier did not flutter an eye-lid. His grey eyes were cold and hard.

"How did you get here? I can see that you belong to the better circles."

And he turned round to note the impression his great power of observation had left upon the journalists. Then, addressing the commandant, he asked: "Is he always as spiteful as this, Monsieur?"

Though Aubras had never seen this little man before, he was anxious to show that he knew his prisoners as a father knows his own children.

"Oh, Monsieur! You cannot conceive the extent of their impudence. We provide them with food—not exactly delicacies, but still. We have a hospital, a doctor, medicines. But they prefer to stay here, wallowing in their filth. When they are sentenced to death they walk up to the wall as though they were taking the shortest cut to the Kingdom of Heaven."

"Indeed? How very remarkable. I must see that some day."

Again he leaned over M. Perrier.

"Why don't you want to talk to me? Are you not well? You must report to the commandant and he will take you to see a doctor. Why are you lying on the damp ground? It is very bad indeed for your health. . . . Is there anything you wish? Could I help you in any way?"

Suddenly M. Perrier's lips parted, and he dropped curtly and indifferently, as though it did not really concern him:

"Tell them to let me out of here. I'm not guilty."

The writer and the commandant exchanged a look, and both smiled.

"I'm afraid I can't do that, my dear friend. I can't do that. It's beyond my power. Your case will doubtlessly be investigated. No innocent man is sentenced. Not one! Perhaps I may offer you a cigarette?"

The silver cigarette case snapped open. But M. Perrier had already closed his eyes, and slipped back into his own world.

Suddenly Jonard was beside them.

"I know him. It is Clémence Perrier, owner of a wine and delicatessen shop. He gave his furniture to the insurgents for barricades. His son deserted from the army and was shot this morning."

The writer shook his thick curls wistfully.

"What unbelievable corruption! A well-to-do citizen joining up with those vagabonds and cut-throats. No doubt you were a good Catholic too, and yet you have brought up a godless son! A firm hand is what we need, a very firm hand. Pampering is a crime. Irresolution had been the disaster of France."

The gentlemen walked away. Jonard lingered a little, but M. Perrier paid no attention to him and most likely did not even notice his presence. He lived in a world where there was no room for Jonard and his kind.

But Jonard had kept him in mind. Two gendarmes came at nine o'clock on the following morning, roused him to his feet, and took him away. It never entered his mind to resist. He had no illusions about his fate, and he did not care. After what he had seen on the previous morning life held no value for him.

Colonel Charcot was the chairman of the military court. At Sedan two Prussian dragoons had chased him like a rabbit across the field until he had fallen off his horse and hidden under a little roadside bridge. Now he was getting his own back for his disgrace, by faithfully serving his country in court and sending two or three prisoners daily to the other world, and five or six to New Caledonia. Leaning his chest on his folded arms he peered into his new victim's face. But M. Perrier was not frightened by the bloated face and the malicious eyes. With sudden magnificent courage, his head raised high, he stood be-

tween his guards looking at the hunchbacked secretary who was nervously arranging the papers. His only witness, Jonard, struck a solemn attitude at the other end of the table.

"Your name?"

Colonel Charcot had a trick of blaring his first question to frighten his victim. It was not enough for him to sentence them. He liked to see them shriveled up and tremble. But this time he had miscalculated. M. Perrier merely gave a little shrug of his shoulders.

"That dolt over there must have it written down."

Colonel Charcot disliked prisoners who scoffed at court procedure. They made him fall out of his part and feel awkward. He had a second method ready for them. A grave expression settled on his face, and taking his elbows off the table he sat up straight.

"Citizen! I demand respect of the French Court and its officials!"

The little comedy began to amuse M. Perrier. A sense of humour he had never possessed stirred in him on this last day of his life. He looked about him.

"Where's the man you addressed as citizen of France? It can't be me. You've sentenced me along with all the others before our trial. This is not a prison. It's a zoological garden you demonstrate to the hypochondriac gentlemen of Paris. These here must be pupils of Torquemada's."

The chairman's face registered surprise.

"Were you treated badly? Why didn't you inform the commandant? Or the Appeal Committee?"

M. Perrier's eyes stabbed the colonel's face, and an ugly smirk twisted his mouth. The colonel felt himself losing his nerve. It was not often that he encountered such obstinacy. Perhaps this little man had not realized the situation. He whispered to the other two judges and motioned to the secretary.

That brute certainly could wield his pen. M. Perrier listened with great interest to the things he had allegedly done during the revolution. And that sneak had apparently always been about, standing right behind his back and making notes. So this kind of person also walked the earth! And he, Clémence Perrier, had never imagined it. For fifty-two years he had lived in Paris without noticing all the meanness, and falsehood, and ignominy, and cruelty about him. How sick he felt, how infinitely tired of it all!

When the indictment had been read the colonel glared at him but found neither ^{1, 2,} ~~fear~~ nor despair in his face. Then he decided to cut the matter short.

The witness was called upon. Jonard was obviously well practised. He spoke with easy eloquence, clasping his hands, lifting his eyes to the ceiling. He confirmed everything. Occasionally he would be carried away by his righteous indignation at respectable citizens who had forgotten all shame and honour and associated with the terrorists. When he came to mentioning the son of the accused who had become a deserter, he digressed into a tirade on the lack of patriotism in the upbringing of the French youth, and the need for reform.

The chairman gently called him to order and turned to M. Perrier:

"What do you have to say?"

"Only one thing: there is no lie that could erase a forged signature on a cheque."

He was also called to order. The procedure was hastened. The sentence was brief enough.

Again M. Perrier shrugged his shoulders.

"Is that all?"

What an impossible man! They took him out, but not back to the yard. He was conducted into a cellar and along crooked passages to a pitch-dark empty hole that reeked of death. Rats scurried across his feet and crawled along invisible beams above his head. The din from

the Satory yards reached his ear faintly like the hollow rumble of subterranean waters.

M. Perrier knew that he would only leave this place to pass into a different world. But ~~death held no fear for~~ him. Death held fear if you had something to cling to in life. He had nothing. All threads were broken. His outlook on life, his religion, his patriotism, his faith in the legitimate government, the court, justice—everything had been rudely trampled on and thrown on the garbage heap. Auguste was killed. What good would it do to drag out his existence for another ten or fifteen years?

He leaned with one shoulder against the damp wall. Cold drops came trickling down it wetting his neck. Even the walls were weeping here. But M. Perrier's eyes were dry as they gazed into the darkness. So it was not granted to him to see the sun, and the blue sky, and the green trees behind the mouldering walls before he died. But this thought of regret passed as it came. He had settled his accounts.

When the heavy door creaked and opened and a grey beam of light fell upon him he walked firmly towards it pushing aside the guards with the hand-cuffs.

"Leave it! I can go there without your help. Are you afraid I might escape? The gates are locked, and there are many of you."

They seemed to realize that he was right and did not force themselves upon him.

Four stakes were driven into the ground outside the large block. They were splotted and scratched all over, and the earth about them was black and churned up. But M. Perrier did not look at them. He tilted back his head towards the sun that glittered in the leaves of the chestnut-trees and screwed up his eyes. After the blind darkness of his death cellar it was difficult to face its glorious brightness. A rust-coloured pigeon with a violet ring about its neck had perched itself on the very edge of the roof,

turning its head to watch with clever red eyes the approaching men. M. Perrier smiled at it and nodded. Don't look surprised, little bird. We are human beings, therefore we destroy birds and beasts and one another. Life cannot exist without bloodshed. Ah, how we love this cheap red juice!

The bird hopped over to the other side of the roof, as though it had seen enough. M. Perrier caught a glimpse of a young soldier running for his life, his rifle slung loosely across one shoulder, swaying on his back. It was Lucien. Poor boy! Was he feeling ashamed for not having kept his promise, for not helping his old master to escape? Or was he simply afraid he might still give him away? The next moment M. Perrier had forgotten about Lucien. His limbs had gone so icy cold that he had to summon all his will power so as not to stiffen or shiver.

The other three men were already pinioned to their stakes. One of them had fainted and hung limply on the ropes, his head dangling, his hands twitching. The two in the centre were grey in the face, and their eyes looked dead in their deep black sockets. The executioner's assistants stood holding the blood-stained rags which they would tie round the eyes of the victims when the priest had finished with them.

M. Perrier watched contemptuously as the men sobbed kissing the cross, and the priest touched their heads in blessing. His steps were firm when he walked up to his stake and stopped with his back towards it. Again he pushed aside the man who was about to tie him to it.

"Can't you see that I don't need it?"

The patrol commander signalled to his assistants to move aside. The soldiers stood waiting for orders. The priest approached M. Perrier holding out his cross to him.

"Confess your sins, my son. Your last hour has come. Soon you will stand before the Supreme Judge, and it will be too late."

A mocking smile appeared on M. Perrier's face.

"First of all, you could sooner be my son than I yours. Secondly, those who have faced these worldly judges have nothing more to fear."

The priest grew red in the face and visibly nervous.

"Are you also an atheist? Woe unto you! Without absolution your soul will go to hell. Do not harden your heart."

But M. Perrier remained unmoved.

"I've gone through Satory—why do you threaten me with hell? If you have the power to forgive sins, why don't you try it on those over there and on yourself, for that matter? Is this your rightful place, with the hangmen of Versailles? Don't you think there's a place waiting for you in hell?"

"Atheist! Accursed blasphemer!" The priest swung back his cross but before he could bring it down upon him he had to jump aside. The order resounded.

M. Perrier stood as upright as though he had been a hero all his life, well accustomed to looking death in the face.

"Come on, boys! Fire away! Our earth is thirsting for blood—give it to her! Long live France!"

The volley echoed back from the wall and faded away.

M. Perrier lay on his back. His eyes were wide open and very large and clear. He seemed to be gazing at the sun above that glittered in the leaves of the chestnut-tree.



Pastor Voldemar Theofil Vilibald Akot woke in exceedingly low spirits. Ill humour was so unusual for him that he lay in bed for half an hour trying to ascertain its causes.

He was one of those liberal parish shepherds who looked on the bright side of life and did not keep too closely to the letter of the Old Testament. He did not insist that God had created Adam from clay, and that the Balaam's ass had actually preached to its rider. Like Andriev Niedra, he considered that the five books of Moses were a beautiful poetical legend that served the useful purpose of strengthening faith among the Latvian people. He did not oppose the study of the natural sciences, or deny the theory of relativity and the evolution of the ape into prehistoric man, and he spoke with an indulgent smile of the sectarians who kept to the ancient ritual of eating peas at traditional funerals.* Pastor Akot tried to reconcile science with religion according to the general

* It was an ancient Latvian custom to serve peas at a funeral as a symbol of tears.—Tr.

formula: where science ends religion begins. And indeed he needed all the tolerance he could command, for he himself, who before the war had owned an estate, two horses, and a spring carriage, not to speak of the tithe, was now reduced to one of those thirty-acre new farms, two rooms in the former coachman's flat, and the help of Annus, who was certainly the most spiteful person in the parish of Vilkaši.

Pastor Akot's thorough analysis of his bad mood revealed that it had two main causes.

The first was of a purely physiological nature. The supper old Katarina had served him the evening before had consisted of roast goose and horse-radish sauce. The goose had been old and had upset his digestion, giving him terrible nightmares.

But the major reason was purely psychological. He remembered that he had summoned Spricis Pagalniek of the Lower Tunki farm for the morning to what people still called the "Pastor's Estate," in other words, to his house. And it was Spricis who was the psychological and decisive reason for his bad mood.

He should never have summoned him if he could have helped it. But the day before Darta Pagalniek had called and had kept him for a whole hour complaining of her husband. That man had become unbearable, she had said. He would be the death of her. If it went on much longer like this she would take their three children, put them into a sack, and drown them in an ice-hole like so many kittens. And then she would jump in herself, just as she stood, in her dirty apron and clogs. Let them try and save her if there was anything left to save by the time they came.

Could he allow such tragedy to continue? Certainly not. As it was, the prestige of a pastor was not what it used to be in the good old days, and it would have been unforgivable for him to let it dwindle completely. Darta Pagalniek was one of the most zealous members

of his congregation and had undeniable influence over the other twenty-three women who came regularly to divine service. And above all, it was the direct duty of the shepherd of a flock to alleviate suffering and step in if there was discord in a family. ~~AYSE~~

So Pastor Akot had summoned Spricis Pagalniek for the morning, and this had brought his spirits very low.

He remembered that man very well from the days of 1905. Spricis had not been one of those who had dragged him from the pulpit by his gown, but he had stood at the roadside watching as they had chased him past the inn and down the avenue that led to the mansion, brandishing a stick with a red rag on it. Spricis had not sneered at him as the others had done. He had merely stood there pressing the tobacco into his pipe with his thumb, one eye closed, the other turned skywards as though he were gazing at the clouds, and presently he had said: "All we want now's a proper downpour."

That was what he had said, and Pastor Akot had never been able to make out what he had meant by it. Certainly nothing good!

Some time later, when Pastor Akot was in a cellar administering the sacrament to those who were to be shot in the evening, like many others, Spricis had not even deigned to rise but had remained sprawling on his bunk, his feet propped against the wall. Whether or not the fifty well-deserved lashes he afterwards received had bettered him the pastor did not know. Women spread all kinds of gossip about his present way of life. It was even rumoured that he had voted for the Left-wing candidates, and had been seen at a meeting called by the Reds outside the pagast house.

Phew, it was certainly small pleasure to face Spricis Pagalniek. However, it could not be helped now.

He got out of bed, and without bothering about underpants put on his checked flannel dressing gown with the

metal buckle on the belt. One felt slipper was right there on the deer-skin at his bedside, and he thrust his right foot into it without effort. But the other one had slipped under the bed. While he was fishing angrily with his left foot, old Katarina, who had heard him moving about, knocked at his door and poked in her head.

"Would you like your coffee at once, Reverend Father, or are you going to wash first? Will you have it here, or in the dining room?"

"What is there for breakfast?" he asked back without raising his head to look at her.

Well, if the Reverend Father didn't care for the goose he had had last night, there was some cooked Valmiera ham that Annus' wife had just brought back from the market. He could have three or four fried eggs with it. And the meat pies were in the oven, they ought to be ready by now. The white bread was nice and new this morning.

While she was talking he had managed to get his second slipper, and his heart had grown lighter in general. All right, he said, she should lay the table in the dining room. He would have a wash first. "And mind you don't put any salt on the eggs—not one bit, and fry them in unsalted butter!"

Presently he heard the butter sputtering and sizzling in the pan, and his spirits rose almost to their normal state. He glanced into the mirror on the wardrobe door and drew his hand over his face. It seemed a little bristly; he could do with a quick shave.

Just then Annus' little dog began to bark in the yard, and through the window he caught sight of Spricis Pagalniek. He was carefully picking his way along a narrow track through the drifted snow, lifting his feet very high. Now he had passed the well and was making for the front door. But he stopped to watch a crow that seemed to have lost its way in the branches of a lime-tree, then

raised his hand. Would he take that pipe from his mouth? He did not! He merely stuffed his thumb into the bowl when he had almost reached the porch. Pastor Akot grew hot all over. This behaviour reminded him of the "crazy year"—the rule of Albering and Stučka. As that political nightmare came to his mind his fingers fumbled nervously with the buckle of his belt, but could not close it properly. When he moved to open the door to his visitor his dressing gown flapped open exposing a spindly, hairy leg and a bare foot thrust into a felt slipper.

"Come in, Spricis!"

Pastor Akot was himself surprised at the gentle, velvety tone of his voice, for he was all on edge inside.

Spricis had tucked away his pipe, but had not removed his hat. On entering the pastor's bedroom which was the study as well, he lifted it off his head with both his hands like a weight.

The pastor sat down at his desk, nervously shifting the cigar box which he had acquired during the occupation period and now used for keeping stamps and small change. Spricis stood at a little distance inspecting the room with serene curiosity as though he had come to draw up an inventory and not been summoned for moral improvement.

Pastor Akot caught his eye as it strayed under the bed and fastened itself on an object there. The pastor flushed.

"What are you looking at, Spricis?"

"I was just figuring that it's only some twenty steps from here to the cowshed," Spricis replied with a ready smile. It was again the ambiguous kind of statement he had made in the "crazy year," outside the inn. It did not make Pastor Akot feel any better. He cleared his throat and looked severely at his visitor.

"I have summoned you, Pagalnik, because I have to talk to you seriously."

Still smiling, Spricis answered glibly in his thin, high-pitched voice:

"You were very lucky, Reverend Father. My brother-in-law Liepa has brewed some ale for the holidays, and he asked me to come over and sample it. He thought he had put in too little hops. So it wasn't much out of my way to drop in here...."

The smile, and the easy, chatty tone, and the answer itself all seemed to the pastor most out of keeping with the present occasion. His tone grew harsher as he said:

"It has come to my notice that you have taken to drink, Pagalniek. Apart from all the other evils this involves, of which we shall talk later, do you not see that you are ruining your health and the welfare of our nation?"

Spricis had narrowed one eye to a tiny little slit, and turned the other upon the ceiling.

"No need to worry about my health, Reverend Father. Now we've got our good old home-made—not like the stuff we used to swill down during the occupation! I hardly get a hangover at all, so I suppose the old guts are still all right. Well, sometimes, of course, if I don't eat the proper things with it. You know, I always want something substantial and savoury with my drink. The other day that silly wife of mine put new bread on the table, and..."

Pastor Akot interrupted his reflections with a categorical gesture.

"I'm not interested in that. Speak to the point."

"Oh, you want to hear about that national welfare business? You see, I figure it this way: now there's no monopoly on vodka, so all we spend on it goes to the state, doesn't it? You wouldn't like the state and our nation to be left without income, would you?"

Feeling pushed upon dangerous ground the pastor hastened to transfer the discussion from political economy to theology.

"The Holy Scriptures say that no one who eats and drinks to excess shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Spricis scratched his head with one hand, and another part of his body with the other.

"Aye, that's a nasty business, of course. . . . But what if I answer them with their own Gospel, those chaps in the other world? Take Noah, for example. He was a god-fearing man, and didn't God himself fish him out of the flood of sin, like a drowning chicken? And He didn't mind it a bit that old Noah liked a good drop now and then. And when they did quite a lot of drinking in the Canaan pagast later on. . . ."

Pastor Akot tapped the table with his knuckles, still keeping himself under control.

"Spricis Pagalniek! You're an atheist!"

"A what? I don't know what you mean, but I've never had anything to do with that job. Anybody'll tell you that. Ask my brother-in-law Lēpa, he was with me all the autumn, felling timber for Kaugert. Ah, maybe you need that—er, thing installed in your house? You could get old Silin to come over from the village, he'll fix it for you!"

The pastor turned a withering look upon the atheist and moved the discussion to a new plane—that of family life.

"You're ruining your family. Your wife called on me and complained."

"I know that, Reverend Father. But you mustn't take it too seriously. Don't you know what women are? I agree, it isn't very nice if I lift my elbow too often. But is she any better? What happens to all my flour and all the lard in the house? As soon as I close the door behind me she's at the range making pancakes for herself."

The obvious association of ideas made the pastor sniff and turn his head towards the kitchen door, behind which the sizzling had just stopped.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I don't know about that. She didn't tell me."

"Trust her not to tell you everything that goes on in the house. Why didn't you ask our landlady, if you're interested? You take up a person's time all for nothing, without knowing the first thing about him."

Old Katarina poked in her head.

"Breakfast's on the table, Reverend Father! Come and eat it up before it gets cold."

It was a standing arrangement between him and old Katarina that she should call him if a visitor was too bothersome and overstayed his welcome. Martin Luther would have surely looked through his fingers at a little trick like that, though Katarina used it perhaps more often than the Catechism permitted. In this particular instance, however, it was very nearly true.

Only this time Pastor Akot would rather let his coffee and ham go cold than have this atheist go unconvinced and unconverted. He waved Katarina out of the room and tried to place his argument on a legal basis.

"You see, Pagalnik, the duty of my office compels me to tell you that your attitude to your wife is not only lamentable, but also a violation of the law. You promised at the holy altar to love her for ever, yet what I hear about you now proves that you do not love her any more! Thus you have broken your oath. Now confess, did you promise to love her?"

Pagalnik's eyes suddenly flashed with anger.

"I promised, yes, you know I did. Why d'you ask such foolish questions? But in return for what? She had promised to bring a dowry of two cows, and one hundred and twenty rubles in cash, and a carpenter's bench from her uncle, with everything that goes with it. Two cows! If I'd had the two cows I could have started a new farm. And what did I get? Pooh, I don't want to talk about it. Am I supposed to love her all my life

for the one dried-up cow she brought, and a bit of home-spun? That's asking too much, Mr. Akot!"

The pastor was speechless with horror. The devil himself must have got into the man. Without showing the courtesy to wait for an answer Spricis went straight on, more infamously than ever.

"And what about you, Mr. Akot? Your Madame's in Jelgava now, and my brother-in-law swears she's started some dress-making courses there. Didn't you also swear at the altar and all the rest of it? You ought to know better."

Pastor Akot had risen to his feet. His fists were pressing into the table as though he wanted to drill holes into it. "Mr. Akot," "your Madame"—this was real blasphemy, brazen contempt of his office in general and the present solemn occasion in particular. There was one last chance for him to save his face—to raise the issue of patriotism and state security and thus get the better of this scoundrel.

He spoke very deliberately, dropping each word like a weight on a scale, and trying to keep the ugly undertone of anger out of his voice.

"From all you have said I see that you are a thoroughly profligate and dissipated sinner. If you had merely erred and admitted your guilt you might have been forgiven. But you are vicious and hard to the marrow. You are a socialist, perhaps even a communist. I ought to hand you over to a certain state institution. Tell me frankly, whom do you serve, and how much do they pay you?"

Not only Spricis' face but his very pose expressed amazement. Again he scratched his head with one hand, and another part of his body with the other, and turned abruptly towards the window as though the answer he needed had slipped out through it.

"How much do they pay?" the pastor repeated.

Spricis gave a little shrug. "If the pay's good. . . . Hell,

never thought of that before! Kaugert pays a hundred and fifty for a measure of timber. My master paid me ten for a ditch last summer, but it was some job! I couldn't feel my back when I came home in the evening. Maybe I could make a little more that way, and with less effort. Wouldn't you tell me, Mr. Akot, how to get into that business? You know these things better."

"I?!"

"Why of course you do. Now you preach every Sunday—May the Lord's mercy never forsake our... well, you know how it goes. How much d'you make on it a month?"

"How much do I...? Are you mad?"

"Oh, of course, I understand. You don't want to tell me, now that the taxation department keeps an eye on every thousand a fellow earns. But under General von der Goltz, and during the occupation period you preached the same thing: May the Lord's mercy never forsake our Kaiser Wilhelm II.... The Germans are richer than we are."

Voiceless with rage the pastor breathed:

"Get out ... you... blasphemer!"

But Pagalniek took no notice. The devil himself seemed to be plucking at his tongue.

"And under Kerensky it was: May the Lord's mercy never forsake our Provisional Government. And under the tsar it was Nicholas II...."

The pastor thrust both his soft little fists into the atheist's chest.

"Spricis.... Spricis Pagalniek! One more word and...."

However, Spricis had more than that to say.

"Every year on St. George's day I go to work for another master. You stay put, but you've had at least as many masters as I have. We're really jobbers, both of us, Akot, and it isn't very nice. I'm not a very bright sort of fellow, I can't express myself very well, but if you don't

mind my saying so, there must be some sense in it for you. I think. . . ."

Before he had said what he thought the two soft fists brushed right past his eyes.

"Get out, you atheist!"

A moment later the atheist was fumbling with the knob of the front door, while Pastor Akot was hopping up and down, shrieking:

"Get out! Get out!"

From the window the pastor saw Spricis passing the well and stopping to play with Annus' little dog. He went back to the dining room and collapsed at the table. The eggs had gone cold and tasted like jelly. The meat pies were salty. The coffee tasted of dish-water. He flopped down on his bed and fell into a dead sleep. Katarina came in with her broom and duster and asked him what the matter was, but received no answer. He did not get up till after dinner-time.

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Father Piotrovsky's home benediction had come off beautifully. He had blessed and sprinkled with holy water not only the Rušons' home but even their new hen-coop with its modern hatching arrangements and the wire netting round it.

The whole Kukliški village had gathered to witness the ceremony and was in raptures of delight. Father Piotrovsky was in high spirits, but his spirits were not quite so high as they might have been had not the Rušons invited those two students from the western parts.* Even before the ceremony began they had been trying to lead him on, and while it was going on they had never taken their mocking eyes off him, openly manifesting their disrespect. The rooted impiety of those Lutherans being nothing new to him, the Father would not let himself be angered, and yet such provoking behaviour was far from pleasing.

* The western churches of Latvia are Protestant (Lutheran) whereas those in the eastern parts are chiefly Catholic.—Tr.

The blessings over, he lingered a while in the yard amidst a crowd of village women. Most of them were content merely to kiss his sleeve, but some solicited his advice as to whether or not they ought to send their starving children to the western parts where they could earn their own bread.

Even the kissing of the sleeve, usually the most gratifying feature of his visits to the countryside, was not an undivided pleasure to him this time, owing to the disconcerting presence of those two scoffers. As to sending children westwards for purposes of earning their livelihood he was adamant. Enough sins had been committed against the holy faith and virtuous customs of Latgale. When one of the women stubbornly insisted, he threatened her with church reprisals in terms that all but incited the other women to set upon the refractory one.

Presently Rušon and his wife came out and dispersed the troublesome crowd. The Reverend Father was called in to dinner.

Father Piotrovsky was always glad to have a meal with his parishioners. Each would set before him the best he had, and in questions of the palate he was as much of an expert as in matters of church ritual.

But nothing gave him greater pleasure than to accept the present invitation. Besides being the richest farmer in the large Kukliški village, Rušon owned a grocery store and a wine-shop locally, as well as a yard for building materials in Daugavpils.

No sooner had he occupied the place of honour at table than he realized that his expectations had been well justified. A variety of sumptuous smells reached his nostrils. In the centre right before him was an entire roast piglet garnished with cabbage leaves, celery, and dill. On either side of it were ranged dishes and bowls with home-made foods and tinned delicacies from the shop. And in between stood bottles of Riga vodka, and brandy from Shwartz's

stores, and wines of every shade of colour. Rušon had dealt with a free hand.

Father Piotrovsky's eyes swam, his heart warmed in pleasant anticipation. But as he looked across the table, something snapped inside him. Just opposite him sat those two lads, those milksops who imagined themselves cleverer than the Latgilians, and who would not recognize the specific nature of St. Mary's* land.

However, the hostess on his left was already putting something on his plate, while the host on his right was filling his glass. To slight them would be the height of incivility, nor did the Holy Scriptures deny the flesh its due. The Father made the sign of the cross and applied himself to his task.

Little was spoken during the first half hour of the meal. But when a steaming venison, shot out of season, appeared on the table, with onion gravy and red bilberry preserve, Father Piotrovsky's ear caught scraps of the conversation across the table, now deliberately conducted in high tones to provoke his irritation.

One of the lads was turning over a loin on his plate showing it to the other.

"I say, haven't we met this bird somewhere before?"

The other bent over it.

"Why, of course! It was in the wood on our way here. Poor thing, what a fate to befall it in the middle of July."

The Reverend Father dropped his fork on which was spiked a juicy morsel.

"God has created the beasts of the wood for man's nourishment."

"But in July! Or are the laws in Latgale different from those in other parts of Latvia?"

"You make your own laws. They do not suit us."

"So you make up others for yourselves?"

* The eastern, formerly Catholic part of Latvia-Latgale.-Tr.

"We do nothing of the kind. But we spit on your laws."

"Spit on state laws? D'you know what that smacks of, Sir?"

It was not an easy task for Rušon to restore peace between his wife's relations and his guest of honour. The two lads were set on picking a quarrel, while Father Piotrovsky was visibly affected by the fifteen glasses of vodka he had consumed. However, where Rušon's conciliation failed, the brandy scored. By the time the bottle was half empty and twilight was drawing in, the Father sat wedged between his two recent enemies without a trace of spite ~~or~~ rancour. The entire world had taken a radical turn for the better in his eyes, and he was pestering the lads to drink to brotherhood. They agreed but not without certain compensations.

"Do you admit that all priests are asses?"

With a broad flourish of his hand the Father knocked over his glass spilling the brandy all over his cassock and muttered:

"There can be no two minds about it!"

"And who's the greatest ass among them all?"

"I myself, of course."

This being settled, they drank their brotherhood and exchanged kisses. One of his newly acquired brothers filled his glass, the other plied him with food, while Rušon's plump servant girl Manya stood laughing at the back holding the dish.

The table was deserted. The guests had withdrawn to other parts of the house. Somebody was singing. The strains of a concertina came from the newly furnished drawing-room where old and young were dancing, shouting, and battering the clean deal floor with their heels. The students sat Manya, dish and all, on their elder brother's knees saying they wanted to join the dancers. But they merely retired to a dark corner of the room for a private conference.

On their return they continued to ply Father Piotrovsky with food and drink. Presently, when the gaiety in Rušon's new house had reached its climax and the clash and clatter had attained such volume that it sounded as though the very tables and chairs were capering and beating time, the lads rose and remarked slyly:

"Time to stretch our legs a little. We're going to have a dance."

Father Piotrovsky staggered to his feet. "I'm going to dance, too."

They helped him as far as the doorway and let him loose. To the delight of the whole crowd of dancers the Reverend Father gathered up his cassock and stepping out all by himself accomplished two circles around the hall. Then Manya chanced in his way, and when he whirled her round and lifted her up into the air with youthful vigour everybody simply shrieked and yelled with delight.

Thereupon his two friends fortified the exhausted Father with more food and drink, though they could not get much more into him. His bulky frame drooped like a ripe ear, head foremost. Manya, the plump maid, had collapsed on a bench nearby snoring heartily.

At about midnight, when not a living soul could be seen standing or sitting in the house, whose doors and windows had remained wide open after the recent revelries, a strange procession appeared in the yard.

Two young lads were hauling along something heavy that showed no sign of resistance or even life. Having dumped it in the hay barn, they returned to the house to emerge once more with a less heavy load, which still stirred a little and uttered an occasional giggle.

The door of the barn was securely bolted from without and propped up with two poles for additional safety. Then, after all the din and hubbub, dead silence fell upon farmhouse and yard.

As consciousness returned to him Father Piotrovsky grew aware of a body by his side, and in the amiable spirit of intoxication he put his arm about it. Then he relapsed into a sleep so sound that neither drums nor even gun-fire could have roused him.

When finally he woke of his own accord he was shivering with cold. His neck felt stiff and painful, his mouth dry, and he felt as sick as though he had eaten a toad the night before. Vague memories of the previous evening floated through his mind. His hand was resting upon something warm. Somebody was snoring voluptuously right in his ear. He jerked himself aside and made an effort to sit up.

A sunbeam shot in through a chink in the door, stinging him in the eye. Blinking to adjust his sight, he perceived next to him the figure of a female curled up in a ball, fast asleep.

The sinfulness of his position came upon him in a flash. Edging away carefully until he could only just touch her with his hand, he smoothed out the straw between them so that it could not be seen that he had lain so close, and then poked the snoring woman in the side.

"Wake up, lass! Get on your feet!"

But she was not so easily roused. It took quite a while before the girl stretched her limbs and uttered a groan, and a tousled head bristly with hay emerged from the mould. It was Manya, the plump servant girl of the Rušons' farm.

Father Piotrovsky was dumbfounded.

"Manya! You crazy thing! How on earth did you get here?"

Manya's mouth gaped from ear to ear.

"I don't know. And you, Reverend Father?"

"I don't know either."

But the situation was serious, that much he knew. He staggered to the door but groped about in vain. And

Manya's efforts were no more successful. The sidewalls had no chinks wide enough for them to squeeze through. How maddening, how absolutely maddening!

Manya had not been quite as drunk as Father Piotrovsky the night before, so her mind worked a little better than his this morning.

"It's those two rascals, those student lads! They want to play a trick on us. That's as clear as daylight."

The Father agreed that it was as clear as daylight. His blood was boiling with anger and excitement.

"You're a wicked girl! How dare you allow such a thing against me, the shepherd of your flock! I'll not admit you to confession and Holy Communion. I'll excommunicate you."

Manya was utterly shaken by the terrible threat. Plumping down on the hay where she had slept, she burst out wailing at the top of her voice. Father Piotrovsky noticed a ladder leaning against the wall, and a skylight in the ceiling, and he climbed up to see whether he could get out by it. But it was impossible. The loft was bare and solid but for a few cracks big enough for the sunbeams to slip in.

He sat down on the ledge of the skylight dangling his legs. Those two milksops obviously wanted to make a fool of him. His Jesuit brain set to work feverishly. When it had reached certain conclusions, he looked down to see Manya still crouching in the hay and howling.

Though not in her first prime, she was still good enough to look at and seemed fairly neat and cleanly. It occurred to him that he ought to dismiss his present housekeeper anyway and had found here a fair replacement.

"Don't cry. I only said it to scare you a little. You're not to blame. Come to confession next Sunday."

Manya's tears dried instantaneously. Rubbing her eyes with her fists she reached out for the Father's sleeve, but

seeing him still perched in the skylight far beyond her reach, gave it up for the time being.

Meanwhile the Father continued.

"My housekeeper is quitting. If you're willing, and if M. Rušon agrees, as no doubt he will, I shall take you in her place."

Manya's wet face broke into a beaming smile showing two rows of healthy white teeth. But Father Piotrovsky hastened to call her to order.

"Don't show me your teeth yet. First let's see how we can get out of this mess. Stay where you are and when they come pretend you've just woken from your sleep. I'll stay here. We'll see if we can't cock a snook at those milksops yet!"

It was not long before muffled whispers came from the yard, and voices hushing them. The two Lutherans had obviously brought along the Catholic parishioners to be eyewitnesses of their priest's sin.

A clatter was heard outside, the door opened to a tiny crack, in which appeared about a score of curious faces.

But they were met by Father Piotrovsky's droning voice, which sounded as though he were in the middle of ~~admon-~~ishing the girl.

"...so last night I climbed up this ladder to seek repose in slumber, here where the air is clean and the wordly din removed. When I woke in the small hours I felt a natural urge and was about to descend. But what do I see? A female lying in the hay below. I shout down to wake her but in vain. Would it befit me to pass a girl sleeping there all by herself? So here I ^{am} freezing with cold and suffering more than human flesh can endure. Why are you here? How did you get here?"

Manya looked terribly scared.

"I really don't know, Your Reverence!"

"You see, you don't even know. But praise the Lord, for He knows all about you, and me, and all the others.

His finger and His finger only has saved you. How easily something evil and sinful might have befallen you in this empty room with nothing in it but a little hay. Do you realize this, light-minded girl that you are?"

"I do, Your Reverence."

"Well, praise the Lord that righteous people have come to open the door and save you from shame and disgrace. But you will come to confession next Sunday, and take your punishment. And now come and hold the ladder for me, or I may fall and sprain my ankle."

He descended and, gathering up his cassock, stepped outside holding his head very high, Manya followed at his heels, her breast puffed out, her eyes flashing. The lads and lasses of the village, who had come to witness the fun, scurried off in all directions in case the Father made a mental note of their names, for he would never leave such things unavenged. But his eye was keen and his memory remarkable, and even from the back he recognized the evil-doers. His jaw set as he pictured the punishment he was going to impose upon them.

The two ill-fated schemers stood looking sheepishly at each other, their arms dangling weakly at their sides.

Nor was this the end of their penalty. Father Piotrovsky had soon rid himself of his hangover and settled the problem of his new housekeeper with the Rušons. With a napkin tied about his neck, his face flushed, he was brandishing his fork on which was spiked a piece of roast chicken, and holding forth against those westerners for their vices and sins, and above all for stinting the Latgalian people. The two students sat opposite with downcast eyes and scarcely touched their glasses. Every half hour they consulted their watches so as not to miss their train to Riga. In vain did their host lay himself out to cheer them up, in vain did the hostess try to divert the Reverend Father's thoughts to other topics. Manya stood rigidly behind his back, flushed and beaming, with a towel

slung over her shoulder so as to be on the spot if a drop of grease should stain his cassock or the wine spill on the tablecloth.

By dinner-time the Reverend Father's spirits were soaring. He poured vodka into a beer mug, his eyes flashing lightning. Leaning across the table he shouted in his own purest tongue:

"What're you gaping for, you Lutheran swine! *Odno iz dvukh*—swill it down or go to bed!"

The hostess rushed up to propitiate them. Manya flashed her white teeth. The two lads opposite sat there with bowed heads. God's finger had smit them hard.

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