# Bertha Garlan

by Arthur Schnitzler

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## BERTHA GARLAN

BY ARTHUR SCHNITZLER

# I

She was walking slowly down the hill; not by the broad high road which wound its way towards the town, but by the narrow footpath between the trellises of the vines. Her little boy was with her, hanging on to her hand and walking all the time a pace in front of her, because there was not room on the footpath for them to walk side by side.

The afternoon was well advanced, but the sun still poured down upon her with sufficient power to cause her to pull her dark straw hat a little further down over her forehead and to keep her eyes lowered. The slopes, at the foot of which the little town lay nestling, glimmered as though seen through a golden mist; the roofs of the houses below glistened, and the river, emerging yonder amongst the meadows outside the town, stretched, shimmering, into the distance. Not a quiver stirred the air, and it seemed as if the cool of the evening was yet far remote.

Bertha stooped for a moment and glanced about her. Save for her boy, she was all alone on the hillside, and around her brooded a curious stillness. At the cemetery, too, on the hilltop, she had not met anybody that day, not even the old woman who usually watered the flowers and kept the graves tidy, and with whom Bertha used often to have a chat. Bertha felt that somehow a considerable time had elapsed since she had started on her walk, and that it was long since she had spoken to anyone.

The church clock struck—six. So, then, scarcely an hour had passed since she had left the house, and an even shorter time since she had stopped in the street to chat with the beautiful Frau Rupius. Yet even the few minutes which had slipped away since she had stood by her husband's grave now seemed to be long past.

"Mamma!"

Suddenly she heard her boy call. He had slipped his hand out of hers and had run on ahead.

"I can walk quicker than you, mamma!"

"Wait, though! Wait, Fritz!" exclaimed Bertha. "You're not going to leave your mother alone, are you?"

She followed him and again took him by the hand.

"Are we going home already?" asked Fritz.

"Yes; we will sit by the open window until it grows quite dark."

Before long they had reached the foot of the hill and they began to walk towards the town in the shade of the chestnut trees which bordered the high-road, now white with dust. Here again they met but few people. Along the road a couple of wagons came towards them, the drivers, whip in hand, trudging along beside the horses. Then two cyclists rode by from the town towards the country, leaving clouds of dust behind them. Bertha stopped mechanically and gazed after them until they had almost disappeared from view.

In the meantime Fritz had clambered up onto the bench beside the road.

"Look, mamma! See what I can do!"

He made ready to jump, but his mother took hold of him by the arms and lifted him carefully to the ground. Then she sat down on the bench.

"Are you tired?" asked Fritz.

"Yes," she answered, surprised to find that she was indeed feeling fatigued.

It was only then that she realized that the sultry air had wearied her to the point of sleepiness. She could not, moreover, remember having experienced such warm weather in the middle of May.

From the bench on which she was sitting she could trace back the course of the path down which she had come. In the sunlight it ran between the vine-trellises, up and up, until it reached the brightly gleaming wall of the cemetery. She was in the habit of taking a walk along that path two or three times a week. She had long since

ceased to regard such visits to the cemetery as anything other than a mere walk. When she wandered about the well-kept gravel paths amongst the crosses and the tombstones, or stood offering up a silent prayer beside her husband's grave, or, maybe, laying upon it a few wild flowers which she had plucked on her way up, her heart was scarcely any longer stirred by the slightest throb of pain. Three years had, indeed, passed since her husband had died, which was just as long as their married life had lasted.

Her eyes closed and her mind went back to the time when she had first come to the town, only a few days after their marriage—which had taken place in Vienna. They had only indulged in a modest honeymoon trip, such as a man in humble circumstances, who had married a woman without any dowry, could treat himself to. They had taken the boat from Vienna, up the river, to a little village in Wachau, not far from their future home, and had spent a few days there. Bertha could still remember clearly the little inn at which they had stayed, the riverside garden in which they used to sit after sunset, and those quiet, rather tedious, evenings which were so completely different from those her girlish imagination had previously pictured to her as the evenings which a newly-married couple would spend. Of course, she had had to be content.

She was twenty-six years old and quite alone in the world when Victor Mathias Garlan had proposed to her. Her parents had recently died. A long time before, one of her brothers had gone to America to seek his fortune as a merchant. Her younger brother was on the stage; he had married an actress, and was playing comedy parts in third-rate German theatres. She was almost out of touch with her relations and the only one whom she visited occasionally was a cousin who had married a lawyer. But even that friendship had grown cool as years had passed, because the cousin had become wrapped up in her husband and children exclusively, and had almost ceased to take any interest in the doings of her unmarried friend.

Herr Garlan was a distant relation of Bertha's mother. When Bertha was quite a young girl he had often visited the house and made love to her in a rather awkward way. In those days she had no reasons to encourage him, because it was in another guise that her fancy pictured life and happiness to her. She was young and pretty; her parents, though not actually wealthy people, were comfortably off, and her hope was rather to wander about the world as a great pianiste, perhaps, as the wife of an artist, than to lead a modest existence in the placid routine of the home circle. But that hope soon faded. One day her father, in a transport of domestic fervour, forbade her further attendance at the conservatoire of music, which put an end to her prospects of an artistic career and at the same time to her friendship with the young violinist who had since made such a name for himself.

The next few years were singularly dull. At first, it is true, she felt some slight disappointment, or even pain, but these emotions were certainly of short duration. Later on she had received offers of marriage from a young doctor and a merchant. She refused both of them; the doctor because he was too ugly, and the merchant because he lived in a country town. Her parents, too, were by no means enthusiastic about either suitor.

When, however, Bertha's twenty-sixth birthday passed and her father lost his modest competency through a bankruptcy, it had been her lot to put up with belated reproaches on the score of all sorts of things which she herself had begun to forget—her youthful artistic ambitions, her love affair of long ago with the violinist, which had seemed likely to lead to nothing, and the lack of encouragement which the ugly doctor and the merchant from the country received at her hands.

At that time Victor Mathias Garlan was no longer resident in Vienna. Two years before, the insurance company, in which he had been employed since he had reached the age of twenty, had, at his own request, transferred him, in the capacity of manager, to the recently-established branch in the little town on the Danube

where his married brother carried on business as a wine merchant. In the course of a somewhat lengthy conversation which took place on the occasion of his farewell visit to Bertha's parents, and which created a certain impression upon her, he had mentioned that the principal reasons for his asking to be transferred to the little town were that he felt himself to be getting on in years, that he had no longer any idea of seeking a wife, and that he desired to have some sort of a home amongst people who were closely connected with him. At that time Bertha's parents had made fun of his notion, which seemed to them somewhat hypochondriacal, for Garlan was then scarcely forty years old. Bertha herself, however, had found a good deal of common sense in Garlan's reason, inasmuch as he had never appeared to her as, properly speaking, a young man.

In the course of the following years Garlan used often to come to Vienna on business, and never omitted to visit Bertha's family on such occasions. After supper it was Bertha's custom to play the piano for Garlan's entertainment, and he used to listen to her with an almost reverent attention, and would, perhaps, go on to talk of his little nephew and niece—who were both very musical—and to whom he would often speak of Fraulein Bertha as the finest pianiste he had ever heard.

It seemed strange, and Bertha's mother could not refrain from commenting now and again upon it, that, since his diffident wooing in the old days, Herr Garlan had not once ventured so much as to make the slightest further allusion to the past, or even to a possible future. And thus Bertha, in addition to the other reproaches to which she had to listen, incurred the blame for treating Herr Garlan with too great indifference, if not, indeed, with actual coldness. Bertha, however, only shook her head, for at that time she had not so much as contemplated the possibility of marrying this somewhat awkward man, who had grown old before his time.

After the sudden death of her mother, which happened at a time when her father had been lying ill for many months, Garlan reappeared upon the scene with the

announcement that he had obtained a month's holiday—the only one for which he had ever applied. It was clearly evident to Bertha that his sole purpose in coming to Vienna was to be of help to her in that time of trouble and distress. And when Bertha's father died a week after the funeral of her mother, Garlan proved himself to be a true friend, and one, moreover, blessed with an amount of energy for which she had never given him credit. He prevailed on his sister-in-law to come to Vienna, so that she could help Bertha to tide over the first few weeks of her bereavement, besides, in some slight degree, distracting her thoughts. He settled the business affairs capably and quickly. His kindness of heart did much to cheer Bertha during those sad days, and when, on the expiration of his leave, he asked her whether she would be his wife she acquiesced with a feeling of the most profound gratitude. She was, of course, aware of the fact that if she did not marry him she would in a few months' time have to earn her own living, probably as a teacher, and, besides, she had come to appreciate Garlan and had become so used to his company that she was able, in all sincerity, to answer "Yes," both when he led her to the altar and subsequently when, as they set off for their honeymoon, he asked her, for the first time, if she loved him.

It was true that at the very outset of their married life she discovered that she felt no love for him. She just let him love her and put up with the fact, at first with a certain surprise at her own disillusionment and afterwards with indifference. It was not until she found that she was about to become a mother that she could bring herself to reciprocate his affection. She very soon grew accustomed to the quiet life of the little town, all the more easily because even in Vienna she had led a somewhat secluded existence. With her husband's family she felt quite happy and comfortable; her brother-in-law appeared to be a most genial and amiable person, if not altogether innocent of an occasional display of coarseness; his wife was good-natured, and inclined at times to be melancholy. Garlan's nephew, who was thirteen years old at the time of Bertha's arrival at the little town, was a pert, good-looking boy; and his

niece, a very sedate child of nine, with large, astonished eyes, conceived a strong attachment for Bertha from the very first moment that they met.

When Bertha's child was born, he was hailed by the children as a welcome plaything, and, for the next two years, Bertha felt completely happy. She even believed at times that it was impossible that her fate could have taken a more favourable shape. The noise and bustle of the great city came back to her memory as something unpleasant, almost hazardous; and on one occasion when she had accompanied her husband to Vienna, in order to make a few purchases and it so chanced, to her annoyance, that the streets were wet and muddy with the rain, she vowed never again to undertake that tedious and wholly unnecessary journey of three hours' duration. Her husband died suddenly one spring morning three years after their marriage. Bertha's consternation was extreme. She felt that she had never taken into consideration the mere possibility of such an event. She was left in very straitened circumstances. Soon, however, her sister-in-law, with thoughtful kindness, devised a means by which the widow could support herself without appearing to accept anything in the nature of charity. She asked Bertha to take over the musical education of her children, and also procured for her an engagement as music teacher to other families in the town. It was tacitly understood amongst the ladies who engaged her that they should always make it appear as if Bertha had undertaken these lessons only for the sake of a little distraction, and that they paid her for them only because they could not possibly allow her to devote so much time and trouble in that way without some return. What she earned from this source was quite sufficient to supplement her income to an amount adequate to meet the demands of her mode of living, and so, when time had deadened the first keen pangs and the subsequent sorrow occasioned by her husband's death, she was again quite contented and cheerful. Her life up to then had not been spent in such a way as to cause her now to feel the lack of anything. Such thoughts as she gave to the future were occupied by scarcely any other theme than her son in the successive stages of

his growth, and it was only on rare occasions that the likelihood of marrying a second time crossed her mind, and then the idea was always a mere fleeting fancy, for as yet she had met no one whom she was able seriously to regard in the light of a possible second husband. The stirrings of youthful desires, which she sometimes felt within her in her waking morning hours, always vanished as the day pursued its even course. It was only since the advent of the spring that she had felt a certain disturbance of her previous sensation of well-being; no longer were her nights passed in the tranquil and dreamless sleep of heretofore, and at times she was oppressed by a sensation of tedium, such as she had never experienced before. Strangest of all, however, was the sudden access of lassitude which would often come over her even in the daytime, under the influence of which she fancied that she could trace the course of her blood as it circled through her body. She remembered that she had experienced a similar sensation in the days when she was emerging from childhood. At first this feeling, in spite of its familiarity, was yet so strange to her that it seemed as though one of her friends must have told her about it. It was only when it recurred with ever-increasing frequency that she realized that she herself had experienced it before.

She shuddered, with a feeling as though she were waking from sleep. She opened her eyes.

It seemed to her that the air was all a-whirl; the shadows had crept halfway across the road; away up on the hilltop the cemetery wall no longer gleamed in the sunlight. Bertha rapidly shook her head to and fro a few times as though to waken herself thoroughly. It seemed to her as if a whole day and a whole night had elapsed since she had sat down on the bench. How was it, then, that in her consciousness time passed in so disjointed a fashion? She looked around her. Where could Fritz have gone to? Oh, there he was behind her, playing with Doctor Friedrich's children. The nursemaid was on her knees beside them, helping them to build a castle with the sand.

The avenue was now less deserted than it had been earlier in the evening. Bertha knew almost all the people who passed; she saw them every day. As, however, most of them were not people to whom she was in the habit of talking, they flitted by like shadows. Yonder came the saddler, Peter Nowak, and his wife; Doctor Rellinger drove by in his little country trap and bowed to her as he passed; he was followed by the two daughters of Herr Wendelein, the landowner; presently Lieutenant Baier and his fiancee cycled slowly down the road on their way to the country. Then, again, there seemed to be a short lull in the movement before her and Bertha heard nothing but the laughter of the children as they played.

Then, again, she saw that some one was slowly approaching from the town, and she recognized who it was while he was still a long way off. It was Herr Klingemann, to whom of late she had been in the habit of talking more frequently than had previously been her custom. Some twelve years ago or more he had moved from Vienna to the little town. Gossip had it that he had at one time been a doctor, and had been obliged to give up his practice on account of some professional error, or even of some more serious lapse. Some, however, asserted that he had never qualified as a doctor at all, but, failing to pass his examinations, had finally given up the study of medicine. Herr Klingemann, for his own part, gave himself out to be a philosopher, who had grown weary of life in the great city after having enjoyed it to satiety, and for that reason had moved to the little town, where he could live comfortably on what remained of his fortune.

He was now but little more than five-and-forty. There were still times when he was of a genial enough aspect, but, for the most part, he had an extremely dilapidated and disagreeable appearance.

While yet some distance away he smiled at the young widow, but did not hasten his steps. Finally he stopped before her and gave her an ironical nod, which was his habitual manner of greeting people.

"Good evening, my pretty lady!" he said.

Bertha returned his salutation. It was one of those days on which Herr Klingemann appeared to make some claim to elegance and youthfulness. He was attired in a dark grey frock coat, so tightly fitting that he might almost have been wearing stays. On his head was a narrow brimmed brown straw hat with a black band. About his throat, moreover, there was a very tiny red cravat, set rather askew.

For a time he remained silent, tugging his slightly grizzled fair moustache upwards and downwards.

"I presume you have come from up there, my dear lady?" he said.

Without turning his head or even his eyes, he pointed his finger over his shoulder, in a somewhat contemptuous manner, in the direction of the cemetery behind him.

Throughout the town Herr Klingemann was known as a man to whom nothing was sacred, and as he stood before her, Bertha could not help thinking of the various bits of gossip that she had heard about him. It was well known that his relations with his cook, whom he always referred to as his housekeeper, were of a somewhat more intimate nature than that merely of master and servant, and his name was also mentioned in connexion with the wife of a tobacconist, who, as he had himself told Bertha with proud regret, deceived him with a captain of the regiment stationed in the town. Moreover, there were several eligible girls in the neighbourhood who cherished a certain tender interest in him.

Whenever these things were hinted at Herr Klingemann always made some sneering remark on the subject of marriage in general, which shocked the susceptibilities of many, but, on the whole, actually increased the amount of respect in which he was held.

"I have been out for a short walk," said Bertha.

"Alone?"

"Oh, no; with my boy."

"Yes—yes—of course, there he is! Good evening, my little mortal!"—he gazed away over Fritz's head as he said this—"may I sit down for a moment beside you, Frau Bertha?"

He pronounced her name with an ironic inflection and, without waiting for her to reply, he sat down on the bench.

"I heard you playing the piano this morning," he continued. "Do you know what kind of an impression it made upon me? This: that with you music must take the place of everything."

He repeated the word "everything" and, at the same time, looked at Bertha in a manner which caused her to blush.

"What a pity I so seldom have the opportunity of hearing you play!" he went on. "If I don't happen to be passing your open window when you are at the piano—"

Bertha noticed that he kept on edging nearer to her, and that his arm was touching hers. Involuntarily she moved away. Suddenly she felt herself seized from behind, her head pulled back over the bench and a hand clasped over her eyes.

For a moment she thought that it was Klingemann's hand, which she felt upon her lids.

"Why, you must be mad, sir," she cried.

"How funny it is to hear you call me 'Sir,' Aunt Bertha!" replied the laughing voice of a boy at her back.

"Well, do let me at least open my eyes, Richard," said Bertha, trying to remove the boy's hands from her face. "Have you come from home!" she added, turning round towards him.

"Yes, Aunt, and here's the newspaper which I have brought you."

Bertha took the paper which he handed to her and began to read it.

Klingemann, meanwhile, rose to his feet and turned to Richard.

"Have you done your exercises already?" he asked.

"We have no exercises at all now, Herr Klingemann, because our final examination is to take place in July."

"So you will actually be a student by this time next year?"

"This time next year! It'll be in the autumn!"

As he said this Richard drummed his fingers along the newspaper.

"What do you want, then, you ill-mannered fellow?" asked Bertha.

"I say, Aunt, will you come and visit me when I am in Vienna?"

"Yes, I should like to catch myself! I shall be glad to be rid of you!"

"Here comes Herr Rupius!" said Richard.

Bertha lowered the paper and looked in the direction indicated by her nephew's glance. Along the avenue leading from the town a maidservant came, pushing an invalid's chair, in which a man was sitting. His head was uncovered and his soft felt hat was lying upon his knees, from which a plaid rug reached down to his feet. His forehead was lofty; his hair smooth and fair and slightly grizzled at the temples; his feet were peculiarly large. As he passed the bench on which Bertha was seated he only inclined his head slightly, without smiling. Bertha knew that, had she been alone, he would certainly have stopped; moreover, he looked only at her as he passed by, and his greeting seemed to apply to her alone. It seemed to Bertha that she had never before seen such a grave look in his eyes as on this occasion, and she was exceedingly sorry, for she felt a profound compassion for the paralysed man.

When Herr Rupius had passed by, Klingemann said:

"Poor devil! And wifie is away as usual on one of her visits to Vienna, eh?"

"No," answered Bertha, almost angrily. "I was speaking to her only an hour ago."

Klingemann was silent, for he felt that further remarks on the subject of the

mysterious visits of Frau Rupius to Vienna might not have been in keeping with his own reputation as a freethinker.

"Won't he really ever be able to walk again?" asked Richard.

"No," said Bertha.

She knew this for a fact because Herr Rupius had told her so himself on one occasion when she had called on him and his wife was in Vienna.

At that moment Herr Rupius seemed to her to be a particularly pitiful figure, for, as he was being wheeled past her in his invalid's chair, she had, in reading the paper, lighted upon the name of one whom she regarded as a happy man.

Mechanically she read the paragraph again.

"Our celebrated compatriot Emil Lindbach returned to Vienna a few days ago after his professional tour through France and Spain, in the course of which he met with many a triumphant reception. In Madrid this distinguished artist had the honour of playing before the Queen of Spain. On the 24th of this month Herr Lindbach will take part in the charity concert which has been organized for the relief of the inhabitants of Vorarlberg, who have suffered such severe losses as a result of the recent floods. A keen interest in the concert is being shown by the public in spite of the fact that the season is so far advanced."

Emil Lindbach! It required a certain effort on Bertha's part to realize that this was the same man whom she had loved—how many?—twelve years ago. Twelve years! She could feel the hot blood mount up into her brow. It seemed to her as though she ought to be ashamed of having gradually grown older.

The sun had set. Bertha took Fritz by the hand, bade the others good evening, and walked slowly homewards.

She lived on the first floor of a house in a new street. From her windows she had a view of the hill, and opposite were only vacant sites.

Bertha handed Fritz over to the care of the maid, sat down by the window, took up the paper and began to read again. She had kept the custom of glancing through the art news first of all. This habit had been formed in the days of her early childhood, when she and her brother, who was now an actor, used to go to the top gallery of the Burg-Theater together. Her interest in art naturally grew when she attended the conservatoire of music; in those days she had been acquainted with the names of even the minor actors, singers and pianists. Later on, when her frequent visits to the theatres, the studies at the conservatoire and her own artistic aspirations came to an end, there still lingered within her a kind of sympathy, which was not free from the touch of homesickness, towards that joyous world of art. But during the latter portion of her life in Vienna all these things had retained scarcely any of their former significance for her; just as little, indeed, as they had possessed since she had come to reside in the little town, where occasional amateur concerts were the best that was offered in the way of artistic enjoyment. One evening during the first year of her married life, she had taken part in one of these concerts at the "Red Apple" Hotel. She had played two marches by Schubert as a duet with another young lady in the town. On that occasion her agitation had been so great that she had vowed to herself never again to appear in public, and was more than glad that she had given up her hopes of an artistic career.

For such a career a very different temperament from hers was necessary—for example, one like Emil Lindbach's. Yes, he was born to it! She had recognized that by his demeanour the very moment when she had first seen him step on to the dais at a school concert. He had smoothed back his hair in an unaffected manner, gazed at the people below with sardonic superiority, and had acknowledged the first applause which he had ever received in the calm, indifferent manner of one long accustomed to such things.

It was strange, but whenever she thought of Emil Lindbach she still saw him in her mind's eye as youthful, even boyish, just as he had been in the days when they had

known and loved each other. Yet not so long before, when she had spent the evening with her brother-in-law and his wife in a restaurant, she had seen a photograph of him in an illustrated paper, and he appeared to have changed greatly. He no longer wore his hair long; his black moustache was curled downwards; his collar was conspicuously tall, and his cravat twisted in accordance with the fashion of the day. Her sister-in-law had given her opinion that he looked like a Polish count.

Bertha took up the newspaper again and was about to read on, but by that time it was too dark. She rose to her feet and called the maid. The lamp was brought in and the table laid for supper. Bertha ate her meal with Fritz, the window remaining open. That evening she felt an even greater tenderness for her child than usual; she recalled once more to memory the times when her husband was still alive, and all manner of reminiscences passed rapidly through her mind. While she was putting Fritz to bed, her glance lingered for quite a long time on her husband's portrait, which hung over the bed in an oval frame of dark brown wood. It was a full-length portrait; he was wearing a morning coat and a white cravat, and was holding his tall hat in his hand. It was all in memory of their wedding day.

Bertha knew for a certainty, at that moment, that Herr Klingemann would have smiled sarcastically had he seen that portrait.

Later in the evening she sat down at the piano, as was a not infrequent custom of hers before going to bed, not so much because of her enthusiasm for music, but because she did not want to retire to rest too early. On such occasions she played, for the most part, the few pieces which she still knew by heart—mazurkas by Chopin, some passages from one of Beethoven's sonatas, or the Kreisleriana. Sometimes she improvised as well, but never pursued the theme beyond a succession of chords, which, indeed, were always the same.

On that evening she began at once by striking those chords, somewhat more softly than usual; then she essayed various modulations and, as she made the last triad

resound for a long time by means of the pedal—her hands were now lying in her lap—she felt a gentle joy in the melodies which were hovering, as it were, about her. Then Klingemann's observation recurred to her.

"With you music must take the place of everything!"

Indeed he had not been far from the truth. Music certainly had to take the place of much.

But everything—? Oh, no!

What was that? Footsteps over the way….

Well, there was nothing remarkable in that. But they were slow, regular footsteps, as though somebody was passing up and down. She stood up and went to the window. It was quite dark, and at first she could not recognize the man who was walking outside. But she knew that it was Klingemann. How absurd! Was he going to haunt the vicinity like a love-sick swain?

"Good evening, Frau Bertha," he said from across the road, and she could see in the darkness that he raised his hat.

"Good evening," she answered, almost confusedly.

"You were playing most beautifully."

Her only answer was to murmur "really?" and that perhaps did not reach his ears.

He remained standing for a moment, then said:

"Good night, sleep soundly, Frau Bertha."

He pronounced the word "sleep" with an emphasis which was almost insolent.

"Now he is going home to his cook!" thought Bertha to herself.

Then suddenly she called to mind something which she had known for quite a long time, but to which she had not given a thought since it had come to her knowledge. It was rumoured that in his room there hung a picture which was always covered with a little curtain because its subject was of a somewhat questionable nature.

Who was it had told her about that picture? Oh, yes, Frau Rupius had told her when they were taking a walk along the bank of the Danube one day last autumn, and she in her turn had heard of it from some one else—Bertha could not remember from whom.

What an odious man! Bertha felt that somehow she was guilty of a slight depravity in thinking of him and all these things. She continued to stand by the window. It seemed to her as though it had been an unpleasant day. She went over the actual events in her mind, and was astonished to find that, after all, the day had just been like many hundreds before it and many, many more that were yet to come.

## II

They stood up from the table. It had been one of those little Sunday dinner parties which the wine merchant Garlan was in the habit of occasionally giving his acquaintances. The host came up to his sister-in-law and caught her round the waist, which was one of his customs on an afternoon.

She knew beforehand what he wanted. Whenever he had company Bertha had to play the piano after dinner, and often duets with Richard. The music served as a pleasant introduction to a game of cards, or, indeed, chimed in pleasantly with the game.

She sat down at the piano. In the meantime the door of the smoking-room was opened; Garlan, Doctor Friedrich and Herr Martin took their seats at a small baize-covered table and began to play. The wives of the three gentlemen remained in the drawing-room, and Frau Martin lit a cigarette, sat down on the sofa and crossed her legs—on Sundays she always wore dress shoes and black silk stockings. Doctor Friedrich's wife looked at Frau Martin's feet as though fixed to the spot by enchantment. Richard had followed the gentlemen—he already took an interest in a game of taroc. Elly stood with her elbows leaning on the piano waiting for Bertha to

begin to play. The hostess went in and out of the room; she was perpetually giving orders in the kitchen, and rattling the bunch of keys which she carried in her hand. Once as she came into the room Doctor Friedrich's wife threw her a glance which seemed to say: "Just look how Frau Martin is sitting there!"

Bertha noticed all those things that day more clearly, as it were, than usual, somewhat after the manner in which things are seen by a person suffering from fever. She had not as yet struck a note. Then her brother-in-law turned towards her and threw her a glance, which was intended to remind her of her duty. She began to play a march by Schubert, with a very heavy touch.

"Softer," said her brother-in-law, turning round again.

"Taroc with a musical accompaniment is a speciality of this house," said Doctor Friedrich.

"Songs without words, so to speak," added Herr Martin.

The others laughed. Garlan turned round towards Bertha again, for she had suddenly left off playing.

"I have a slight headache," she said, as if it were necessary to make some excuse; immediately, however, she felt as though it were beneath her dignity to say that, and she added: "I don't feel any inclination to play."

Everybody looked at her, feeling that something rather out of the common was happening.

"Won't you come and sit by us, Bertha?" said Frau Garlan.

Elly had a vague idea that she ought to show her affection for her aunt, and hung on her arm; and the two of them stood side by side, leaning against the piano.

"Are you going with us to the 'Red Apple' this evening?" Frau Martin asked of her hostess.

"No, I don't think so."

"Ah," broke in Herr Garlan, "if we must forgo our concert this afternoon we will have one in the evening instead—your lead, Doctor."

"The military concert?" asked Doctor Friedrich's wife.

Frau Garlan rose to her feet.

"Do you really mean to go to the 'Red Apple' this evening?" she asked her husband.

"Certainly."

"Very well," she answered, somewhat flustered, and at once went off to the kitchen again to make fresh arrangements.

"Richard," said Garlan to his son; "you might make haste and run over and tell the manager to have a table reserved for us in the garden."

Richard hurried off, colliding in the doorway with his mother, who was just coming into the room. She sank down on the sofa as though exhausted.

"You can't believe," she said to Doctor Friedrich's wife; "how difficult it is to make Brigitta understand the simplest thing."

Frau Martin had gone and sat down beside her husband, at the same time throwing a glance towards Bertha, who was still standing silently with Elly beside the piano. Frau Martin stroked her husband's hair, laid her hand on his knee and seemed to feel that she was under the necessity of showing the company how happy she was.

"I'll tell you what. Aunt," said Elly suddenly to Bertha; "let's go into the garden for a while. The fresh air will drive your headache away."

They went down the steps into the courtyard, in the centre of which a small lawn had been laid out. At the back, it was shut off by a wall, against which stood a few shrubs and a couple of young trees, which still had to be propped up by stakes. Away over the wall only the blue sky was to be seen; in boisterous weather the rush of the river which flowed close by could be heard. Two wicker garden chairs stood with their backs against the wall, and in front of them was a small table. Bertha and

Elly sat down, Elly still keeping her arm linked in her aunt's.

"Tell you what, Elly?"

"See, I am quite a big girl now; do tell me about him."

Bertha was somewhat alarmed, for it struck her at once that her niece's question did not refer to her dead husband, but to some one else. And suddenly she saw before her mind's eye the picture of Emil Lindbach, just as she had seen it in the illustrated paper; but immediately both the vision and her slight alarm vanished, and she felt a kind of emotion at the shy question of the young girl who believed that she still grieved for her dead husband, and that it would comfort her to have an opportunity for talking about him.

"May I come down and join you, or are you telling each other secrets?"

Richard's voice came at that moment from a window overlooking the courtyard. For the first time Bertha was struck by the resemblance he bore to Emil Lindbach. She realized, however, that it might perhaps only be the youthfulness of his manner and his rather long hair that put her in mind of Emil. Richard was now nearly as old as Emil had been in the days of her studies at the conservatoire.

"I've reserved a table," he said as he came into the courtyard. "Are you coming with us, Aunt Bertha?"

He sat down on the back of her chair, stroked her cheeks, and said in his fresh, yet rather affected, way:

"You will come, won't you, pretty Aunt, for my sake?"

Mechanically Bertha closed her eyes. A feeling of comfort stole over her, as if some childish hand, as if the little fingers of her own Fritz, were caressing her cheeks. Soon, however, she felt that some other memory as well rose up in her mind. She could not help thinking of a walk in the town park which she had taken one evening with Emil after her lesson at the conservatoire. On that occasion he had sat down to

rest beside her on a seat, and had touched her cheeks with tender fingers. Was it only once that that had happened? No—much oftener! Indeed, they had sat on that seat ten or twenty times, and he had stroked her cheeks. How strange it was that all these things should come back to her thoughts now!

She would certainly never have thought of those walks again had not Richard by chance—but how long was she going to put up with his stroking her cheek?

"Richard!" she exclaimed, opening her eyes.

She saw that he was smiling in such a way that she thought that he must have divined what was passing through her mind. Of course, it was quite impossible, because, as a matter of fact, scarcely anybody in the town was aware that she was acquainted with Emil Lindbach, the great violinist. If it came to that, was she really acquainted with him still? It was indeed a very different person from Emil as he must now be that she had in mind—a handsome youth whom she had loved in the days of her early girlhood.

Thus her thoughts strayed further and further back into the past, and it seemed altogether impossible for her to return to the present and chatter with the two children.

She bade them good-bye and went away.

The afternoon sun lay brooding heavily upon the streets of the little town. The shops were shut, the pavements almost deserted. A few officers were sitting at a little table in front of the restaurant in the market square. Bertha glanced up at the windows of the first story of the house in which Herr and Frau Rupius lived. It was quite a long time since she had been to see them. She clearly remembered the last occasion—it was the day after Christmas. It was then that she had found Herr Rupius alone and that he had told her that his affliction was incurable. She also remembered distinctly why she had not called upon him since that day: although she did not admit it to herself, she had a kind of fear of entering that house which she had then left with her

mind in a state of violent agitation.

On the present occasion, however, she felt that she must go up; it seemed as though in the course of the last few days a kind of bond had been established between her and the paralysed man, and as though even the glance with which he had silently greeted her on the previous day, when she was out walking, had had some significance.

When she entered the room her eyes had, first of all, to become accustomed to the dimness of the light; the blinds were drawn and a sunbeam poured in only through the chink at the top, and fell in front of the white stove. Herr Rupius was sitting in an armchair at the table in the centre of the room. Before him lay stacks of prints, and he was just in the act of picking up one in order to look at the one beneath it. Bertha could see that they were engravings.

"Thank you for coming to see me once again," he said, stretching out his hand to her. "You see what it is I am busy on just now? Well, it is a collection of engravings after the old Dutch masters. Believe me, my dear lady, it is a great pleasure to examine old engravings."

"Oh, it is, indeed."

"See, there are six volumes, or rather six portfolios, each containing twenty prints. It will probably take me the whole summer to become thoroughly acquainted with them."

Bertha stood by his side and looked at the engraving immediately before him. It was a market scene by Teniers.

"The whole summer," she said absent-mindedly.

Rupius turned towards her.

"Yes, indeed," he said, his jaw slightly set, as though it was a matter of vindicating his point of view; "what I call being thoroughly acquainted with a picture. By that I

mean: being able, so to speak, to reproduce it in my mind, line for line. This one here is a Teniers—the original is in one of the galleries at The Hague. Why don't you go to The Hague, where so many splendid examples of the art of Teniers and so many other styles of painting are to be seen, my dear lady?"

Bertha smiled.

"How can I think of making such a journey as that?"

"Yes, yes, of course, that's so," said Herr Rupius; "The Hague is a very beautiful town. I was there fourteen years ago. At that time I was twenty-eight, I am now forty-two—or, I might say, eighty-four"—he picked up the print and laid it aside—"here we have an Ostade—'The Pipe Smoker.' Quite so, you can see easily enough that he is smoking a pipe. 'Original in Vienna.'"

"I think I remember that picture."

"Won't you come and sit opposite to me, Frau Bertha, or here beside me, if you would care to look at the pictures with me? Now we come to a Falkenborg—wonderful, isn't it? In the extreme foreground, though, it seems so void, so cramped. Yes, nothing but a peasant lad dancing with a girl, and there's an old woman who is cross about it, and here is a house out of the door of which someone is coming with a pail of water. Yes, that is all—a mere nothing of course, but there in the background you see, is the whole world, blue mountains, green towns, the clouded sky above, and near it a tourney—ha! ha!—in a certain sense perhaps it is out of place, but, on the other hand, in a certain sense it may be said to be appropriate. Since everything has a background and it is therefore perfectly right that here, directly behind the peasant's house, the world should begin with its tourneys, and its mountains, its rivers, its fortresses, its vineyards and its forests."

He pointed out the various parts of the picture to which he was referring with a little ivory paper-knife.

"Do you like it?" he continued. "The original also hangs in the Gallery in Vienna.

You must have seen it."

"Oh, but it is now six years since I lived in Vienna, and for many years before that I had not paid a visit to the museum."

"Indeed? I have often walked round the galleries there, and stood before this picture, too. Yes, in those earlier days I walked."

He was almost laughing as he looked at her, and; her embarrassment was such that she could not make any reply.

"I fear I am boring you with the pictures," Herr Rupius went on abruptly. "Wait a little; my wife will be home soon. You know, I suppose, that she always goes for a two hours walk after dinner now. She is afraid of becoming too stout."

"Your wife looks as young and slender as … well, I don't think she has altered in the very least since I have come to live here."

Bertha felt as though Rupius' countenance had grown quite rigid. Then suddenly he said, in a gentle tone of voice which was not by any means in keeping with the expression of his face:

"A quiet life in a little town such as this keeps me young, of course. It was a clever idea of mine and hers, for it occurred simultaneously to both of us, to move here. Who can say whether, had we stayed in Vienna, it might not have been all over already?"

Bertha could not guess what he meant by the expression "all over"; whether he was referring to his own life, to his wife's youthfulness, or to something else. In any case, she was sorry that she had called that day; a feeling of shame at being so strong and well herself came over her.

"Did I tell you," continued Rupius, "that it was Anna who got these portfolios for me? It was a chance bargain, for the work is usually very expensive. A bookseller had advertised it and Anna telegraphed at once to her brother to procure it for us.

You know, of course, that we have many relations in Vienna, both Anna and myself. Sometimes, too, she goes there to visit them. Soon after they pay us a return visit. I should be very glad indeed to see them again, especially Anna's brother and his wife, I owe them a great deal of gratitude. When Anna is in Vienna, she dines and sleeps at their house—but, of course, you already know all that, Frau Bertha."

He spoke rapidly and, at the same time, in a cool, businesslike tone. It sounded as though he had made up his mind to tell the same things to every one who should enter the room that day. It was the first time that he had as much as spoken to Bertha of the journeys of his wife to Vienna.

"She is going again to-morrow," he continued; "I believe the matter in hand this time is her summer costume."

"I think that is a very clever notion of your wife," said Bertha, glad to have found an opening for conversation.

"It is cheaper, at the same time," added Herr Rupius. "Yes, I assure you it is cheaper even if you throw in the cost of the journey. Why don't you follow my wife's example?"

"In that way, Herr Rupius?"

"Why, in regard to your frocks and hats! You are young and pretty, too!"

"Heavens above! On whose account should I dress smartly?"

"On whose account! On whose account is it that my wife dresses so smartly?"

The door opened and Frau Rupius entered in a bright spring costume, a red sunshade in her hand and a white straw hat, trimmed with red ribbon, on her dark hair, which was dressed high. A pleasant smile was hovering around her lips, as usual, and she greeted Bertha with a quiet cheerfulness.

"Are you making an appearance in our house once more?" she said, handing her sunshade and hat to the maid, who had followed her into the room.

"Are you also interested in pictures, Frau Garlan?"

She went up close behind her husband and softly passed her hand over his forehead and hair.

"I was just telling Frau Garlan," said Rupius, "how surprised I am that she never goes to Vienna."

"Indeed," Frau Rupius put in; "why don't you do so? Moreover, you must certainly have some acquaintances there, too. Come with me one day—to-morrow, for example. Yes, to-morrow."

Rupius gazed straight before him while his wife said this, as though he did not dare to look at her.

"You are really very kind, Frau Rupius," said Bertha, feeling as though a perfect stream of joy was coursing through her being.

She wondered, too, how it was that all this time the possibility of making such a journey had not once entered her mind, the more so as it could be accomplished with so little trouble. It appeared to her at that moment that such a journey might be a remedy for the strange sense of dissatisfaction under which she had been suffering during the past few days.

"Well, do you agree, Frau Garlan?"

"I don't really know—I daresay I could spare the time, for I have only one lesson to give tomorrow at my sister-in-law's, and she, of course, won't be too exacting; but wouldn't I be putting you to some inconvenience?"

A slight shadow flitted across Frau Rupius' brow.

"Putting me to inconvenience! Whatever are you dreaming of! I shall be very glad to have pleasant company during the few hours of the journey there and back. And in Vienna—oh, we shall be sure to have much to do together in Vienna."

"Your husband," said Bertha, blushing like a girl who is speaking of her first ball,

"has told me … has advised me …"

"Surely, he has been raving to you about my dressmaker," said Frau Rupius, laughing.

Rupius still sat motionless in his chair and looked at neither of them.

"Yes, I should really like to ask you about her, Frau Rupius. When I see you I feel as if I should like to be well dressed again, just as you are."

"That is easily arranged," said Frau Rupius. "I will take you to my dressmaker, and by so doing I hope also to have the pleasure of your company on my subsequent visits. I am glad for your sake as well," she said to her husband, touching his hand which was lying on the table. Then she turned to Bertha and added: "and for yours. You will see how much good it will do you. Wandering about the streets without being known to a soul has a wonderful effect on one's spirits. I do it from time to time, and I always come back quite refreshed and—" in saying this she threw a sidelong glance, full of anxiety and tenderness, in the direction of her husband—"and then I am as happy here as ever it is possible to be; happier, I believe, than any other woman in the world."

She drew near her husband and kissed him on the temple. Bertha heard her say in a soft voice, as she did so:

"Dearest!"

Rupius, however, continued to stare before him as though he shrank from meeting his wife's glance.

Both were silent and seemed to be absorbed in themselves, as though Bertha was not in the room. Bertha comprehended vaguely that there was some mysterious factor in the relations of these two people, but what that factor was she was not clever, or not experienced, or not good enough to understand. For a whole minute the silence continued, and Bertha was so embarrassed that she would gladly have gone away had it not been necessary to arrange with Frau Rupius the details of the morrow's

journey.

Anna was the first to speak.

"So then it is agreed that we are to meet at the railway station in time for the morning train—isn't it? And I will arrange matters so that we return home by the seven o'clock train in the evening. In eight hours, you see, it is possible to get through a good deal."

"Certainly," said Bertha; "provided, of course, that you are not inconveniencing yourself on my account in the slightest degree."

Anna interrupted her, almost angrily.

"I have already told you how glad I am that you will be travelling with me, the more so as there is not a woman in the town so congenial to me as you."

"Yes," said Herr Rupius, "I can corroborate that. You know, of course, that my wife is on visiting terms with hardly anybody here—and as it has been such a long time since you came to see us I was beginning to fear that she was going to lose you as well."

"However could you have thought such a thing? My dear Herr Rupius! And you, Frau Rupius, surely you haven't believed—"

At that moment Bertha felt an overwhelming love for both of them. Her emotion was such that she detected her voice to be assuming an almost tearful tone.

Frau Rupius smiled, a strange, deliberate smile.

"I haven't believed anything. As a matter of fact there are some things over which I do not generally ponder for long. I have no great need of friends, but you, Frau Bertha, I really and truly love."

She stretched out her hand to her. Bertha cast a glance at Rupius. It seemed to her that an expression of contentment should now be observable on his features. To her amazement, however, she saw that he was gazing into the corner of the room with

an almost terrified look in his eyes.

The parlourmaid came in with some coffee. Further particulars as to their plans for the morrow were discussed, and finally they drew up a tolerably exact time-table which, to Frau Rupius' slight amusement, Bertha entered in a little notebook.

When Bertha reached the street again, the sky had become overcast, and the increasing sultriness foretold the approach of a thunderstorm. The first large drops were falling before she reached home, and she was somewhat alarmed when, on going upstairs, she failed to find the servant and little Fritz. As she went up to the window, however, in order to shut it, she saw the two come running along. The first thunderclap crashed out, and she started back in terror. Then immediately came a brilliant flash of lightning.

The storm was brief, but unusually violent. Bertha went and sat on her bed, held Fritz on her lap, and told him a story, so that he should not be frightened. But, at the same time, she felt as though there was a certain connexion between her experiences of the past two days and the thunderstorm.

In half an hour all was over. Bertha opened the window; the air was now fresh, the darkening sky was clear and distant. Bertha drew a deep breath, and a feeling of peace and hope seemed to permeate her being.

It was time to get ready for the concert in the gardens. On her arrival she found her friends already gathered at a large table beneath a tree. It was Bertha's intention to tell her sister-in-law at once about her proposed visit to Vienna on the morrow, but a sense of shyness, as though there was something underhand in the journey, caused her to refrain.

Herr Klingemann went by with his housekeeper towards their table. The housekeeper was getting on towards middle-age; she was a very voluptuous looking woman, taller than Klingemann, and, when she walked, always appeared to be asleep. Klingemann bowed towards them with exaggerated politeness. The

gentlemen scarcely acknowledged the salutation, and the ladies pretended not to have noticed it. Only Bertha nodded slightly and gazed after the couple.

"That is his sweetheart—yes, I know it for a positive fact," whispered Richard, who was sitting near his aunt.

Herr Garlan's party ate, drank and applauded. At times various acquaintances came over from other tables, sat down with them for awhile, and then went away again to their places. The music murmured around Bertha without making any impression on her. Her mind was continuously occupied with the question as to how to inform them of her project.

Suddenly, while the music was playing very loudly, she said to Richard:

"I say, I won't be able to give you a music lesson to-morrow. I am going to Vienna."

"To Vienna!" exclaimed Richard; then he called across to his mother; "I say, Aunt Bertha is going to Vienna to-morrow!"

"Who's going to Vienna?" asked Garlan, who was sitting furthest away.

"I am," answered Bertha.

"What's this! What's this!" said Garlan, playfully threatening her with his finger.

So, then, it was accomplished. Bertha was glad. Richard made jokes about the people who were sitting in the garden, also about the fat bandmaster who was always skipping about while he was conducting, and then about the trumpet-player whose cheeks bulged out and who seemed to be shedding tears when he blew into his instrument. Bertha could not help laughing very heartily. Jests were bandied about her high spirits and Doctor Friedrich remarked that she must surely be going to some rendezvous at Vienna.

"I should like to put a stop to that, though!" exclaimed Richard, so angrily that the hilarity became general.

Only Elly remained serious, and gazed at her aunt in downright astonishment.

# III

Bertha looked out through the open carriage window upon the landscape: Frau Rupius read a book, which she had taken out of her little traveling-bag very soon after the train had started. It almost appeared as though she wished to avoid any lengthy conversation with Bertha, and the latter felt somewhat hurt. For a long time past she had been cherishing a wish to be a friend of Frau Rupius, but since the previous day this desire of hers had become almost a yearning, which recalled to her mind the whole-hearted devotion of the friendships of the days of her childhood.

At first, therefore, she had felt quite unhappy, and had a sensation of having been abandoned, but soon the changing panorama to be seen through the window began to distract her thoughts in an agreeable manner. As she looked at the rails which seemed to run to meet her, at the hedges and telegraph poles which glided and leaped past her, she recalled to mind the few short journeys to the Salzkammergut, where she had been taken, when a child, by her parents, and the indescribable pleasure of having been allowed to occupy a corner seat on those occasions. Then she looked into the distance and exulted in the gleaming of the river, in the pleasant windings of the hills and meadows, in the azure of the sky and in the white clouds.

After a time Anna laid down the book, and began to chat to Bertha and smiled at her, as though at a child.

"Who would have foretold this of us?" said Frau Rupius.

"That we should be going to Vienna together?"

"No, no, I mean that we shall both—how shall I express it?—pass or end our lives yonder"—she gave a slight nod in the direction of the place from which they came.

"Very true, indeed!" answered Bertha, who had not yet considered whether there was anything really strange in the fact or not.

"Well, you, of course, knew it the moment you were married, but I—"

Frau Rupius gazed straight before her.

"So then your move to the little town," said Bertha, "did not take place until—until—"

She broke off in confusion.

"Yes, you know that, of course."

In saying this Frau Rupius looked Bertha full in the face as if reproaching her for her question. But when she continued to speak she smiled gently, as though her thoughts were not occupied by anything so sad.

"Yes, I never imagined that I should leave Vienna; my husband had his position as a government official, and indeed he would certainly have been able to remain longer there, in spite of his infirmity, had he not wanted to go away at once."

"He thought, perhaps, that the fresh air, the quiet—" began Bertha, and she at once perceived that she was not saying anything very sensible.

Nevertheless Anna answered her quite affably.

"Oh, no, neither rest nor climate could do him any good, but he thought that it would be better for both of us in every way. He was right, too—what should we have been able to do if we had remained in the city?"

Bertha felt that Anna was not telling her the whole story and she would have liked to beg her not to hesitate, but to open her whole heart to her. She knew, however, that she was not clever enough to express such a request in the right words. Then, as though Frau Rupius had guessed that Bertha was anxious to learn more, she quickly changed the subject of their conversation. She asked Bertha about her brother-in-law, the musical talent of her pupils, and her method of teaching; then she took up the novel again and left Bertha to herself.

Once she looked up from the book and said:

"You haven't brought anything with you to read, then?"

"Oh, yes," answered Bertha.

She suddenly remembered that she had bought a newspaper; she took it up and turned over the pages assiduously. The train drew near to Vienna. Frau Rupius closed her book and put it in the travelling-bag. She looked at Bertha with a certain tenderness, as at a child who must soon be sent away alone to meet an uncertain destiny.

"Another quarter of an hour," she remarked; "and we shall be—well, I very nearly said, home."

Before them lay the town. On the far side of the river chimneys towered up aloft, rows of tall yellow painted houses stretched away into the distance, and steeples ascended skywards. Everything lay basking in the gentle sunlight of May.

Bertha's heart throbbed. She experienced a sensation such as might come over a traveller returning after a long absence to a longed-for home, which had probably altered greatly in the meantime, and where surprises and mysteries of all kinds awaited him. At the moment when the train rolled into the station she seemed almost courageous in her own eyes.

Frau Rupius took a carriage, and they drove into the town. As they passed the Ring, Bertha suddenly leaned out of the window and gazed after a young man whose figure and walk reminded her of Emil Lindbach. She wished that the young man would turn round, but she lost sight of him without his having done so.

The carriage stopped before a house in the Kohlmarkt. The two ladies got out and made their way to the third floor, where the dressmaker's workroom was situated. While Frau Rupius tried on her new costume, Bertha had various materials displayed to her from which she made a choice. The assistant took her measure, and it was arranged that Bertha should call in a week's time to be fitted. Frau Rupius came out from the adjoining room and recommended that particular care should be given to her friend's order.

It seemed to Bertha that everybody was looking at her in a rather disparaging, almost compassionate manner, and, on looking at herself in the large pier glass she suddenly perceived that she was very tastelessly dressed. What on earth had put it into her head to attire herself on this occasion in the provincial Sunday-best, instead of in one of the simple plain dresses she usually wore? She grew crimson with shame. She had on a black and white striped foulard costume, which was three years out of date, so far as its cut was concerned, and a bright-coloured hat, trimmed with roses and turned up at an extravagant angle in front, which seemed to weigh heavily upon her dainty figure and made her appear almost ridiculous.

Then, as if her own conviction needed further confirmation by some word of consolation, Frau Rupius said, as they went down the stairs:

"You are looking lovely!"

They stood in the doorway.

"What shall be done now?" asked Frau Rupius. "What do you propose?"

"Will you then … I … I mean …"

Bertha was quite frightened; she felt as though she was being turned adrift.

Frau Rupius looked at her with kindly commiseration.

"I think," she said, "that you are going to pay a visit to your cousin now, are you not? I suppose that you will be asked to stay to dinner."

"Agatha will be sure to invite me to dine with her."

"I will accompany you as far as your cousin's, if you would like me to; then I will go to my brother and, if possible, I will call for you at three in the afternoon."

Together they walked through the most crowded streets of the central part of the town and looked at the shop windows. At first Bertha found the din somewhat confusing; afterwards, however, she found it more pleasant than otherwise. She gazed at the passers-by and took great pleasure in watching the well-groomed men

and smartly-attired ladies. Almost all the people seemed to be wearing new clothes, and it seemed to her they all looked much happier than the people at home.

Presently she stopped before the window of a picture-dealer's shop and immediately her eyes fell on a familiar portrait; it was the same one of Emil Lindbach as had appeared in the illustrated paper, Bertha was as delighted as if she had met an acquaintance.

"I know that man," she said to Frau Rupius.

"Whom?"

"That man there"—she pointed with her finger at the photograph—"what do you think? I used to attend the conservatoire at the same time he did!"

"Really?" said Frau Rupius.

Bertha looked at her and observed that she had not paid the slightest attention to the portrait, but was thinking of something else. Bertha, however, was glad of that, for it seemed to her that there had been too much warmth lurking in her voice.

All at once a gentle thrill of pride stirred within her at the thought that the man whose portrait hung there in the shop window had been in love with her in the days of his youth, and had kissed her. She walked on with a sensation of inward contentment. After a short time they reached her cousin's house on the Riemerstrasse.

"So it's settled then," she said; "you will call for me at three o'clock, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Frau Rupius; "that is to say—but if I should be a little late, do not on any account wait for me at your cousin's any longer than you want to. In any case, this much is settled: we will both be at the railway station at seven o'clock this evening. Good-bye for the present."

She shook hands with Bertha and hurried away.

Bertha gazed after her in surprise. Once more she felt forlorn, just as she had done in

the train when Frau Rupius had read the novel.

Then she went up the two flights of stairs. She had not sent her cousin word as to her visit, and she was a little afraid that her arrival might be somewhat inopportune. She had not seen Agatha for many years, and they had exchanged letters only at very rare intervals.

Agatha received her without either surprise or cordiality, as though it was only the day before that they had seen each other for the last time. A smile had been playing around Bertha's lips—the smile of those who think that they are about to give some one else a surprise—she repressed it immediately.

"Well, you are not a very frequent visitor, I must say!" said Agatha, "and you never let us have a word from you."

"But, Agatha, you know it was your turn to write; you have been owing me a letter these last three months."

"Really!" replied Agatha. "Well, you'll have to excuse me; you can imagine what a lot of work three children mean. Did I write and tell you that Georg goes to school now?"

Agatha took her cousin into the nursery, where Georg and his two little sisters were just having their dinner given them by the nursery-governess. Bertha asked them a few questions, but the children were very shy, and the younger girl actually began to cry.

"Do beg Aunt Bertha to bring Fritz with her next time she comes," said Agatha to Georg at length.

It struck Bertha how greatly her cousin had aged during the last few years. Indeed, when she bent down to the children Agatha appeared almost like an old woman; and yet she was only a year older than Bertha, as the latter knew.

By the time they had returned to the dining-room they had already told each other all

that they had to say, and when Agatha invited Bertha to stay to dinner, it seemed that she spoke only for the mere sake of making some remark. Bertha accepted the invitation, nevertheless, and her cousin went into the kitchen to give some orders.

Bertha gazed around the room, which was furnished economically and in bad taste. It was very dark, for the street was extremely narrow. She took up an album which was lying on the table. She found hardly any but familiar faces in it. At the very beginning were the portraits of Agatha's parents, who had died long ago; then came those of her own parents and of her brothers, of whom she scarcely ever heard; portraits of friends whom they both had known in earlier days, and of whom she now knew hardly anything; and, finally, there was a photograph, the existence of which she had long forgotten. It was one of herself and Agatha together, and had been taken when they were quite young girls. In those days they had been very much alike in appearance, and had been great friends. Bertha could remember many of the confidential chats which they had had together in the days of their girlhood.

And that lovely creature there with the looped plaits was now almost an old woman! And what of herself? What reason had she, then, for still looking upon herself as a young woman? Did she not, perhaps, appear to others as old as Agatha had seemed to her? She resolved that, in the afternoon, she would take notice of the glances which passers-by bestowed upon her. It would be terrible if she really did look as old as her cousin! No, the idea was utterly ridiculous! She called to mind how her nephew, Richard always called her his "pretty aunt," how Klingemann had walked to and fro outside her window the other evening—and even the recollection of her brother-in-law's attentions reassured her. And, when she looked in the mirror which was hanging opposite to her, she saw two bright eyes gazing at her from a smooth, fresh face—they were her face and her eyes.

When Agatha came into the room again Bertha began to talk of the far-away years of their childhood, but it seemed that Agatha had forgotten all about those early

days, as though marriage, motherhood and week-day cares had obliterated both youth and its memories. When Bertha went on to speak of a students' dance they had both attended, of the young men who had courted Agatha, and of a bouquet which some unknown lover had once sent her, Agatha at first smiled rather absent-mindedly, then she looked at Bertha and said:

"Just fancy you still remembering all those foolish things!"

Agatha's husband came home from his Government office. He had grown very grey since Bertha had last seen him. At first sight he did not appear to recognize Bertha, then he mistook her for another lady, and excused himself by remarking that he had a very bad memory for faces. At dinner he affected to be smart, he inquired in a certain superior way about the affairs of the little town, and wondered, jestingly, whether Bertha was not thinking of marrying again. Agatha also took part in this bantering, although, at the same time, she occasionally glanced reprovingly at her husband, who was trying to give the conversation a frivolous turn.

Bertha felt ill at ease. Later on she gathered from some words of Agatha's husband that they were expecting another addition to their family. Usually Bertha felt sympathy for women in such circumstances, but in this case the news created an almost unpleasant impression upon her. Moreover there was not a trace of love to be discerned in the tone of the husband's voice when he referred to it, but rather a kind of foolish pride on the score of an accomplished duty. He spoke of the matter as though it was a special act of kindness on his part that, in spite of the fact that he was a busy man, and Agatha was no longer beautiful, he condescended to spend his time at home. Bertha had an impression that she was being mixed up in some sordid affair which did not concern her in the least. She was glad when, as soon as he had finished his dinner, the husband went off—it was his custom, "his only vice," as he said with a smile, to play billiards at the restaurant for an hour after dinner.

Bertha and Agatha were left together.

"Yes," said Agatha, "I've got that to look forward to again."

Thereupon she began, in a cold, businesslike way, to talk about her previous confinements, with a candour and lack of modesty which seemed all the more remarkable because they had become such strangers. While Agatha was continuing the relation of her experiences, however, the thought suddenly passed through Bertha's mind that it must be glorious to have a child by a husband whom one loved.

She ceased to pay attention to her cousin's unpleasant talk; and her thoughts were only occupied by the infinite yearning for motherhood which had often come over her when she was quite a young girl, and she called to mind an occasion when that yearning had been more keen than it had ever been, either before or after. This had happened one evening when Emil Lindbach had accompanied her home from the conservatoire, her hand clasped in his. She still remembered how her head had begun to swim, and that at one moment she had understood what the phrase meant which she had sometimes read in novels: "He could have done with her just as he liked."

Then she noticed that it had grown quite silent in the room, and that Agatha was leaning back in the corner of the sofa, apparently asleep. It was three by the clock. How tiresome it was that Frau Rupius had not yet arrived! Bertha went to the window and looked out into the street. Then she turned towards Agatha, who had again opened her eyes. Bertha quickly tried to begin a fresh conversation, and told her about the new costume which she had ordered in the forenoon, but Agatha was too sleepy even to answer. Bertha had no wish to put her cousin out, and took her departure. She decided to wait for Frau Rupius in the street. Agatha seemed very pleased when Bertha got ready to go. She became more cordial than she had been at any time during her cousin's visit, and said at the door, as if struck by some brilliant idea:

"How the time does pass! I do hope you'll come and see us again soon."

Bertha, as she stood before the door of the house, realized that she was waiting for Frau Rupius in vain. There was no doubt that it had been the latter's intention from the beginning to spend the afternoon without her. Of course, it did not necessarily follow that there was anything wicked in it; as a matter of fact there was nothing wicked in it, but it hurt Bertha to think that Anna had so little trust in her.

She walked along with no fixed purpose. She had still more than three hours to while away before she was to be at the station. At first, she took a walk in the inner town, which she had passed through in the morning. It was really a pleasant thing to wander about unobserved like this, as a stranger in the crowd. It was long since she had experienced that pleasure. Some of the men who passed her glanced at her with interest, and more than one, indeed, stopped to gaze after her. She regretted that she was dressed to so little advantage, and rejoiced at the prospect of obtaining soon the beautiful costume she had ordered from the Viennese dressmaker. She would have liked to find some one following her.

Suddenly the thought passed through her mind: would Emil Lindbach recognize her if she were to meet him? What a question! Such things never happened, of course. No, she was quite sure that she could wander about Vienna the whole day long without ever meeting him. How long was it since she had seen him? Seven—eight years…. Yes, the last time she had met him was two years before her marriage. She had been with her parents one warm summer evening in the Schweitzerhaus on the Prater; he had gone by with a friend and had stopped a few minutes at their table. Ah, and now she remembered also that amongst the company at their table there had been the young doctor who was courting her. She had forgotten what Emil had said on that occasion, but she remembered that he had held his hat in his hand during the whole time he was standing before her, which had afforded her inexpressible delight. Would he do the same now, she thought to herself, if she were to meet him?

Where was he living now, she wondered. In the old days he had a room on the

Weiden, near St. Paul's Church…. Yes, he had pointed out the window as they passed one day, and had ventured, as they did so, to make a certain remark—she had forgotten the exact words, but there was no doubt that they had been to the effect that he and she ought to be in that room together. She had rebuked him very severely for saying such a thing; she had even gone the length of telling him that if that was the sort of girl he thought she was, all was over between them. And, in fact, he had never spoken another word on the subject.

Would she recognize the window again? Would she find it? It was all the same to her, of course, whether she went for a walk in this direction or that. She hurried towards the Weiden as though she had suddenly found an object for her walk. She was amazed at the complete change which had come over the neighbourhood. When she looked down from the Elizabeth Bridge she saw walls that rose from the bed of the Wien, half finished tracks, little trucks moving to and fro, and busy workmen. Soon she reached St. Paul's Church by the same road as she had so often followed in the old days. But then she came to a standstill; she was absolutely at a loss to remember where Emil had lived—whether she had to turn to the right or to the left. It was strange how completely it had escaped her memory. She walked slowly back as far as the Conservatoire, then she stood still. Above her were the windows from which she had so often gazed upon the dome of St. Charles' Church, and longingly awaited the end of the lesson so that she might meet Emil. How great had been her love for him, indeed; and how strange it was that it should have died so completely!

And now, when she had returned to these scenes, she was a widow, had been so for years, and had a child at home who was growing up. If she had died, Emil would never have heard of it, or perhaps not until years afterwards. Her eyes fell on a large placard fixed on the entrance, gates of the Conservatoire. It was an announcement of the concert at which he was going to play, and there was his name appearing among a number of other great ones, many of which she had long since admired with gentle awe.

"BRAHMS VIOLIN CONCERTO—EMIL LINDBACH, VIOLINIST TO THE COURT OF BAVARIA."

"Violinist to the Court of Bavaria!"—she had never heard anything about that before.

Gazing up at his name, which stood out in glittering letters, it seemed to her as though the next moment Emil himself might come out through the gate, his violin case in his hand, a cigarette between his lips. Of a sudden it all seemed so near, and nearer still when all at once from the windows above came floating down the long-drawn notes of a violin, just as she had so often heard in the old days.

She thought she would like to come to Vienna for that concert—yes, even if she should be obliged to spend the night at an hotel! And she would take a seat right in front and see him quite close at hand. She wondered whether he, in his turn, would see her, and, if so, whether he would recognize her. She remained standing before the yellow placard, wholly absorbed in thought, until she felt that some young people coming out of the Conservatoire were staring at her and then she realized that she had been smiling to herself the whole time, as if lost in a pleasant dream.

She proceeded to walk on. The district around the town-park had also changed, and, when she sought the places where she and Emil had often been for walks together, she found that they had quite' disappeared. Trees had been felled, boardings barred the way, the ground had been dug up, and in vain she tried to find the seat where she and Emil had exchanged words of love, the tone of which she remembered so well without being able to recall the actual phrases.

Presently she reached the trim well-kept part of the park, which was full of people. But she had a sensation that many were looking at her, and that some ladies were laughing at her. And once more she felt that she was looking very countrified. She was vexed at being embarrassed, and thought of the time when, as a pretty young girl, she had walked, proud and unconcerned, along these very avenues. It seemed to

her that she had fallen off so much since then, and become so pitiable. Her idea of sitting in the front row of the concert hall appeared presumptuous, almost unfeasible. It seemed also highly improbable now that Emil Lindbach would recognize her; indeed, it struck her as almost impossible that he should remember her existence. What a number of experiences he must have had! How many women and girls might well have loved him—and in a manner quite different from her own!

And whilst she continued her way, walking, now along the less frequented avenues and at length out of the park upon the Ringstrasse again, she drew a mental picture of the beloved of her youth figuring in all manner of adventures, in which confused recollections of events depicted in the novels she had read and indistinctly formed ideas of his professional tours were strangely intermingled. She imagined him in Venice with a Russian princess in a gondola; then in her mind's eye she saw him at the court of the King of Bavaria, where duchesses listened to his playing, and fell in love with him; then in the boudoir of an opera singer; then at a fancy-dress ball in Spain, with crowds of alluring masqueraders about him. The further he seemed to soar away, unapproachable and enviable, the more miserable she felt herself to be, and all at once it seemed utterly inconceivable that she had so lightly surrendered her own hopes of an artistic career and given up her lover, in order to lead a sunless existence, and to be lost in the crowd. A shudder seemed to seize her as she recalled that she was nothing but the widow of an insignificant man, that she lived in a provincial town, that she earned her living by means of music lessons, and that she saw old age slowly approaching. Never had there fallen upon her way so much as a single ray of the brilliance which shone upon the road his footsteps would tread so long as he lived. And again the same shudder ran through her at the thought that she had always been content with her lot, and that, without hope and indeed, without yearning, she had passed her whole existence in a gloom, which, at that moment, seemed inexplicable.

She reached the Aspernbrueke without in the least giving heed to where her

footsteps were taking her. She wished to cross the street at this point, but had to wait while a great number of carriages drove by. Most of them were occupied by gentlemen, many of whom carried field-glasses. She knew that they were returning from the races at the Prater.

There came an elegant equipage in which were seated a young man and a girl, the latter dressed in a white spring costume. Immediately behind was a carriage containing two strikingly dressed ladies. Bertha gazed long after them, and noticed that one of the ladies turned round, and that the object of her attention was the carriage which followed immediately behind, and in which sat a young and very handsome man in a long grey overcoat. Bertha was conscious of something very painful—uneasiness and annoyance at one and the same time. She would have liked to be the lady whom the young man followed; she would have liked to be beautiful, young, independent, and, Heaven knows, she would have liked to be any woman who could do as she wanted, and could turn round after men who pleased her.

And at that moment she realized, quite distinctly, that Frau Rupius was now in the company of somebody whom she loved. Indeed why shouldn't she? Of course, so long as she stayed in Vienna, she was free and mistress of her own time—besides, she was a very pretty woman, and was wearing a fragrant violet costume. On her lips there hovered a smile such as only comes to those who are happy—and Frau Rupius was unhappy at home. All at once, Bertha had a vision of Herr Rupius sitting in his room, looking at the engravings. But on that day, surely, he was not doing so; no, he was trembling for his wife, consumed with an immense fear that some one yonder in the great city would take her away from him, that she would never return, and that he would be left all alone with his sorrow. And Bertha suddenly felt a thrill of compassion for him, such as she had never experienced before. Indeed, she would have liked to be with him, to comfort and to reassure him.

She felt a touch on her arm. She started and looked up. A young man was standing

beside her and gazing at her with an impudent leer. She stared at him, full in the face, still quite absentmindedly; then he said with a laugh:

"Well?"

She was frightened, and almost ran across the street, quickly passing in front of a carriage. She was ashamed of her previous desire to be the lady in the carriage she had seen coming from the Prater. It seemed as though the man's insolence had been her punishment. No, no, she was a respectable woman; in the depth of her soul she had an aversion to everything that savoured of the insolent…. No, she could no longer stay in Vienna, where women were exposed to such things! A longing for the peace of her home came over her, and she rejoiced in the prospect of meeting her little boy again, as in something extraordinarily beautiful.

What time was it, though? Heavens, a quarter of seven! She would have to take a carriage; there was no question about that now, indeed! Frau Rupius had, of course, paid for the carriage in the morning, and so the one which she was now going to take would only cost her half, so to speak. She took her seat in an open cab, leaned back in the corner, in almost the same aristocratic manner as that of the lady she had seen in the white frock. People gazed after her. She knew that she was now looking young and pretty. Moreover, she was feeling quite safe, nothing could happen to her. She took an indescribable pleasure in the swift motion of the cab with its rubber-tyred wheels. She thought how splendid it would be if on the occasion of her next visit she were to drive through the town, wearing her new costume and the small straw hat which made her look so young.

She was glad that Frau Rupius was standing in the entrance to the station and saw her arrive. But she betrayed no sign of pride, and acted as though it was quite the usual thing for her to drive up to the station in a cab.

"We have still ten minutes to spare," said Frau Rupius. "Are you very angry with me for having kept you waiting? Just fancy, my brother was giving a grand children's

party to-day, and the little ones simply wouldn't let me go. It occurred to me too late that I might really have called for you; the children would have amused you so much. I have told my brother that, next time, I will bring you and your boy with me."

Bertha felt heartily ashamed of herself. How she had wronged this woman again! She could only press her hand and say:

"Thank you, you are very kind!"

They went on to the platform and entered an empty compartment. Frau Rupius had a small bag of cherries in her hand, and she ate them slowly, one after another, throwing the stones out of the window. When the train began to move out of the station she leaned back and closed her eyes. Bertha looked out of the window; she felt very tired after so much walking, and a slight uneasiness arose within her; she might have spent the day differently, more quietly and enjoyably. Her chilly reception and the tedious dinner at her cousin's came to her mind. After all, it was a great pity that she no longer had any acquaintances in Vienna. She had wandered like a stranger about the town in which she had lived twenty-six years. Why? And why had she not made the carriage pull up in the morning, when she saw the figure that seemed to have a resemblance to Emil Lindbach? True, she would not have been able to run or call after him—but if it had been really he, if he had recognized her and been pleased to see her again? They might have walked about together, might have told each other all that had happened during the long time that had passed since they had last known anything about one another; they might have gone to a fashionable restaurant and had dinner; some would naturally have recognized him, and she would have heard quite distinctly people discussing the question as to who "she" might really be. She was looking beautiful, too; the new costume was already finished; and the waiters served her with great politeness, especially a small youth who brought the wine—but he was really her nephew, who had, of course,

become a waiter in that restaurant instead of a student. Suddenly Herr and Frau Martin entered the dining-hall; they were holding one another in such a tender embrace as if they were the only people there. Then Emil rose to his feet, took up the violin bow which was lying beside him, and raised it with a commanding gesture, whereupon the waiter turned Herr and Frau Martin out of the room. Bertha could not help laughing at the incident, laughing much too loudly indeed, for by this time she had quite forgotten how to behave in a fashionable restaurant. But then it was not a fashionable restaurant at all; it was only the coffee room at the "Red Apple," and the military band was playing somewhere out of sight. That, be it known, was a clever invention on the part of Herr Rupius, that military bands could play without being seen. Now, however, it was her turn that was immediately to follow. Yonder was the piano—but, of course, she had long since completely forgotten how to play; she would run away rather than be forced to play. And all at once she was at the railway station, where Frau Rupius was already waiting for her. "It is high time you came," she said. She placed in Bertha's hand a large book, which, by the way, was her ticket. Frau Rupius, however, was not going to take the train; she sat down, ate cherries and spat out the stones at the stationmaster, who took a huge delight in the proceedings. Bertha entered the compartment. Thank God, Herr Klingemann was already there! He made a sign to her with his screwed-up eyes, and asked her if she knew whose funeral it was. She saw that a hearse was standing on the other line. Then she remembered that the captain with whom the tobacconist's wife had deceived Herr Klingemann was dead—of course, it was the day of the concert at the "Red Apple." Suddenly Herr Klingemann blew on her eyes, and laughed in a rumbling way.

Bertha opened her eyes—at that moment a train was rushing past the window. She shook herself. What a confused dream! And hadn't it begun quite nicely? She tried to remember. Yes, Emil played a part in it … but she could not recollect what part.

The dusk of evening slowly fell. The train sped on its way along by the Danube.

Frau Rupius slept and smiled. Perhaps she was only pretending to be asleep. Bertha was again seized with a slight suspicion, and she felt rising within her a sensation of envy at the unknown and mysterious experiences which Frau Rupius had had. She, too, would gladly have experienced something. She wished that someone was sitting beside her now, his arm pressed against hers—she would fain have felt once more that sensation that had thrilled her on that occasion when she had stood with Emil on the bank of the Wien, and when she had almost been on the point of losing her senses and had yearned for a child…. Ah, why was she so poor, so lonely, so much in obscurity? Gladly would she have implored the lover of her youth:

"Kiss me but once again just as you used to do, I want to be happy!"

It was dark; Bertha looked out into the night.

She determined that very night before she went to bed to fetch from the attic the little case in which she kept the letters of her parents and of Emil. She longed to be home again. She felt as though a question had been wakened within her soul, and that the answer awaited her at home.

## IV

When, late in the evening, Bertha entered her room, the idea which she had taken into her head of going up to the attic at once and fetching down the case with the letters seemed to her to be almost venturesome. She was afraid that some one in the house might observe her on her nocturnal pilgrimage, and might take her for mad. She could, of course, go up the next morning quite conveniently and without causing any stir; and so she fell asleep, feeling like a child who has been promised an outing into the country on the following day.

She had much to do the next forenoon; her domestic duties and piano lessons occupied the whole of the time. She had to give her sister-in-law an account of her visit to Vienna. Her story was that in the afternoon she had gone for a walk with her

cousin, and the impression was conveyed that she had made an excuse to Frau Rupius at the request of Agatha.

It was not until the afternoon that she went up to the attic and brought down the dusty travelling-case, which was lying beside a trunk and a couple of boxes—the whole collection covered with an old and torn piece of red-flowered coffee-cloth. She remembered that her object on the last occasion on which she had opened the case had been to put away the papers which her parents had left behind. On her return to her room she opened the case and perceived lying on top of the other contents a number of letters from her brothers and other letters, with the handwriting of which she was not familiar; then she found a neat little bundle containing the few letters which her parents had addressed to her: these were followed by two books of her mother's household accounts, a little copybook dating back to her own schooldays and containing entries of timetables and exercises, a few programmes of the dances which she had attended when a young girl, and, finally, Emil Lindbach's letters, which were wrapped up in blue tissue paper, torn here and there. And now she was able to fix the very day on which she had last held those letters in her hand, although she had not read them on that occasion. It was when her father had been lying ill for some time and, for whole days, she had not once gone outside the door.

She laid the bundle aside. She wanted, first of all, to see all the other things which had been stored in the case, and concerning which she was consumed with curiosity. A number of letters lay in a loose heap at the bottom of the case, some with their envelopes and others without. She cast her eye over them at random. There were letters from old friends, a few from her cousin, and here was one from the doctor who had courted her in the old days. In it he asked her to reserve for him the first waltz at the medical students' dance. Here—what was it? Why, it was that anonymous letter which some one had addressed to her at the Conservatoire. She picked it up and read:

"My Dear Fraulein,

"Yesterday I again had the good fortune to have an opportunity of admiring you on your daily walk; I do not know whether I had also the good fortune to be observed by you."

No, he had not had that good fortune. Then followed three pages of enthusiastic admiration, and not a single wish, not a single bold word. She had, moreover, never heard anything more of the writer.

Here was a letter signed by two initials, "M.G." That was the impudent fellow who had once spoken to her in the street, and who in this letter made proposals—wait a minute, what were they? Ah, here was the passage which had sent the hot blood mounting to her brow when she had first read it:

"Since I have seen you, and since you have looked on me with a glance so stern and yet seemingly so full of promise, I have had but one dream, but one yearning—that I might kiss those eyes!"

Of course, she had not answered the letter; she was in love with Emil at the time. Indeed, she had even thought of showing him the letter, but was restrained by the fear of rousing his jealousy. Emil had never learned anything of "M. G."

And that piece of soft ribbon that now fell into her hands?… A cravat … but she had quite forgotten whose it was, and why she had kept it.

Here again was a little dance album in which she had written the names of her partners. She tried to call the young men to mind, but in vain. Though, by the way, it was at that very dance that she had met that man who had said such passionate words to her as she had never heard from any other. It seemed as though he suddenly emerged a victor from among the many shadows that hovered around her. It must have happened during the time when she and Emil had been meeting each other less frequently. How strange it was … or had it only been a dream? This passionate admirer had clasped her closely in his arms during the dance—and she

had not offered the slightest resistance. She had felt his lips in her hair, and it had been incredibly pleasant … Well, and then?—she had never seen him again.

It suddenly seemed to her that, after all, in those days she had had many and strange experiences, and she was lost in amazement at the way in which all these memories had slumbered so long in the travelling case and in her soul…. But no, they had not slumbered; she had thought of all these things many a time: of the men who had courted her, of the anonymous letter, of her passionate partner at the dance, of the walks with Emil—but only as if they had been merely such things as go to constitute the past, the youth which is allotted to every young girl, and from which she emerges to lead the placid life of a woman. On the present occasion, however, it seemed to Bertha as if these recollections were, so to speak, unredeemed promises, as if in those experiences of distant days there lay destinies which had not been fulfilled; nay, more, as if a kind of deception had long been practised upon her, from the very day on which she had been married until the present moment; as if she had discovered it all too late; and here she was, unable to lift a finger to alter her destiny.

Yet why should it seem so?… She thought of all these futile things, and there beside her, wrapped up in tissue paper, still lay the treasure, for the sake of which alone she had rummaged in the case—the letters of the only man she had loved, the letters written in the days when she had been happy. How many women might there be now who envied her because that very man had once loved her—loved her with a different, better, chaster love than that which he had given any of the women who had followed her in his affections. She felt herself most bitterly deceived that she, who could have been his wife if … if … her thoughts broke off.

Hurriedly, as though seeking to rid her mind of doubt, or rather, indeed, of fear, she tore off the tissue paper and seized the letters. And she read—read them one after another. Long letters, short letters; brief, hasty notes, like: "To-morrow evening, darling, at seven o'clock!" or "Dearest, just one kiss ere I go to sleep!" letters that

covered many pages, written during the walking tours which he and his fellow students had taken in the summer; letters written in the evening, in which he had felt constrained to impart to her his impressions of a concert immediately on returning home; endless pages in which he unfolded his plans for the future; how they would travel together through Spain and America, famous and happy … she read them all, one after another, as though tortured by a quenchless thirst. She read from the very first, which had accompanied a few pieces of music, to the last, which was dated two and a half years later, and contained nothing more than a greeting from Salzburg.

When she came to an end she let her hands fall into her lap and gazed fixedly at the sheets lying about. Why had that been the last letter? How had their friendship come to an end? How could it have come to an end? How had it been possible that that great love had died away? There had never been any actual rupture between Emil and herself; they had never come to any definite understanding that all was over between them, and yet their acquaintanceship had ended at some time or other—when?… She could not tell, because at the time when he had written that card to her from Salzburg she had still been in love with him. She had, as a matter of fact, met him in the autumn—indeed, during the winter of the same year everything had seemed once more to blossom forth. She remembered certain walks they had taken over the crunching snow, arm in arm, beside St. Charles' Church—but when was it that they had taken the last of these walks? They had, to be sure, never taken farewell of each other…. She could not understand it.

How was it that she had been able so easily to renounce a happiness which it might yet have been within her power to retain? How had it come about that she had ceased to love him? Had the dullness of the daily routine of her home life, which weighed so heavily upon her spirits ever since she had left the Conservatoire, lulled her feelings to sleep just as it had blunted the edge of her ambitions? Had the querulous remarks of her parents on the subject of her friendship with the youthful violinist—which had seemed likely to lead to nothing—acted on her with such

sobering effect?

Then she recalled to mind that even at a later date, when some months had elapsed since she had last seen him, he had called at her parents' house, and had kissed her in the back room. Yes, that had been the last time of all. And then she remembered further that on that occasion she had noticed that his relation towards women had changed; that he must have had experiences of which she could know nothing—but the discovery had not caused her any pain.

She asked herself how it all would have turned out if in those days she had not been so virtuous, if she had taken life as easily as some of the other girls? She called to mind a girl at the Conservatoire with whom she had ceased to associate on finding that her friend had an intrigue with a dramatic student. She remembered again the suggestive words which Emil had spoken as they were walking together past his window, and the yearning that had come over her as they stood by the bank of the Wien. It seemed inconceivable that those words had not affected her more keenly at the moment, that that yearning had been awakened within her only once, and then only for so short a time. With a kind of perplexed amazement she thought of that period of placid purity and then, with a sudden agonized feeling of shame which drove the blood to her temples, of the cold readiness with which she had given herself afterwards to a man whom she had never loved. The consciousness that whatever happiness she had tasted in the course of her married life had been gained in the arms of the husband she had not loved made her shudder with horror, for the first time, in its utter wretchedness. Had that, then, been life such as her thoughts had depicted to her, had that been the mystic happiness such as she had yearned for?… And a dull feeling of resentment against everything and everybody, against the living and the dead, began to smoulder within her bosom. She was angry with her dead husband and with her dead father and mother; she was indignant with the people amongst whom she was now living, whose eyes were always upon her so that she dared not allow herself any freedom; she was hurt with Frau Rupius, who had

not turned out to be such a friend that Bertha could rely on her for support; she hated Klingemann because, ugly and repulsive as he was, he desired to make her his wife; and finally she was violently enraged with the man she had loved in the days of her girlhood, because he had not been bolder, because he had withheld from her the ultimate happiness, and because he had bequeathed her nothing but memories full of fragrance, yet full of torment. And there she was, sitting in her lonely room amongst the faded mementoes of a youth that had passed unprofitably and friendlessly; there she was, on the verge of the time when there would be no more hopes and no more desires—life had slipped through her fingers, and she was thirty and poor.

She wrapped up the letters and the other things, and threw them, all crumpled as they were, into the case. Then she closed it and went over to the window.

Evening was at hand. A gentle breeze was blowing over from the direction of the vine-trellises. Her eyes swam with unwept tears, not of grief, but of exasperation. What was she to do? She, who had, without fear and without hope, seen the days, nights, months, years extending into the future, shuddered at the prospect of the emptiness of the evening which lay before her.

It was the hour at which she usually returned home from her walk. On that day she had sent the nursemaid out with Fritz—not so much as once did she yearn for her boy. Indeed, for one moment there even fell on her child a ray of the anger which she felt against all mankind and against her fate. And, in her vast discontent, she was seized with a feeling of envy against many people who, at ordinary times, seemed to her anything but enviable. She envied Frau Martin because of the tender affection of her husband; the tobacconist's wife because she was loved by Herr Klingemann and the captain; her sister-in-law, because she was already old; Elly, because she was still young; she envied the servant, who was sitting on a plank over there with a soldier, and whom she heard laughing. She could not endure being at home any longer; She took up her straw hat and sunshade and hurried into the street. There she

felt somewhat better. In her room she had been unhappy; in the street she was no more than out of humour.

In the main thoroughfare she met Herr and Frau Mahlmann, to whose children she gave music lessons. Frau Mahlmann was already aware that Bertha had ordered a costume from a dressmaker in Vienna on the previous day, and she began to discuss the matter with great weightiness. Later on, Bertha met her brother-in-law, who came towards her from the chestnut avenue.

"Well," he said, "so you were in Vienna yesterday! Tell me, what did you do with yourself there? Did you have any adventures?"

"What do you mean?" asked Bertha, looking at him in great alarm, as though she had done something she ought not, and had been found out.

"What? You had no adventures? But you were with Frau Rupius; all the men must surely have run after you?"

"What on earth has come into your head? Frau Rupius' conduct is irreproachable! She is one of the most well-bred ladies I know."

"Quite so, quite so! I am not saying a word against Frau Rupius or you."

She looked him in the face. His eyes were gleaming, as they often did when he had had a little too much to drink. She could not help recalling that somebody had once foretold that Herr Garlan would die of an apoplectic stroke.

"I must pay another visit to Vienna myself one of these days," he said. "Why, I haven't been there since Ash Wednesday. I should like to see some of my acquaintances once again. The next time you and Frau Rupius go, you might just take me with you."

"With pleasure," answered Bertha. "I shall have to go again, of course, before long, to have my costume tried on."

Garlan laughed.

"Yes, and you can take me with you, too, when you try it on."

He sidled up closer to her than was necessary. It was a way he had always to squeeze up against her, and, moreover, she was accustomed to his jokes, but on the present occasion she thought him particularly objectionable. She was very much annoyed that he, of all men, always spoke of Frau Rupius in such a suspicious way.

"Let us sit down," said Herr Garlan; "if you don't mind."

They both sat down on a seat. Garlan took the newspaper from his pocket.

"Ah!" said Bertha involuntarily.

"Will you have it?" asked Garlan.

"Has your wife read it yet?"

"Tut, tut!" said Garlan disdainfully. "Will you have it?"

"If you can spare it."

"For you—with pleasure. But we might just as well read it together."

He edged closer to Bertha and opened the paper.

Herr and Frau Martin came along, arm in arm, and stopped before them.

"Well, so you are back again from the momentous journey," said Herr Martin.

"Ah, yes, you were in Vienna," said Frau Martin, nestling against her husband. "And with Frau Rupius, too," she added, as though that implied an aggravation of the offence.

Once more Bertha had to give an account of her new costume. She told them all about it in a somewhat mechanical manner, indeed; but she felt, none the less, that it was long since she had been such an interesting personage as she was now.

Klingemann went by, bowed with ironical politeness, and turned round to Bertha with a look which seemed to express his sympathy for her in having to be friendly with such people.

It seemed to Bertha as though she were gifted that day with the ability to read men's glances.

It began to grow dark. They set off together towards the town. Bertha suddenly grew uneasy at not having met her boy. She walked on in front with Frau Martin, who turned the conversation on to the subject of Frau Rupius. She badly wanted to find out whether Bertha had observed anything.

"But what do you mean, Frau Martin? I accompanied Frau Rupius to her brother's house, and called for her there on my way back."

"And are you convinced that she was with her brother the whole time?"

"I really don't know what you expect Frau Rupius to do! Where would she have been then?"

"Well," said Frau Martin; "really, you are an artless creature. I must say—or are you only putting on? Do you quite forget then …"

Then she whispered something into Bertha's ear, at which the latter grew very red. She had never heard such an expression from a woman. She was indignant.

"Frau Martin," she said, "I am not so old myself either and, as you see, it is quite possible to live a decent life in such circumstances."

Frau Martin was a little taken aback.

"Yes, of course!" she said. "Yes, of course! You must, I dare say, think that I am a little over-nice in such matters."

Bertha was afraid that Frau Martin might be about to give her some further and more intimate disclosures, and she was very glad to find that, at that moment, they had reached the street corner where she could say good-bye.

"Bertha, here's your paper!" her brother-in-law called after her.

She turned round quickly and took the paper. Then she hastened home. Fritz had returned and was waiting for her at the window. She hurried up to him. She

embraced and kissed him as though she had not seen him for weeks. She felt that she was completely engrossed with love for her boy, a fact which, at the time, filled her with pride. She listened to his account of how he had spent the afternoon, where he had been, and with whom he had played. She cut up his supper for him, undressed him, put him to bed, and was satisfied with herself. Her state of mind of the afternoon, when she had rummaged among the old letters, had cursed her fate and had even envied the tobacconist's wife, seemed to her, at the thought of it, as an attack of fever. She ate a hearty supper and went to bed early. Before falling to sleep, however, it occurred to her that she would like to read the paper. She stretched her limbs, shook up the soft bolster so that her head should be higher, and held the paper as near the candle as possible.

As her custom was, she first of all skimmed through the theatrical and art news. Even the short announcements, as well as the local reports, had acquired a new interest for her, since her trip to Vienna. Her eyelids were beginning to grow heavy when all at once she observed the name of Emil Lindbach amongst the personal news. She opened her eyes wide, sat up in bed and read the paragraph.

"Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, whose great success at the Spanish Court we were recently in a position to announce, has been honoured by the Queen of Spain, who has invested him with the Order of the Redeemer."

A smile flitted across her lips. She was glad, Emil Lindbach had obtained the Order of the Redeemer…. Yes … the man whose letters she had been reading that very day … the man who had kissed her—the man who had once written to her that he would never adore any other woman…. Yes, Emil—the only man in all the world in whom she really had still any interest—except her boy, of course. She felt as though this notice in the paper was intended only for her, as though, indeed, Emil himself had selected that expedient, so as to establish some means of communication with her. Had it not been he, after all, whose back she had seen in the distance on the previous

day? All at once she seemed to be quite near to him; still smiling, she whispered to herself: "Herr Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, … I congratulate you…."

Her lips remained half open. An idea had suddenly come to her. She got up quickly, donned her dressing-gown, took up the light and went into the adjoining room. She sat down at the table and wrote the following letter as fluently as though some one were standing beside her and dictating it, word for word:

"DEAR EMIL,

"I have just read in the newspaper that the Queen of Spain has honoured you by investing you with the Order of the Redeemer. I do not know whether you still remember me"—she smiled as she wrote these words—"but, all the same, I will not let this opportunity slip without congratulating you upon your many successes, of which I so often have the pleasure of reading. I am living most contentedly in the little town where fate has cast me; I am getting on very well!

"A few lines in reply would make me very happy.

"Your old friend,

"BERTHA.

"P.S.—Kind regards also from my little Fritz (five years old)."

She had finished the letter. For a moment she asked herself whether she should mention that she was a widow; but even if he had not known it before, it was quite obvious from her letter. She read it over and nodded contentedly. She wrote the address.

"Herr Emil Lindbach, violinist to the Court of Bavaria, Holder of the Order of the Redeemer …" Should she write all that? He was certain to have many other Orders also … "Vienna …"

But where was he living at present? That, however, was of no consequence with

such a celebrated name. Moreover the inaccuracy in the address would also show that she did not attach so very much importance to it all; if the letter reached him—well, so much the better. It was also a way of putting fate to the test…. Ah, but how was she to know for a certainty that the letter had arrived or not? The answer might, of course, quite easily fail to reach her if…. No, no, certainly not! He would be sure to thank her. And so, to bed.

She held the letter in her hand. No, she could not go to bed now, she was wide awake again. And, moreover, if she did not post the letter until next morning it would not go before the midday train, and would not reach Emil before the day after. That was an interminably long time. She had just spoken to him, and were thirty-six hours to be allowed to elapse before her words reached his ears?… Supposing she did not wait, but went to the post now?… no, to the station? Then he would have the letter at ten o'clock the next morning. He was certain to be late in rising—the letter would be brought into his room with his breakfast…. Yes, she must post the letter at once!

Quickly she dressed again. She hurried down the stairs—it was not yet late—she hastened along the main street to the station, put the letter in the yellow box, and was home again.

As she stood in her room, beside the tumbled bed, and she saw the paper lying on the floor and the candle flickering, it seemed as though she had returned from a strange adventure. For a long time she remained sitting on the edge of the bed, gazing through the window into the bright, starlit night, and her soul was filled with vague and pleasurable expectations.

## V

"My Dear Bertha!

"I am wholly unable to tell you how glad I was to receive your letter. Do you really

still think of me, then? How curious it is that it should have been an Order, of all things, that was the cause of my hearing from you again! Well, at all events, an Order has at least had some significance for once in a way! Therefore, I heartily thank you for your congratulations. But, apart from all that, don't you come to Vienna sometimes? It is not so very far, after all. I should be immensely pleased to see you again. So come soon!

"With all my heart,

"Your old

"Emil."

Bertha was sitting at breakfast, Fritz beside her. He was chatting, but she was not listening to him. The letter lay before her on the table.

It seemed miraculous. Two nights and a day ago she had posted her letter, and here was his reply already. Emil had not allowed a day to pass, not even an hour! He had written to her as cordially as if they had only parted the previous day.

She looked out of the window. What a splendid morning it was! Outside the birds were singing, and from the hills came floating down the fragrance of the early summer-tide.

Bertha read the letter again and again. Then she took Fritz, lifted him up and kissed him to her heart's content. It was long since she had been so happy.

While she was dressing she turned things over in her mind. It was Thursday; on Monday she had to go to Vienna again to try on the costume. That was four long days, just the same space of time as had elapsed since she had dined at her brother-in-law's—what a long time it seemed to have to wait. No, she must see Emil sooner than that. She could, of course, go the very next morning and remain in Vienna a few days. But what excuse could she make to the people at home?… Oh, she would be sure to find some pretext. It was more important to decide in what way she should answer his letter and tell him where she would meet him…. She could

not write and say: "I am coming, please let me know where I can see you…." Perhaps he would answer: "Come to my rooms…." No, no, no! It would be best to let him have a definite statement of fact. She would write to the effect that she was going to Vienna on such and such a day and was to be found at such and such a place….

Oh, if she only had someone with whom she could talk the whole thing over!… She thought of Frau Rupius—she had a genuine yearning to tell her everything. At the same time she had an idea that, by so doing, she might become more intimate with her and might win her esteem. She felt that she had become much more important since the receipt of Emil's letter. Now she remarked, too, that she had been very much afraid that Emil might quite possibly have changed and become conceited, affected and spoiled—just as was the case with so many celebrated men. But there was not the slightest trace of such things in the letter; there was the same quick, heavy writing, the same warmth of tone, as in those earlier letters. What a number of experiences he might well have had since she had last seen him—well, had not she also had many experiences, and were they not all seemingly obliterated?

Before going out she read Emil's letter again. It grew more like a living voice; she heard the cadence of the words, and that final "Come soon" seemed to call her with tender yearning. She stuck the letter into her bodice and remembered how, as a girl, she had often done the same with his notes, and how the gentle touch had sent a pleasant thrill coursing through her.

First of all, she went to the Mahlmanns', where she gave the twins their music lesson. Very often the finger exercises, to which she had to listen there, were positively painful to her, and she would rap the children on the knuckles when they struck a false note. On the present occasion, however, she was not in the least strict. When Frau Mahlmann, fat and friendly as ever, came into the room and inquired whether Bertha was satisfied, the latter praised the children and added, as though

suddenly inspired:

"Now, I shall be able to give them a few days' holiday."

"Holiday! How will that be, then, dear Frau Garlan?"

"You see, Frau Mahlmann, I have no choice in the matter. What do you think, when I was in Vienna lately my cousin begged me so pressingly to be sure to come and spend a few days with her—"

"Quite so, quite so," said Frau Mahlmann.

Bertha's courage kept rising, and she continued to add falsehood to falsehood, taking a kind of pleasure in her own boldness:

"I really wanted to put it off till June. But this very morning I had a letter from her, saying that her husband is going away for a time, and she is so lonely, and just now"—she felt the letter crackle, and had an indescribable desire to take it out; but yet restrained herself—"and I, think I shall perhaps take advantage of the opportunity…."

"Well, to tell the truth," said Frau Mahlmann, taking Bertha by both hands, "if I had a cousin in Vienna, I would like to stay with her a week every fortnight!"

Bertha beamed. She felt as though an invisible hand was clearing away the obstacles which lay in her path; everything was going so well. And, indeed, to whom, after all, was she accountable for her actions? Suddenly, however, the fear flashed through her mind that her brother-in-law really intended to go with her to Vienna. Everything became entangled again; dangers cropped up and suspicion lurked even under the good-natured smile of Frau Mahlmann….

Ah, she must on no account fail to take Frau Rupius into her confidence. Directly the lesson was over she went to call upon her.

It was not until she had found Frau Rupius in a white morning gown, sitting on the sofa, and had observed the surprised glance with which the latter received her, that it

struck Bertha that there was anything strange in her early visit, and she said with affected cheerfulness:

"Good morning! I'm early to-day, am I not?"

Frau Rupius remained serious. She had not the usual smile on her lips.

"I am very glad to see you. The hour makes no difference to me."

Then she threw her a questioning glance, and Bertha did not know what to say. She was annoyed, too, at the childish embarrassment, of which she could not rid herself in the presence of Frau Rupius.

"I wanted," she said, at length, "to ask you how you felt after our trip."

"Quite well," answered Frau Rupius, rather stiffly. But all at once her features changed, and she added with excessive friendliness: "Really, it was my place to have asked you. I am accustomed to those trips, you know."

As she said this she looked through the window and Bertha mechanically followed her gaze, which wandered over to the other side of the market square to an open window with flowers on the sill. It was quite calm, and the repose of a summer day shrouded the slumbering town. Bertha would have dearly liked to sit beside Frau Rupius and be kissed upon the brow by her, and blessed; but at the same time she had a feeling of compassion towards her. All this puzzled her. For what reason, indeed, had she really come? And what should she say to her?… "I'm going to-morrow to Vienna to see the man who used to be in love with me when I was a girl?"… In what way did all that concern Frau Rupius? Would it really interest her in the very slightest degree? There she sat as if surrounded by something impenetrable; it was impossible to approach her. She could not approach her, that was the trouble. Of course, there was a word by means of which it was possible to find the way to her heart, only Bertha did not know it.

"Well, how is your little boy?" asked Frau Rupius, without taking her eyes off the flowers in the opposite window.

"He is going on as well as ever. He is very well-behaved, and is a marvellously good child!"

The last word she uttered with an intentional tenderness as though Frau Rupius was to be won over by that means.

"Yes, yes," answered the latter, her tone implying that she knew he was good, and had not asked about that. "Have you a reliable nursemaid?" she added.

Bertha was somewhat astonished at the question.

"My maid has, of course, many other things to attend to besides her nurse's duties," she replied; "but I cannot complain of her. She is also a very good cook."

"It must be a great happiness to have such a boy," said Frau Rupius very drily, after a short interval of silence.

"It is, indeed, my only happiness," said Bertha, more loudly than was necessary.

It was an answer which she had often made before, but she knew that, on that day, she was not speaking with entire sincerity. She felt the sheet of paper touch her skin, and, almost with alarm, she realized that she had also deemed it a happiness to have received that letter. At the same time it occurred to her that the woman sitting opposite her had neither a child nor even the prospect of having one, and Bertha would have been glad to take back what she had said. Indeed, she was on the point of seeking some qualifying word. But, as if Frau Rupius was able to see into her soul, and as if in her presence a lie was impossible, she said at once:

"Your only happiness? Say, rather, 'a great happiness,' and that is no small thing! I often envy you on that score, although I really think that, apart from such considerations, life in itself is a joy to you."

"Indeed, my life is so lonely, so…."

Anna smiled.

"Quite so, but I did not mean that. What I meant was that the fact that the sun is

shining and the weather is now so fine also makes you glad."

"Oh yes, very glad!" replied Bertha assiduously. "My frame of mind is generally dependent on the weather. During that thunderstorm a few days ago I was utterly depressed, and then, when the storm was over—"

Frau Rupius interrupted her.

"That is the case with every one, you know."

Bertha grew low-spirited. She felt that she was not clever enough for Frau Rupius; she could never do any more than follow the ordinary lines of conversation, like the other women of her acquaintance. It seemed as though Frau Rupius had arranged an examination for her, which she had not passed, and, all at once, she was seized with a great apprehension at the prospect of meeting Emil again. What sort of a figure would she cut in his presence? How shy and helpless she had become during the six years of her narrow existence in the little town!

Frau Rupius rose to her feet. The white morning gown streamed around her; she looked taller and more beautiful than usual, and Bertha was involuntarily reminded of an actress she had seen on the stage a very long time ago, and to whom at that moment Frau Rupius bore a remarkable resemblance. Bertha said to herself: If I were only like Frau Rupius I am sure I would not be so timid. At the same time it struck her that this exquisitely lovely woman was married to an invalid—might not the gossips be right then, after all? But here, again, she was unable to pursue further her train of thought; she could not imagine in what way the gossips could be right. And at that moment it dawned upon her mind how bitter was the fate to which Frau Rupius was condemned, no matter whether she now bore it or resisted it.

But, as if Anna had again read Bertha's thoughts, and could not tolerate that the latter should thus insinuate herself into her confidence, the uncanny gravity of her face relaxed suddenly, and she said in an innocent tone:

"Just fancy, my husband is still asleep. He has acquired the habit of remaining

awake until late at night, reading and looking at engravings, and then he sleeps on until midday. As for that, it is quite a matter of habit; when I used to live in Vienna I was incredibly lazy about getting up."

And thereupon she began to chat about her girlhood, cheerfully, and with a confiding manner such as Bertha had never before noticed in her. She told about her father, who had been an officer on the Staff, about her mother, who had died when she was quite a young woman; and about the little house in the garden of which she had played as a child. It was only now that Bertha learned that Frau Rupius had first become acquainted with her husband when he was just a boy; he had lived with his parents in the adjoining house, and had fallen in love with Anna and she with him, while they were both children. To Bertha the whole period of Frau Rupius' youth appeared as if radiant with bright sunbeams, a youth replete with happiness, replete with hope; and it seemed to her, moreover, that Frau Rupius' voice assumed a fresher tone when she went on to relate about the travels which she and her husband had undertaken in the early days of their married life.

Bertha let her talk and hesitated to interrupt her with a word, as though she were a somnambulist wandering on the ridge of a roof. But while Frau Rupius was speaking of her past, a period through which the blessedness of being loved ever beamed brightly as its chiefest glory, Bertha's soul began to thrill with the hope of a happiness for herself such as she had not yet experienced. And while Frau Rupius was telling of the walking tours through Switzerland and the Tyrol, which she had once undertaken with her husband, Bertha pictured herself wandering by Emil's side on similar paths, and she was filled with such an immense yearning that she would dearly have liked at once to get up, go to Vienna, seek him out, fall into his arms, and at last, at last to taste those delights which had hitherto been denied her.

Her thoughts wandered so far that she did not notice that Frau Rupius had long since fallen silent, and was sitting on the sofa, staring at the flowers in the window of the

house over the way. The utter stillness brought Bertha back to reality; the whole room seemed to her to be filled with some mysterious atmosphere, in which the past and the future were strangely intermingled. She felt that there existed an incomprehensible connexion between herself and Frau Rupius. She rose to her feet, stretched out her hand, and, as if it were quite a matter of course, the two ladies kissed each other good-bye like a couple of old friends.

On reaching the door Bertha remarked:

"I am going to Vienna again to-morrow for a few days."

She smiled as she spoke, like a girl about to be married.

After leaving Frau Rupius, Bertha went to her sister-in-law. Her nephew was already sitting at the piano, improvising in a very wild manner. He pretended not to have noticed her enter, and proceeded to practise his finger exercises, which he played in an attitude of stiffness, assumed for the occasion.

"We will play a duet to-day," said Bertha, endeavouring to find the volume of Schubert's marches.

She paid not the least attention to her own playing, and hardly noticed how, in using the pedals, her nephew touched her feet.

In the meantime Elly came into the room and kissed her aunt.

"Ah, just so, I had quite forgotten that!" said Richard, and, whilst continuing to play, he placed his lips close to Bertha's cheek.

Her sister-in-law came in with her bunch of keys rattling and a deep dejection on her pale and indistinct features.

"I have given Brigitta notice," she said in a feeble tone. "I couldn't endure it any longer."

"Shall I get you a maid in Vienna?" asked Bertha with a facility which even surprised her.

And now for the second time she told the fiction which she had invented about her cousin's invitation, with even greater assurance than before, and, moreover, with a little amplification this time. Along with the secret joy which she found in the telling, she felt her courage increasing at the same time. Even the possibility of being joined by her brother-in-law no longer alarmed her. She felt, too, that she had an advantage over him, because of the way in which he was in the habit of sidling up to her.

"How long are you thinking of staying in the town, then?" asked her sister-in-law.

"Two or three days; certainly no longer. And in any case, of course, I should have had to go on Monday—to the dressmaker."

Richard strummed on the keys, but Elly stood with both arms resting on the piano, gazing at her aunt with a look almost of terror.

"Whatever is the matter with you?" asked Bertha involuntarily.

"Why do you ask that?" said Elly.

"You are looking at me," said Bertha, "as queerly as though—well, as though you did not like the idea of missing your music lessons for a couple of days."

"No, it is not that," replied Elly, smiling. "But … no, I can't tell you."

"What is it, though?" asked Bertha.

"No, please, I really can't tell you."

She hugged her aunt, almost imploringly.

"Elly," said her mother, "I cannot permit you to have any secrets."

She sat down as though most deeply grieved and very tired.

"Well, Elly," said Bertha, filled with a vague fear, "if I were to beg you—"

"But you mustn't laugh at me, Aunt."

"Certainly not."

"Well, you see, Aunt, I was so frightened when you were away in Vienna that last time—I know very well it is silly—but it is because … because of the number of carriages in the streets."

Bertha drew a deep breath as of relief, and stroked Elly's cheeks.

"I will be sure to take great care. You can be quite easy in your mind."

Her sister-in-law shook her head.

"I am afraid that Elly will turn out a most eccentric girl."

Before Bertha left the house she arranged with her sister-in-law that she would come back to supper, and that she would hand over Fritz to the care of her relations while she as away in Vienna.

After dinner, Bertha sat down at the writing table, read over Emil's letter a few more times, and made a rough draft of her reply.

"My Dear Emil,

"It was very good of you to answer me so soon. I was very happy"—she crossed out "very happy" and substituted "very glad"—"when I received your dear note. How much has changed since we last saw each other! You have become a famous virtuoso since then, which I, for my part, was always quite sure that you would be"—she stopped and struck out the whole sentence—"I also share your desire to see me soon again"—no, that was mere nonsense! This was better: "I should be immensely delighted to have an opportunity of talking to you once more."—Then an excellent idea occurred to her, and she wrote with great zest: "It is really strange that we have not met for so long, for I come to Vienna quite often; for instance, I shall be there this week-end…." Then she allowed her pen to drop and fell into thought. She was determined to go to Vienna the next afternoon, to put up at an hotel, and to sleep there, so as to be quite fresh the following day, and to breathe the air of Vienna for a few hours before meeting him. The next question was to fix a meeting place. That was easily done. "In accordance with your kind wish I am writing to let you

know that on Saturday morning at eleven o'clock…." No, that was not the right thing! It was so businesslike, and yet again too eager—"if," she wrote, "you would really care to take the opportunity of seeing your old friend again, then perhaps you will not consider it too much trouble to go to the Art and History Museum on Saturday morning at eleven o'clock. I will be in the gallery of the Dutch School"—as she wrote that she seemed to herself rather impressive and, at the same time, everything of a suspicious nature seemed to be removed.

* * * * *

She read over the draft. It appeared to her rather dry, but, after all, it contained all that was necessary, and did not compromise her in any way. Whatever else was to happen would take place in the Museum, in the Dutch gallery.

She neatly copied out the draft, signed it, placed it in an envelope, and hurried down the sunny street to post the letter in the nearest box. On arriving home again she slipped off her dress, donned a dressing-gown, sat down on the sofa, and turned over the leaves of a novel by Gerstacker, which she had read half a score of times already. But she was unable to take in a word. At first, she attempted to dismiss from her mind the thoughts which beset her, but her efforts met with no success.

She felt ashamed of herself, but all the time she kept dreaming that she was in Emil's arms. Why ever did such dreams come to her? She had never, even for a moment, thought of such a thing! No, … she would not think of it, either … she was not that sort of woman…. No, she could not be anyone's mistress—and even on this occasion…. Yes, perhaps if she were to go to Vienna once more and again … and again … yes, much later—perhaps. And besides, he would not even so much as dare to speak of such a thing, or even to hint at it…. It was, however, useless to reason like this; she could no longer think of anything else. Ever more importunate came her dreams and, in the end, she gave up the struggle. She lolled indolently in the corner of the sofa, allowed the book to slip from her fingers and lie on the floor, and

closed her eyes.

When she rose to her feet an hour later a whole night seemed to have passed, and the visit to Frau Rupius seemed, in particular, to be far distant. Again she wondered at this confusion of time—in truth, the hours appeared to be longer or shorter just as they chose.

She dressed in order to take Fritz for a walk. She was in the tired, indifferent mood which usually came over her after an unaccustomed afternoon nap. It was that mood in which it is scarcely possible to collect one's thoughts with any degree of completeness, and in which the usual appears strange, but as though it refers to some one else. For the first time, it seemed strange to Bertha that the boy, whom she was now helping into his coat, was her own child, whose father had long been buried, and for whom she had endured the pangs of motherhood.

Something within her urged her to go to the cemetery again that day. She had not, however, the feeling that she had a wrong to make reparation for, but that she must again politely visit some one to whom she had become a stranger for no valid reason. She chose the way through the chestnut avenue. There the heat was particularly oppressive that day. When she passed out into the sun again a gentle breeze was blowing and the foliage of the trees in the cemetery seemed to greet her with a slight bow. As she passed through the cemetery gates with Fritz the breeze came towards her, cool, even refreshing. With a feeling of gentle, almost sweet, weariness, she walked through the broad centre avenue, allowed Fritz to run on in front, and did not mind when he disappeared from her sight for a few seconds behind a tombstone, though at other times she would not have allowed such behaviour. She remained standing before her husband's grave. She did not, however, look down at the flower-bed, as was her general custom, but gazed past the tombstone and away over the wall into the blue sky. She felt no tears in her eyes; she felt no emotion, no dread; she did not even realize that she had walked over the

dead, and that there beneath her feet he, who had once held her in his arms, had crumbled into dust.

Suddenly she heard behind her hurried footsteps on the gravel, such as she was not generally accustomed to hear in the cemetery. Almost shocked, she turned round. Klingemann was standing before her, in an attitude of greeting, holding in his hand his straw hat, which was fixed by a ribbon to his coat button. He bowed deeply to Bertha.

"What a strange thing to see you here!" she said.

"Not at all, my dear lady, not at all! I saw you from the street; I recognized you by your walk."

He spoke in a very loud tone, and Bertha almost involuntarily murmured:

"Hush!"

A mocking smile at once made its appearance on Klingemann's face.

"He won't wake up," he muttered, between his clenched teeth.

Bertha was so indignant at this remark that she did not attempt to find an answer, but called Fritz, and was about to depart.

Klingemann, however, seized her by the hand.

"Stop," he whispered, gazing at the ground.

Bertha opened her eyes wide; she could not understand.

Suddenly Klingemann looked up from the ground and fixed his eyes on Bertha's.

"I love you, you see," he said.

Bertha uttered a low cry.

Klingemann let go her hand, and added in quite an easy conversational tone:

"Perhaps that strikes you as rather odd."

"It is unheard of!—unheard of!"

Once more she sought to go, and she called Fritz.

"Stop! If you leave me alone now, Bertha…." said Klingemann, now in a suppliant tone.

Bertha had recovered her senses again.

"Don't call me Bertha!" she said, vehemently. "Who gave you the right to do so? I have no wish to say anything further to you … and here, of all places!" she added, with a downward glance, which, as it were, besought the pardon of the dead.

Meanwhile Fritz had come back. Klingemann seemed very disappointed.

"My dear lady," he said, following Bertha, who, holding Fritz by the hand, was slowly walking away: "I recognize my mistake. I should have begun differently and not said that which seems now to have frightened you, until I had come to the end of a well-turned speech."

Bertha did not look at him, but said, as though she were speaking to herself:

"I would not have considered it possible; I thought you were a gentleman…."

They were at the cemetery gate. Klingemann looked back again, and in his glance there was something of regret at not having been able to play out his scene at the graveside to a finish. Hat in hand, and twisting the ribbon, by which it was fastened, round his finger, and still keeping by Bertha's side, he went on to say:

"All I can do now is to repeat that I love you, that you pursue me in my dreams—in a word, you must be mine!"

Bertha came to a standstill again, as if she were terrified.

"You will, perhaps, consider my remarks insolent, but let us take things as they are. You"—he made a long pause—"are alone in the world. So am I—"

Bertha stared him full in the face.

"I know what you are thinking of," said Klingemann. "That is all of no consequence; that is all done with the moment you give the word. I have a dim presentiment that

we two suit each other very well. Yes, unless I am very much deceived, the blood should be flowing in your veins, my dear lady, as warm…."

The glance which Bertha now gave him was so full of anger and loathing that Klingemann was unable to complete the sentence. He therefore began another.

"Ah, when you come to think of it, what sort of a life is it that I am now leading? It is even a long, long time since I was loved by a noble woman such as you are. I understand, of course, your hesitation, or rather, your refusal. Deuce take it, of course it needs a bit of courage—with such a disreputable fellow as I am, too … although, perhaps, things are not quite so bad. Ah, if I could only find a human soul, a kind, womanly soul!"—He emphasized the "womanly soul"—"Yes, my dear lady, it was as little meant to be my fate as it was yours to pine away and grow crabbed in such a hole of a town as this. You must not be offended if I … if I—"

The words began to fail him when he approached the truth. Bertha looked at him. He seemed to her at that moment to be rather ridiculous, almost pitiable, and very old, and she wondered how it was that he still had the courage, not so much as to propose to her, as even simply to court her favour.

And yet, to her own amazement and shame, there overflowed from these unseemly words of a man who appeared absurd to her, the surge, so to speak, of desire. And when his words had died away she heard them again in her mind—but as though from the lips of another who was waiting for her in Vienna—and she felt that she would not be able to withstand this other speaker. Klingemann continued to talk; he spoke of his life as being a failure, but yet a life worth saving. He said that women were to be blamed for bringing him so low, and that a woman could raise him up again. Away back in his student days he had run away with a woman, and that had been the beginning of his misfortunes. He talked of his unbridled passions, and Bertha could not restrain a smile. At the same time she was ashamed of the knowledge which seemed to her to be implied by the smile….

"I will walk up and down in front of your window this evening," said Klingemann, when they reached the gate. "Will you play the piano?"

"I don't know."

"I will take it as a sign."

With that he went away.

In the evening she supped, as she had so often done, at her brother-in-law's house. At the table she sat between Elly and Richard. Mention was made of her approaching journey to Vienna as though it was really nothing more than a matter of paying a visit to her cousin, trying on the new costume at the dressmaker's, and executing a few commissions in the way of household necessities, which she had promised to undertake for her sister-in-law. Towards the end of supper, her brother-in-law smoked his pipe, Richard read the paper to him, her sister-in-law knitted, and Elly, who had nestled up close beside Bertha, leaned her childish head upon her aunt's breast. And Bertha, as her glance took in the whole scene, felt herself to be a crafty liar. She, the widow of a good husband, was sitting there in a family circle which interested itself in her welfare so loyally; by her side was a young girl who looked up at her as on an older friend. Hitherto she had been a good woman, honest and industrious, living only for her son. And now, was she not about to cast aside all these things, to deceive and lie to these excellent people, and to plunge into an adventure, the end of which she could foresee? What was it, then, that had come over her these last few days, by what dreams was she pursued, how was it that her whole existence seemed only to aspire towards the one moment when she would again feel the arms of a man about her? She had but to think of it and she was seized with an indescribable sensation of horror, during which she seemed devoid of will, as if she had fallen under the influence of some strange power.

And while the words that Richard was reading beat monotonously upon her ear, and her fingers played with the locks of Elly's hair—she resisted for the last time; she

resolved that she would be steadfast—that she would do no more than see Emil once again, and that, like her own mother who had died long ago, and like all the other good women she knew—her cousin in Vienna, Frau Mahlmann, Frau Martin, her sister-in-law, and … yes, certainly Frau Rupius as well—she would belong only to him who made her his wife. As soon, however, as she thought of that, the idea flashed through her mind, like lightning: if he himself…if Emil…. But she was afraid of the thought, and banished it from her. Not with such bold dreams as these would she go to meet Emil. He, the great artist, and she, a poor widow with a child…no, no!—she would see him once again … in the Museum of course, at the Dutch gallery … once only, and that for the last time, and she would tell him that she did not wish for anything else than to see him that once. With a smile of satisfaction she pictured to herself his somewhat disappointed face; and, as if practising beforehand for the scene, she knitted her brow and assumed a stern cast of countenance, and had the words ready on her lips to say to him: "Oh, no, Emil, if you think that…." But she must take care not to say it in quite too harsh a tone, in order that Emil might not, as on that previous occasion … twelve years before! … cease to plead after only the one attempt. She intended that he should beg a second time, a third time—ah, Heaven knew, she intended that he should continue to plead until she gave way…. For she felt, there in the midst of all those good, respectable, virtuous people, with whom, indeed, she would soon no longer be numbered, that she would give way the moment he first asked her. She was only going to Vienna to be his, and after that, if needs must be, to die.

On the afternoon of the following day Bertha set off. It was very hot, and the sun beat down upon the leather-covered seats of the railway carriage. Bertha had opened the window and drawn forward the yellow curtain, which, however, kept flapping in the breeze. She was alone. But she scarcely thought of the place towards which she was travelling; she scarcely thought of the man whom she was about to see again, or of what might be in store for her—she thought only of the strange words she had

heard, an hour before her departure. She would gladly have forgotten them, at least for the next few days. Why was it that she had been unable to remain at home during those few short hours between dinner and her departure? What unrest had driven her on this glowing hot afternoon out from her room, on to the street, into the market, and bade her pass Herr Rupius' house? He was sitting there upon the balcony, his eyes fixed on the gleaming white pavement, and over his knees, as usual, was spread the great plaid rug, the ends of which were hanging down between the bars of the balcony railings; in front of him was the little table with a bottle of water and a glass. When he perceived Bertha his eyes became fixed upon her, as though he were making some request to her, and she observed that he beckoned her with a slight movement of the head.

Why had she obeyed him? Why had she not taken his nod simply as a greeting and thanked him and gone upon her way? When, however, in answer to his nod, she turned towards the door of the house, she saw a smile of thanks glide over his lips and she found it still on his countenance when she went out to him on the balcony, through the cool, darkened room, and, taking his outstretched hand, sat down opposite to him on the other side of the little table.

"How are you getting on?" she asked.

At first he made no answer; then she observed from the working of his face that he wanted to say something, but seemed as if he was unable to utter a word.

"She is going to …" he broke out at length. These first words he uttered in an unnecessarily loud voice; then, as though alarmed at the almost shrieking tone, he added very softly: "My wife is going to leave me."

Bertha involuntarily looked around her.

Rupius raised his hands, as if to reassure her.

"She cannot hear us She is in her room; she is asleep."

Bertha was embarrassed.

"How do you know?…" she stammered. "It is impossible—quite impossible!"

"She is going away—away, for a time, as she says … for a time … do you understand?" "Why, yes, to her brother, I suppose."

"She is going away for ever … for ever! Naturally she does not like to say to me: Good-bye, you will never see me again! So she says: I should like to travel a little; I need a change; I will go to the lake for a few weeks; I should like to bathe; I need a change of air! Naturally she does not say to me: I can endure it no longer; I am young and in my prime and healthy; you are paralysed and will soon die; I have a horror of your affliction and of the loathsome state that must supervene before it is at an end. So she says: I will go away only for a few weeks, then I will come back again and stay with you."

Bertha's painful agitation became merged in her embarrassment.

"You are certainly mistaken," was all that she could answer.

Rupius hastily drew up the rug, which was on the point of slipping down off his knees. He seemed to find it chilly. As he continued to speak, he drew the rug higher and higher, until finally he held it with both hands pressed against her breast.

"I have seen it coming; for years I have seen this moment coming. Imagine what sort of an existence it has been; waiting for such a moment, defenceless and forced to be silent!—Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Oh, no," said Bertha, looking down at the market square.

"Well, I beg your pardon for referring to all this. I had no intention of doing so, but when I saw you walking past—well, thank you very much for having listened to me."

"Please don't mention it," said Bertha, mechanically stretching out her hand to him. He did not notice it, however, and she let it lie upon the table.

"Now it is all over," said Herr Rupius; "now comes the time of loneliness, the time

of dread."

"But has your wife … she loves you, I'm sure of it!… I am quite certain that you are giving yourself needless anxiety. Wouldn't the simplest course be, Herr Rupius, for you to request your wife to forego this journey?"

"Request?…" said Herr Rupius, almost majestically. "Can I pretend to have the right to do so? AH these last six or seven years have only been a favour which she has granted me. I beg you, consider it. During all these seven years not a word of complaint at the waste of her youth has passed her lips."

"She loves you," said Bertha, decisively; "and that is the chief point."

Herr Rupius looked at her for a long time.

"I know what is in your mind, although you do not venture to say it. But your husband, my dear Frau Bertha, lies deep in the grave, and does not sleep by your side night after night."

He looked up with a glance that seemed to ascend to Heaven as a curse.

Time was getting on; Bertha thought of her train.

"When is your wife going to start?"

"Nothing has been said about that yet—but I am keeping you, perhaps?"

"No, not at all, Herr Rupius, only…. Hasn't Anna told you? I'm going to Vienna to-day, you know."

She grew burning red. Once more he gazed at her for a long time. It seemed to her as though he knew everything.

"When are you coming back?" he asked drily.

"In two or three days."

She would have liked to say that he was mistaken, that she was not going to see a man whom she loved, that all these things about which he was worrying were sordid and mean, and really of not the slightest importance to women—but she was not

clever enough to find the right words to express herself.

"If you come back in two or three days' time you may, perhaps, find my wife still here. So, good-bye! I hope you will enjoy yourself."

She felt that his glance had followed her as she went through the dark, curtained room and across the market square. And now, too, as she sat in the railway carriage, she felt the same glance and still in her ears kept ringing those words, in which there seemed to lie the consciousness of an immense unhappiness, which she had not hitherto understood. The torment of this recollection seemed stronger than the expectation of any joys that might be awaiting her, and the nearer she approached to the great city the heavier she became at heart. As she thought of the lonely evening that lay before her she felt as though she were travelling, without hope, towards some strange, uncertain destination. The letter, which she still carried in her bodice, had lost its enchantment; it was nothing but a piece of crackling paper, filled with writing, the corners of which were beginning to get torn. She tried to imagine what Emil now looked like. Faces bearing a slight resemblance to his arose before her mind's eye; many times she thought that she had surely hit upon the right one, but it vanished immediately. Doubts began to assail her as to whether she had done the right thing in travelling so soon. Why had she not waited, at least, until Monday?

Then she was obliged, however, to confess to herself that she was going to Vienna to keep an appointment with a young man, with whom she had not exchanged a word for ten years, and who, perhaps, was expecting a quite different woman from the one who was travelling to see him on the morrow. Yes, that was the cause of all her uneasiness; she realized it now. The letter which was already beginning to chafe her delicate skin was addressed to Bertha, the girl of twenty; for Emil, of course, could not know what she looked like now. And, although for her own part, she could assure herself that her face still preserved its girlish features and that her figure, though grown fuller, still preserved the contours of youth, might he not see, in spite

of all, how many changes a period of ten years had wrought in her, and, perhaps, even destroyed without her having noticed it herself?

The train drew up at Klosterneuburg. Bertha's ears were assailed by the sound of many clear voices and the clatter of hurrying footsteps. She looked out of the window. A number of schoolboys crowded up to the train and, laughing and shouting, got into the carriages. The sight of them caused Bertha to call to mind the days of her childhood, when her brothers used to come back from picnics in the country, and suddenly there came before her eyes a vision of the blue room in which the boys had slept. She seemed to feel a tremor run through her as she realized how all the past was scattered to the wind; how those to whom she owed her existence had died, how those with whom she had lived for years under one roof were forgotten; how friendships which had seemed to have been formed to last for ever had become dissolved. How uncertain, how mortal, everything was!

And he … he had written to her as if in the course of those ten years nothing had changed, as if in the meantime there had not been funerals, births, sorrows, illnesses, cares and—for him, at least—so much good fortune and fame. Involuntarily she shook her head. A kind of perplexity in the face of so much that was incomprehensible came over her. Even the roaring of the train, which was carrying her along to unknown adventures, seemed to her as a chant of remarkable sadness. Her thoughts went back to the time, by no means remote, in fact no more than a few days earlier, when she had been tranquil and contented, and had borne her existence without desire, without regret and without wonder. However had it happened that this change had come over her? She could not understand.

The train seemed to rush forward with ever-increasing speed towards its destination. Already she could see the smoke of the great city rising skywards as out of the depths. Her heart began to throb. She felt as if she was awaited by something vague, something for which she could not find a name, a thing with a hundred arms, ready

to embrace her. Each house she passed knew that she was coming; the evening sun, gleaming on the roofs, shone to meet her; and then, as the train rolled into the station, she suddenly felt sheltered. Now for the first time, she realized that she was in Vienna, in her Vienna, the town of her youth and of her dreams, that she was home. Had she not given the slightest thought to that before? She did not come from home—no, now she had arrived home. The din at the station filled her with a feeling of comfort, the bustle of people and carriages gladdened her, everything that was sorrowful had been shed from her.

There she stood at the Franz Josef Station in Vienna, on a warm May evening, Bertha Garlan, young and pretty, free and accountable to no one, and on the morrow she was to see the only man whom she had ever loved—the lover who had called her.

She put up at a little hotel near the station. She had determined to choose one of the less fashionable, partly for the sake of economy, and partly, too, because she stood in awe, to a certain extent, of smart waiters and porters. She was shown to a room on the third floor with a window looking out on the street. The chambermaid closed the window when the visitor entered, and brought some fresh water, the boots placed her box beside the stove, and the waiter placed before her the registration paper, which Bertha filled up immediately and unhesitatingly, with the pride that comes of a clear conscience.

A feeling of freedom as regards external circumstances, such as she had not known for a long time, encompassed her; there were none of the petty domestic cares of the daily round, there was no obligation to talk to relations or acquaintances; she was at liberty that evening to do just as she liked.

When she had changed her dress she opened the window. She had already been obliged to light the candles, but out of doors it was not yet quite dark. She leaned her elbows on the window-sill and looked down. Again she remembered her childhood,

when she had often looked down out of the windows in the evenings, sometimes with one of her brothers, who had thrown his arm around her shoulders. She also thought of her parents with so keen an emotion that she was on the verge of tears.

Down below the street lamps were already alight. Well, at all events, she must find something to do. She thought of what might be happening the next day at that hour…. She could not picture it to herself. At that moment, it just happened that a lady and gentleman drove by the hotel in a cab. If things turned out in accordance with her wishes, Emil and she should be going for a drive together into the country the next morning—yes, that would be nicest. Some quiet spot away from the town in a restaurant garden, a candle lamp on the table, and he beside her, hand in hand like a pair of young lovers. And then back again—and then…. No, she would rather not imagine anything further! Where was he now, she wondered. Was he alone? Or was he at that very instant engaged in talking with some one? And with whom—a man?—a woman?—a girl? But, after all, was it any concern of hers? For the present it was certainly not any concern of hers. And to Emil it mattered just as little that Herr Klingemann had proposed to her the previous day, that Richard, her precocious nephew, kissed her sometimes, and that she had a great admiration for Herr Rupius. She would be sure to ask him on the morrow—yes, she must be certain as regards all these points before she … well, before she went with him in the evening into the country.

So then she decided to go out—but where? She stopped, irresolute, at the door. All she could do was to go for a short walk and then have supper … but again, where? A lady alone…. No, she would have supper here in her room at the hotel, and go to bed early so that she might have a good night's rest and look fresh, young and pretty in the morning.

She locked the door and went out into the street. She turned towards the inner town, and proceeded at a very sharp pace, for she did not like walking alone in the

evening. Soon she reached the Ring and went past the University, and on to the Town Hall. But she took no pleasure at all in this aimless rambling. She felt bored and hungry, and went back to her hotel in a tramcar. She had no great desire to seek her room. From the street she had already noticed that the dining-room of the hotel was barely lighted and evidently empty. She had supper there, after which she grew tired and sleepy and, with an effort, went up the three flights of stairs to her room. As she sat on the bed and undid her shoe laces, she heard ten o'clock chime in a neighbouring church steeple.

When she awoke in the morning she hurried, first of all, to the window and drew up the blinds with a great longing to see the daylight and the town. It was a sunny morning, and the air was as fresh as if it had come flowing down from a thousand springs in the forests and hills into the streets of the town. The beauty of the morning acted on Bertha as a good omen; she wondered at the strange, foolish manner in which she had spent the previous evening—as if she had not quite correctly understood why she had come to Vienna. The certainty that the repose of a whole night no longer separated her from the longed-for hour filled her with a sense of great gladness. All at once, she could no longer understand how it was that she could have come to Vienna, as she had done just recently, without daring to make even an attempt to see Emil. Finally, too, she wondered how it was that she had, for weeks, months, perhaps years, needlessly deferred availing herself of the opportunity of seeing him. The fact that she had scarcely thought of him during the whole time, did not occur to her at first, but, when at length she did realize it, she was amazed at that, most of all.

At last only four more hours were to be endured, and then she would see him. She lay down on the bed again; she reclined, at first, with her eyes wide open, and she whispered to herself, as though she wanted to intoxicate herself with the words: "Come soon!" She heard Emil himself speak the words, no longer far away, no, but as though he were close by her side. His lips breathed them on hers: "Come soon!"

he said, but the words meant: "Be mine! be mine!" She opened her arms as though making ready to press her beloved to her heart. "I love you," she said, and breathed a kiss into the air.

At length she got up and dressed. This time she had brought with her a simple grey costume, cut in the English fashion, which, according to the general opinion of her friends, suited her very well, and she was quite content with herself when she had completed her toilet. She probably did not look like a fashionable lady of Vienna, but, on the other hand, she had not the appearance of a fashionable lady from the country either; it seemed to her that she looked more like a governess in the household of some Count or Prince, than anything else. Indeed, as a matter of fact, there was something of the young, unmarried lady in her aspect; no one would have taken her for a married woman and the mother of a five-year-old boy. She thought, with a slight sigh, that truly she would have done better to have remained unmarried. But, as to that, she was feeling that day very much like a bride.

Nine o'clock! Still two long hours to wait! What could she do in the meantime? She sat down at the table, ordered coffee and sipped it slowly. There was no sense in remaining indoors any longer; it was better to go out into the open air at once.

For a time she walked about the streets of the suburb, and she took a particularly keen pleasure in the wind blowing on her cheeks. She asked herself: What was Fritz doing at that moment? Probably Elly was playing with him. Bertha took the road which led towards the public gardens; she was glad to go for a walk through the avenues, in which, many years ago, she had played as a child. She entered the garden by the gate opposite the Burg-theatre. At that early hour of the day there were but few people in the gardens. Children were playing on the gravel; governesses and nursemaids were sitting on the seats; little girls were running about along the steps of the Temple of Theseus and under its colonnade. Elderly people were walking in the shade of the avenues; young men, who were apparently

studying from large writing books, and ladies, who were reading books, had taken their seats in the cool shade of the trees.

Bertha sat on a seat and watched two little girls who were jumping over a piece of string, as she had so often done herself, when a child—it seemed to her, in just the same spot. A gentle breeze blew through the foliage; from afar she heard the calls and laughter of some children playing "catch." The cries came nearer and nearer; and then the children ran trooping past her. She felt a thrill of pleasure when a young man in a long overcoat walked slowly by and turned round to look at her for a second time, when he reached the end of the avenue. Then there passed by a young couple; the girl, who had a roll of music in her hand, was neatly but somewhat strikingly dressed; the man was clean-shaven and was wearing a light summer suit and a tall hat. Bertha thought herself most experienced when she fancied that she was able with certainty to recognize in the girl a student of music, and in her companion a young man who had just gone on the stage. It was very pleasant to be sitting there, to have nothing to do, to be alone, and to have people walking, running and playing like this before her. Yes, it would be nice to live in Vienna and be able to do just as she liked. Well, who could say how everything would turn out, what the next few hours would bring forth, what prospects for her future life that evening would open out before her? What was it then, that really forced her to live in that dreadful little town? After all, in Vienna she would be able to supplement her income by giving music lessons just as easily as at home. Why not, indeed? Moreover, in Vienna, better terms were to be obtained for music lessons…. Ah, what an idea!… if he came to her aid; if he, the famous musician, recommended her? Why, certainly it would only need one word from him. What if she were to speak to him on the subject? And would it not also be a most advantageous arrangement in view of her child? In a few years' time he would have to go to school, and then, of course, the schools were so much better in Vienna than at home. No, it was quite impossible for her to pass all her life in the little town—she would

have to move to Vienna, and that, too, at no distant date. Moreover, even if she had to economise here, and—and…. In vain she attempted to restrain the bold thoughts which now came rushing along…. If she should take Emil's fancy, if he should again … if he should still be in love with her … if he should ask her to be his wife? If she could be a bit clever, if she avoided compromising herself in any way, and understood how to fascinate him—she felt rather ashamed of her craftiness. But, after all, was it so bad that she should think of such things, considering that she was really in love with him, and had never loved any other man but him? And did not the whole tone of his letter give her the right to indulge in such thoughts?

And then, when she realised that in a few minutes she was to meet him who was the object of her hopes, everything began to dance before her eyes. She rose to her feet, and nearly reeled. She saw the young couple, who had previously walked past her, leave the gardens by the road leading to the Burgplatz. She went off in the same direction. Yonder, she saw the dome of the Museum, towering and gleaming. She decided to walk slowly, so as not to appear too excited or even breathless when she met him. Once more she was seized with a thrill of fear—suppose he should not come? But whatever happened, she would not leave Vienna this time without seeing him.

Would it not, perhaps, even be better if he did not come, she wondered. She was so bewildered at that moment … and supposing she was to say anything silly or awkward…. So much depended on the next few minutes—perhaps her whole future….

There was the Museum before her. Up the steps, through the entrance, and she was standing in the large, cool vestibule. Before her eyes was the grand staircase and, yonder, where it divided to right and left, was the colossal marble statue of Theseus slaying the Minotaur. Slowly she ascended the stairs and, as she looked round about her, she grew calmer. The magnificence of her surroundings captivated her. She

looked up at the galleries which, with their golden railings, ran round the interior of the dome. She came to a stop. Before her was a door, above which appeared in gilt letters: "Dutch School."

Her heart gave a sudden convulsive throb. Before her eyes lay the row of picture galleries. Here and there she saw people standing before the pictures. She entered the first hall, and gazed attentively at the first picture hanging at the very entrance. She thought of Herr Rupius' portfolio. And then she heard a voice say:

"Good morning, Bertha."

## VI

It was his voice. She turned round. He was standing before her, young, slim, elegant and rather pale. In his smile there was a suggestion of mockery. He nodded to Bertha, took her hand at the same time, and held it for a while in his own. It was Emil himself, and it was exactly as if the last occasion on which they had spoken to one another had been only the previous day.

"Good morning, Emil," she said.

They gazed at each other. His glance was expressive of much: pleasure, amiability, and something in the nature of a scrutiny. She realised all this with perfect clearness, whilst she gazed at him with eyes in which nothing but pure happiness was shining.

"Well, then, how are you getting on, Bertha?" he asked.

"Quite well."

"It is really funny that I should ask you such a question after eight or nine years. Things have probably gone very differently with you."

"Yes, indeed, that's true. You know, of course, that my husband died three years ago."

She felt obliged to assume an expression of sorrow.

"Yes, I know that, and I know, too, that you have a boy. Let me see, who could it have been that told me?"

"I wonder who?"

"Well, it'll come back to me presently. It is new to me, though, that you are interested in pictures."

Bertha smiled.

"Well, it wasn't really on account of the pictures alone. But you mustn't think that I am quite so silly as all that. I do take an interest in pictures."

"And so do I. If the truth must be told, I think I would rather be a painter than anything else."

"Yet you ought to be quite satisfied with what you have attained."

"Well, that's a question that can't be disposed of in one word. Of course, I find it a very pleasant thing to be able to play the violin so well, but what does it all lead to? Only to this, I think: that when I am dead my name will endure for a short time. That—" his eyes indicated the picture before which they were standing—"that, on the other hand, is something different."

"You are awfully ambitious, Emil!"

He looked at her, but without evincing the slightest interest in her.

"Ambitious? Well, it is not such a simple matter as all that. But let's talk about something else. What a strange idea to indulge in a theoretical conversation on the subject of art, when we haven't seen each other for a hundred years! So come, then, Bertha, tell me something about yourself! What do you do with yourself at home? How do you live? And what really put it into your head to congratulate me on getting that silly Order?"

She smiled a second time.

"I wanted to write to you again," she answered; "and, chiefly, I wanted to hear

something of you once more; It was really very good of you to answer my letter at once."

"Good? Not at all, my child! I was so pleased when, all of a sudden, your letter came—I recognised your writing at once. You know, you still have the same schoolgirl writing as…. Well, let us say, as in the old days, although I can't bear such expressions."

"But why?" she asked, somewhat astonished.

He looked at her, and then said in a rapid voice:

"Well, tell me, how do you live? You must generally get very bored, I'm sure."

"I haven't much time for that," she replied gravely. "I give lessons, you must know."

"Oh!"

His tone was one of such disproportionate pity that she felt constrained to add quickly:

"Oh, not because there is really any pressing need for me to do so—although, of course, I find it very useful, because …" she felt that it would be best to be quite frank with him … "I could scarcely live on the slender means that I possess."

"What is it, then, that you are actually a teacher of?"

"What! Didn't I tell you that I give piano lessons?"

"Piano lessons? Really? Yes, of course … you used to be very talented. If you hadn't left the Conservatoire when you did … well, of course, you would not have become one of the great pianistes, you know, but for certain things you had quite a pronounced aptitude. For instance, you used to play Chopin and the little things of Schumann very prettily."

"You still remember that?"

"After all, I dare say that you have chosen the better course."

"In what way?"

"Well, if it is impossible to master everything, it is better, no doubt, to get married and have children."

"I have only one child."

He laughed.

"Tell me something about him, and all about your own life in general."

They sat down on the divan in the little saloon on front of the Rembrandts.

"What have I to tell you about myself? There is nothing in it of the slightest interest. Rather, you tell me about yourself"—she looked at him with admiration—"things have gone so splendidly with you, you are such a celebrated man, you see!"

Emil twitched his underlip very slightly, as if discontented.

"Why, yes," she continued, undaunted; "quite recently I saw your portrait in an illustrated paper."

"Yes, yes," he said impatiently.

"But I always knew that you would make a name for yourself," she added. "Do you still remember how you played the Mendelssohn Concerto at that final examination at the Conservatoire? Everybody said the same thing then."

"I beg you, my dear girl, don't, please, let us have any more of these mutual compliments! Tell me, what sort of a man was your late husband?"

"He was a good; indeed, I might say noble, man."

"Do you know, though, that I met your father about eight days before he died?"

"Did you really?"

"Didn't you know?"

"I am certain he didn't tell me anything about it."

"We stood chatting with one another in the street for a quarter of an hour, perhaps. I had just returned then from my first concert tour."

"Not a word did he tell me—not a single word!"

She spoke almost angrily, as though her father had, at that time, neglected something that might have shaped her future life differently.

"But why didn't you come to see us in those days?" she continued. "How did it happen at all that you had already suddenly ceased to visit us some considerable time before my father's death?"

"Suddenly?—Gradually!"

He looked at her a long time; and now his eyes glided down over her whole body, so that she mechanically drew in her feet under her dress, and pressed her arms against her body, as though to defend herself.

"Well, how did it happen that you came to get married?"

She related the whole story. Emil listened to her, apparently with attention, but as she spoke on and remained seated, he rose to his feet and gazed out through the window…. When she had finished with a remark about the good-nature of her relations, he said:

"Don't you think that we ought to look at a few pictures now that we are here in the Museum?"

They walked slowly through the galleries, stopping here and there before a picture.

"Lovely! Exquisite!" commented Bertha many a time, but Emil only nodded.

It seemed to Bertha that he had quite forgotten that he was with her. She felt slightly jealous at the interest which the paintings roused in him. Suddenly they found themselves before one of the pictures which she knew from Herr Rupius' portfolio. Emil wanted to pass on, but she stopped and greeted it, as she might an old acquaintance.

"Exquisite!" she exclaimed. "Emil, isn't it beautiful? On the whole, I greatly admire Falckenborg's pictures."

He looked at her, somewhat surprised.

She became embarrassed, and tried to go on talking.

"Because such an immense quantity—because the whole world—"

She felt that this was dishonest, even that she was robbing some one who could not defend himself; and accordingly she added, repentantly, as it were:

"You must know, there's a man living in our little town who has an album, or rather a portfolio, of engravings, and that's how I know the picture. His name is Rupius, he is very infirm; just fancy, he is quite paralysed."

She felt obliged to tell Emil all this, for it seemed to her as though his eyes were unceasingly questioning her.

"That might be a chapter, too," he said, with a smile, when she had come to an end; then he added more softly, as though ashamed of his indelicate joke: "There must certainly also be gentlemen in that little town who are not paralysed."

She felt that she had to take poor Herr Rupius under her protection.

"He is a very unhappy man," she said, and, remembering how she had sat with him on the balcony the previous day, a feeling of great compassion seized her.

But Emil was following his own train of thought.

"Yes," he said; "that is what I should really like to know—what experiences you have had."

"You know them, already."

"I mean, since the death of your husband."

She understood now what he meant, and was a little offended.

"I live only for my boy," she said, with decision. "I do not allow men to make love to me. I am quite respectable."

He had to laugh it the comically serious way in which she made this confession of

virtue. For her part, she felt at once that she ought to have expressed herself differently, and so she laughed, too.

"How long are you going to stay, then, in Vienna?" asked Emil.

"Till to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow."

"So short a time as that? And where are you staying? I should like to know."

"With my cousin," she replied.

Something restrained her from mentioning that she had put up at an hotel. But immediately she was angry with herself for having told such a stupid lie, and she was about to correct herself. Emil, however, broke in quickly:

"Perhaps you will have a little time to spare for me, too? I hope so, at least."

"Oh, yes!"

"So, then, we can arrange something now if you like"—he glanced at the clock—"Ah!"

"Must you go?" she asked.

"Yes, by twelve o'clock I ought really to…."

She was seized with an intense uneasiness at the prospect of having to be alone again so soon, and she said:

"I have plenty of time—as much as you like. But, of course, it must not be too late."

"Is your cousin so strict then?"

"But—" she said, "this time, as a matter of fact, I'm not staying with her, you see."

He looked at her in astonishment.

She grew red.

"Usually I do stay with her…. I mean, sometimes…. She has such a large family, you know."

"So you are staying at an hotel," he said, rather impatiently. "Well, there, of course,

you are accountable to no one, and we can spend the evening together quite comfortably."

"I shall be delighted. But I should like not to be too late … even in an hotel I should like not to be too late…."

"Of course not. We will just have supper, and you can be in bed long before ten o'clock."

They paced slowly down the grand staircase.

"So, if you are agreeable," said Emil, "we will meet at seven o'clock."

She was on the point of replying: "So late as that?"—but, remembering her resolution not to compromise herself, she refrained and answered instead:

"Very well, at seven."

"Seven o'clock at … where?… Out of doors, shall we say? In that case we could go wherever we fancied, life would lie before us, so to speak … yes."

He seemed to her just then remarkably absent-minded. They went through the entrance hall, and at the exit they stopped for a moment.

"At seven o'clock, then—by the Elizabeth Bridge."

"Very well; seven o'clock at the Elizabeth Bridge."

Before them lay the square, with the Maria Theresa memorial, in the brilliant glare of the noonday sun. It was a warm day, but a very high wind had arisen. It seemed to Bertha that Emil was looking at her with a scrutinising glance. At the same time, he appeared to her cold and strange, a very different man from what he had been when standing before the pictures in the Museum.

"Now we will say good-bye for the present," he said, after a time.

It made her feel somewhat unhappy to think that he was going to leave her.

"Won't you … or can't I come with you a little way?" she said.

"Well, no," he answered. "Besides, it is blowing such a gale. There's not much enjoyment to be had in walking side by side and having to hold your hat all the time, for fear it should blow away. Generally, it is difficult to converse if you are walking with a person in the street, and then, too, I have to be in such a hurry…. But perhaps I can see you to a carriage?"

"No, no, I shall walk."

"Yes, you can do that. Well, good-bye till we meet again this evening."

He stretched out his hand to her, and walked quickly away across the square. She gazed after him for a long time. He had taken off his hat and held it in his hand, and the wind was ruffling his hair. He went across the Ring, then through the Town Gate, and disappeared from Bertha's view.

Mechanically, and very slowly, she had followed him. Why had he suddenly grown so cold? Why had he taken his departure so quickly? Why didn't he want her to accompany him? Was he ashamed of her? She looked down at herself, wondering whether she was not dressed, after all, in a countrified and ridiculous manner. Oh, no, it could not be that! Moreover, she had been able to remark from the way in which people gazed at her that she was not looking ludicrous, but, on the contrary, decidedly pretty. Why, then, this sudden departure? She called to mind the period of their previous acquaintance, and it seemed to her that she could remember his having this strange manner even then. He would break off a conversation quite unexpectedly, whilst he suddenly became as though his thoughts had been carried away, and his whole being expressed an impatience which he could not master.

Yes, she was certain that he had been like that in those days also, though, perhaps, less strikingly so than now. She remembered, as well, that she had sometimes make jokes on the subject of his capriciousness, and had laid the responsibility at the door of his artistic temperament. Since then he had become a greater artist, and certainly more absent and irresponsible than ever.

The chimes of noon rang out from many a spire, the wind grew higher and higher, dust flew into her eyes. She had a whole eternity before her, with which she did not know what to do. Why wouldn't he see her, then, until seven o'clock? Unconsciously, she had reckoned on his spending the whole day with her. What was it that he had to do? Had he, perhaps, to make his preparations for the concert? And she pictured him to herself, violin in hand, by a cabinet, or leaning on a piano, just as, many years ago, he had played before the company at her home. Yes, that would be nice if she could only be with him now, sitting in his room, on a sofa, while he played, or even accompanying him on the piano. Would she, then, have gone with him if he had asked her? Why hadn't he asked her? No, of course, he could not have done so within an hour of seeing her again…. But in the evening—wouldn't he ask her that evening? And would she go with him? And, if she went, would she be able to deny him anything else that he might ask her? Indeed, he had a way of expressing everything so innocently. How easily he had managed to make those ten years seem as nothing! Had he not spoken to her as if they had seen each other daily all that time? "Good morning, Bertha. How are you, then?"—just as he might have asked if, on the previous evening, he had wished her "Good night!" and said "Good-bye till we meet again!" What a number of experiences he must have had since then! And who could tell who might be sitting on the sofa in his room that afternoon, while he leaned against the piano and played the violin? Ah, no, she would not think of it. If she followed up such thoughts to the end, would she not simply have to go home again?

She walked past the railings of the public gardens, and could see the avenue where, an hour ago, she had sat, and through which clouds of dust were now sweeping. So, then, that for which she had so deeply yearned was over—she had seen Emil again. Had it been so lovely as she expected? Had she felt any particular emotion when walking by his side, his arm touching hers? No! Had his departure put her out of humour? Perhaps. Would she be able to go home again without seeing him once

more? Good heavens, no! And a sensation almost of terror thrilled through her at the thought. Had not, then, her life during the past few days been, as it were, obsessed by him? And all the years that lay behind her, had they been meant for anything else, at all, than to lead her back to him at the right moment? Ah, if she only had a little more experience, if she were a little more worldly-wise! She would have liked to possess the capability of marking out for herself a definite course.

She asked herself which would be the wiser—to be reserved or yielding? She would gladly have known what she was to do that evening, what she ought to do in order to win his heart with greater certainty. She felt that any move on her part, one way or the other, might have the effect of gaining him, or, just as well, of losing him. But she also realised that all her meditation was of no avail, and that she would do just as he wished.

She was in front of the Votive Church, a spot where many streets intersected. The wind there was so violent as to be altogether intolerable. It was time to dine. But she decided that she would not go back to the little hotel that day. She turned towards the inner town. It suddenly occurred to her that she might meet her cousin, but that was a matter of supreme indifference to her. Or, supposing that her brother-in-law had followed her to Vienna? But that thought did not worry her either in the least. She had a feeling, such as she had never experienced before, that she had the right to dispose of her person and her time just as she pleased. She strolled leisurely along the streets, and amused herself by looking at the shop windows. On the Stephansplatz the idea came to her to go into the church for a while. In the dim, cool, and immense building a profound sensation of comfort came over her. She had never been of a religious disposition, but she could never enter a place of worship without experiencing a devotional feeling and, without clothing her prayers in definite form, she had yet always thought to find a way to send up her wishes to Heaven. At first she wandered round the church in the manner of a stranger visiting a beautiful edifice, then she sat down in a pew before a small altar in a side chapel.

She called to mind the day on which she had been married, and she had a vision of her late husband and herself standing side by side before the priest—but the event seemed to be so infinitely far away in the past, and it affected her spirit as little as if her thoughts were occupied by strangers. But suddenly, as a picture changed in a magic lantern, she seemed to see Emil, instead of her husband, standing by her side, and the picture appeared to stand out so completely, without any co-operation on the part of her will, that she almost had to regard as a premonition, even as a prediction from Heaven itself. Mechanically, she folded her hands and said softly: "So be it." And, as though her will acquired thereby a further access of strength, she remained sitting in a pew a while longer and sought to hold the picture fast.

After a few minutes she went out again into the street, where the broad daylight and the din of the traffic affected her as something new, something which she had not experienced for a long time, as though she had spent whole hours in the church. She felt tranquil, and hopes seemed to hover about her.

She dined in the restaurant of a fashionable hotel in the Kaernthernstrasse…. She was not in the least embarrassed, and thought it very childish that she had not preferred to put up at a first-class hotel. On reaching her room again, she undressed and, such was the state of languor into which she had fallen as the result of the unusually rich meal and the wine she had taken, that she had to stretch herself out on the sofa and fall asleep. It was five o'clock before she awoke. She had no great desire to get up. Usually at that time … what would she probably have been doing at that moment if she had not come to Vienna? If he had not answered her letter—if she had not written to him? If he had not received that Order? If she had never seen his portrait in the illustrated paper? If nothing had called his existence back into her memory? If he had become an insignificant, unknown fiddler in some suburban orchestra? What strange thoughts were these! Did she, then, love him merely because he was celebrated? What did it all mean? Did she, indeed, take any interest in his violin playing? … Wouldn't he be dearer to her if he was not famous and

admired? Certainly in that case she would have felt herself much nearer to him, much more allied to him; in that case, she would not have had this feeling of uncertainty about him, and also he would have been different in his manner towards her. As it was, of course, he was, indeed, very charming, and yet … she realized it now … something had come between them that day and had sundered them. Yes, and that was nothing else than the fact that he was a man whom the whole world knew, and she was nothing but a stupid little woman from the country. Suddenly she pictured him to herself as he had stood in the Rembrandt gallery at the Museum, and had looked out of the window while she had been telling him the story of her life in the little town; she remembered how he had scarcely bidden her good-bye, and how he had gone away from her, indeed, absolutely fled away from her. But, then, had she herself felt any emotion such as a woman would feel in the presence of the man she loved? Had she been happy when he had been speaking to her? Had she longed to kiss him when he was standing beside her?… Not at all. And now—was she pleased at the prospect of the evening she was going to spend with him? Was she pleased at the idea of seeing him again in a couple of hours? If she had the power, simply by expressing the wish, to transport herself just where she pleased, would she not, perhaps, at that, moment, rather be at home, with her boy, walking between the vine-trellises, without fear, without agitation, and with a clear conscience; as a good mother and a respectable woman, instead of lying in that uncomfortable room in the hotel, on a miserable sofa, restlessly, yet without longing, awaiting the next hours? She thought of the time, still so near, when all her concern was for nothing save her boy, the household, and her lessons—had she not been contented, almost happy?…

She looked round her. The bare room with the ugly blue and white painted walls, the specks of dust and dirt on the ceiling, the cabinet with its half-open door, all seemed most repulsive to her. No, that was no place for her. Then she thought with displeasure, too, of the dinner in the fashionable hotel, and also of her strolling about in the town, her weariness, the wind and the dust. It seemed to her that she had been

wandering about like a tramp. Then another thought came to her: what if something had happened at home!—Fritz might have caught the fever; they would telegraph to her cousin at Vienna, or they might even come to look for her, and they would not be able to find her, and all would know that she had lied like any disreputable person whose purpose it suits to do so…. It was terrible! How could she face them at home, her sister-in-law, her brother-in-law, Elly, her grown-up nephew Richard … the whole town, which, of course, would hear the news at once…. Herr Rupius! No, in good truth, she was not intended for such things! How childishly and clumsily, after all, she had set about it, so that only the slightest accident was needed to betray her. Had she, then, failed to give the least thought to all these things? Had she only been obsessed with the idea of seeing Emil once more, and for that had hazarded everything … her good name, even her whole future! For who could say whether the family would not renounce her, and she would lose her music lessons, if the truth came out?… The truth…. But what could come out? What had happened, then? What had she to reproach herself with? And with the comforting feeling of a clear conscience she was able boldly to answer: "Nothing." And, of course, there was still time…. She could leave Vienna directly by the seven o'clock train, be back by ten in her own home, in her own cosy room, with her beloved boy…. Yes, she could; to be sure, Fritz was not at home … but she could have him brought back…. No, she would not do it, she would not return at once … there was no occasion to do so—to-morrow morning would be quite time enough. She would say good-bye to Emil that very evening…. Yes, she would inform him at once that she was returning home early next morning, and that her only reason in coming had been to press his hand once more. Yes, that would be best.

Oh, he could, of course, accompany her to the hotel; and, goodness knows, he could even have supper with her in the garden restaurant … and she would go away as she had come…. Besides, she would see from his behaviour what he really felt towards her; she would be very reserved, even cold; it would be quite easy for her to act in

that way, because she felt completely at her ease. It seemed to her as if all her desires had fallen into slumber again, and she had a feeling akin to a determination to remain respectable. As a young girl she had withstood temptation, she had been faithful to her husband; her whole widowhood had hitherto passed without attack…. Well, the long and the short of it was: if he wished to make her his wife she would be very glad, but she would reject any bolder proposal with the same austerity as … as … twelve years before, when he had showed her his window behind St. Paul's Church.

She stood up, stretched herself, held up her hands, and went to the window. The sky had become overcast, clouds were moving down from the mountains, but the storm had subsided.

She got ready to go out.

## VII

Bertha had hardly proceeded a few steps from the hotel when it began to rain. Under her open umbrella she seemed to herself to be protected against unwelcome attentions from people she might meet. A pleasant fragrance was diffused throughout the air, as if the rain brought with it the aroma of the neighbouring woods, shedding it over the town. Bertha gave herself up wholly to the pleasure of the walk; even the object of her outing appeared before her mind's eye only vaguely, as if seen through a mist. She had at last grown so weary as the result of the profusion of her changing feelings that she no longer felt anything at all. She was without fear, without hope, without purpose. She walked on past the gardens, across the Ring, and rejoiced in the humid fragrance of the elder-trees. In the forenoon it had completely escaped her notice that everything was beautiful in an array of violet blossoms. An idea brought a smile to her lips: she went into a flower shop and bought a little bunch of violets. As she raised the flowers to her lips, a great

tenderness came over her; she thought of the train going homewards at seven o'clock, and she rejoiced, as if she had outwitted some one.

She walked slowly across the bridge, diagonally, and remembered how she had crossed it a few days ago in order to reach the neighbourhood of her former home, and to see Emil's window again. The throng of traffic at the bridge was immense; two streams, one coming from the suburb into the town, the other going in the opposite direction, poured by in confusion; carriages of all kinds rolled past; the air resounded with the jingling of bells, with whistling and with the shouts of drivers. Bertha tried to stand still, but was pushed forward.

Suddenly she heard a whistle quite close by. A carriage pulled up, a head leaned out of the window … it was Emil. He made a sign to her to come over to him. A few people immediately became attentive, and seemed very anxious to hear what the young man had to say to the lady who had gone up to his carriage.

"Will you get in?" Emil asked in a low voice.

"Get in…?"

"Why, yes, it is raining, you see!"

"Really, I would rather walk, if you don't mind."

"Just as you like," said Emil.

He got out quickly and paid the driver. Bertha observed, with some alarm, that about half a dozen people, who were crowding round her, were very anxious to see how this remarkable affair would turn out.

"Come," said Emil.

They quickly crossed the road, and thereby got away from the whole throng. They then walked slowly along a less frequented street by the bank of the Wien.

"Why, Emil, you haven't brought your umbrella with you!"

"Won't you take me under yours? Wait a moment, it won't do like this."

He took the umbrella out of her hand, held it over both of them, and thrust his arm under hers. Now she felt that it was his arm, and rejoiced greatly.

"The country, unfortunately, is out of the question," he said.

"What a pity."

"Well, what have you been doing with yourself all day long?"

She told him about the fashionable restaurant, in which she had had her dinner.

"Now, why on earth didn't I know about that? I thought you were dining with your cousin. We might, of course, have had such a pleasant lunch together!"

"You have had so much to do, I dare say," she said, a little proud at being able to infuse a slight tone of sarcasm into her voice.

"Yes, that's true, in the afternoon, of course. I had to listen to half an opera."

"Oh? How was that, then?"

"There was a young composer with me—a very talented fellow, in his own way."

She was very glad to hear that. So that, then, was the way in which he spent his afternoons.

He stood still and, without letting go her arm, looked into her face.

"Do you know that you have really grown much prettier? Yes, I am quite serious about it! But, tell me, first of all, tell me candidly, how the idea came to you to write to me."

"Why, I have already told you."

"Have you thought of me, then, all this time?"

"A great deal."

"When you were married, too?"

"Certainly, I have always thought of you. And you?"

"Often, very often."

"But …"

"Well, what?"

"You are a man, you see!"

"Yes—but what do you mean by that?"

"I mean that certainly you must have loved many women."

"Loved … loved … yes, I suppose I have."

"But I," she broke out with animation, as though the truth was too strong to be restrained within her; "I have loved no one but you."

He took her hand and raised it to his lips.

"I think we might rather leave that undecided, though," he said.

"Look, I have brought some violets with me for you."

He smiled.

"Are they to prove that you have told me the truth? Anybody would think, from the way in which you said that, that you have done nothing else since we last met but pluck, or, at least, buy, violets for me. However, many thanks! But tell me, why didn't you want to get into the carriage?"

"Oh, but you know, a walk is so nice."

"But we can't walk forever…. We are having supper together, though?"

"Yes, I shall be delighted—for instance, here in an hotel," she added hastily.

At that time they were walking through quieter streets, and it was growing dusk.

Emil laughed.

"Oh, no, we will arrange things a little more cosily than that."

Bertha cast her eyes down.

"However, we mustn't sit at the same table as strangers," she said.

"Certainly not. We will even go somewhere where there is nobody else at all."

"What are you thinking of?" she asked. "I don't do that sort of thing!"

"Just as you please," he answered, shrugging his shoulders. "Have you an appetite yet?"

"No, not at all."

They were both silent for a time.

"Shall I not make the acquaintance of your boy some day?" he asked.

"Certainly," she replied, greatly pleased; "whenever you wish."

She began to tell him about Fritz, and then went on to speak about her family. Emil threw in a question at times, and soon he knew all that happened in the little town, even down to the efforts of Klingemann, of which Bertha gave him an account, laughingly, but with a certain satisfaction.

The street lamps were alight; the rays glittered on the damp pavements.

"My dear girl, we can't stroll about the streets all night, you know," said Emil suddenly.

"No … but I cannot come with you … into a restaurant…. Just think, if I should happen to meet my cousin or anyone else!"

"Make your mind easy, no one will see us."

Quickly he passed through a gateway and closed the umbrella.

"What are you going to do, then?"

She saw a large garden before her. Near the walls, from which canvas shelters were stretched, people were sitting at tables, laid for supper.

"There, do you mean?"

"No. Just come with me."

Immediately on the right of the gate was a small door, which had been left ajar.

"Come in here."

They found themselves in a narrow, lighted passage, on both sides of which were rows of doors. A waiter bowed and went in front of them, past all the doors. The last one he opened, allowed the guests to enter, and closed it again after them.

In the centre of the little room stood a small table laid for three; by the wall was a blue velvet sofa, and opposite that hung a gilt framed oval mirror, before which Bertha took her hat off and, as she did so, she noticed that the names "Irma" and "Rudi" had been scratched on the glass. At the same time, she saw in the mirror Emil coming up behind her. He placed his hands on her cheeks, bent her head back towards himself, and kissed her on the lips. Then he turned away without speaking, and rang the bell.

A very young waiter came in at once, as if he had been standing outside the door. When he had taken his order he left them, and Emil sat down. "Well, Bertha!"

She turned towards him. He took her gently by the hand and still continued to hold it in his, when Bertha had taken a seat beside him on the sofa. Mechanically she touched her hair with her other hand.

An older waiter came in, and Emil made his choice from the menu. Bertha agreed to everything. When the waiter had departed, Emil said:

"Mustn't the question be asked: How is it that all this hasn't happened before to-day?"

"What do you mean by that?"

"Why didn't you write to me long ago?"

"Well, I would … if you had got your Order sooner!"

He held her hand and kissed it.

"But you come to Vienna fairly often!"

"Oh, no."

He looked up.

"But you said something like that in your letter!"

She remembered then, and grew red.

"Well, yes … often … Monday was the last time I was here."

The waiter brought sardines and caviar, and left the room.

"Well," said Emil; "it is probably just the right time."

"In what way?"

"That we should have met again."

"Oh, I have often longed for you."

He seemed to be deep in thought.

"And perhaps it is also just as well that things then turned out as they did," he said. "It is on that very account that the recollection is so charming."

"Yes, charming."

They were both silent for a time.

"Do you remember …" she said, and then she began to talk of the old days, of their walks in the town-park, and of her first day at the Conservatoire.

He nodded in answer to everything she said, held his arm on the back of the sofa, and lightly touched the lock of hair, which curled over the nape of her neck. At times he threw in a word. Then Emil himself recalled something which she had forgotten; he had remembered a further outing: a trip to the Prater one Sunday morning.

"And do you still recollect," said Bertha, "how we …" she hesitated to utter it—"once were almost in love with each other?"

"Yes," he said. "And who knows …"

He was perhaps about to say: "It would have been better for me if I had married you"—but he did not finish the sentence.

He ordered champagne.

"It is not so long ago," said Bertha, "since I tasted champagne. The last time was about six months ago, at the party which my brother-in-law gave on the occasion of his fiftieth birthday."

She thought of the company at her brother-in-law's, and it was amazing how remote from the present time it all seemed—the entire little town and all who lived there.

The young waiter brought an ice-tub with the wine. At that moment it occurred to Bertha that Emil had certainly been there before, many a time, with other women. That, however, was a matter of tolerable indifference to her.

They clinked glasses and drank. Emil embraced Bertha and kissed her. That kiss reminded her of something … what could it have been, though?… Of the kisses she had received when a young girl?… Of the kiss of her husband?… No…. Then it suddenly occurred to her that it was exactly like the kisses which her young nephew Richard had lately given to her.

The waiter came in with fruit and pastry. Emil put some dates and a bunch of grapes on a plate for Bertha.

"Why don't you say something?" she asked. "Why do you leave me to do all the talking? And you know you could tell me so much!"

"I?…"

He slowly sipped the wine.

"Why, yes, about your tours."

"Good Heavens, one town is just like all the others. You must not, of course, lose sight of the fact that I only rarely travel for my own pleasure."

"Quite so, of course."

During the whole time she had not given a thought to the fact that it was Emil Lindbach, the celebrated violin virtuoso, with whom she was sitting there; and she

felt bound to say:

"By the way, you are playing in Vienna soon. I should be very glad to hear you."

"Not a soul will hinder you from doing so," he replied drily.

It passed through her mind that it would really be very much nicer for her to hear him play, not at the concert, but for herself alone. She had almost said so, but then it occurred to her that that would have meant nothing else than: "I will come with you"—and, who could say, perhaps very soon she would go with him. It would be as easy for her as ever, if she had had some wine…. Yet, not so, the wine was affecting her differently from usual—it was not the soft inebriation which made her feel a little more cheerful; it was better, lovelier. It was not the few drops of wine that made it so; it was the touch of his dear hand, as he stroked her brow and hair. He had sat down beside her and he drew her head onto his shoulder. How gladly would she have fallen asleep like that…. Yes, indeed, nothing else did she desire…. Then she heard him whisper: "Darling."… She trembled softly.

Why was this the first time? Could she not have had all this before? Was there a grain of sense in living as she did?… After all, there was nothing wicked in what she was doing now…. And how sweet it was to feel the breath of a young man upon her eyelids!… No, not—not the breath of a young man… of a lover….

She had shut her eyes. She made not the slightest effort to open them again, she had not the least desire to know where she was, or with whom she was…. Who was it, after all?… Richard?… No…. Was she falling asleep, then?… She was there with Emil…. With whom?… But who was this Emil?… How hard it was to be clear as to who it was!… The breath upon her eyelids was the breath of the man she had loved when a girl … and, at the same time, that of the celebrated artist who was soon to give a concert … and, at the same time, of a man whom she had not seen for thousands and thousands of days … and, at the same time, of a gentleman with whom she was sitting alone in a restaurant, and who, at that moment, could do with

her just as he pleased…. She felt his kiss upon her eyes…. How tender he was … and how handsome…. But what did he really look like, then?… She had only to open her eyes to be able to see him quite plainly…. But she preferred to imagine what he was like, without actually seeing him…. No, how funny—why, that was not in the least like his face!… Of course, it was the face of the young waiter, who had left the room a minute or two before…. But what did Emil look like, after all?… Like this?… No, no, of course, that was Richard's face…. But away … away…. Was she then so low as to think of nothing but other men while she … was with him?… If she could only open her eyes!… Ah!

She shook herself violently, so that she almost pushed Emil away—and then she tore her eyes wide open.

Emil gazed at her, smiling.

"Do you love me?" he asked.

She drew him towards her and kissed him of her own accord…. It was the first time that day that she had given him a kiss of her own accord, and in doing so she felt that she was not acting in accordance with her resolve of the morning…. She tried to think what that resolve had been…. To compromise herself in no way; to deny herself…. Yes, there had certainly been a time when that had been her wish, but why? She was in love with him, really and truly; and the moment had arrived which she had been awaiting for days…. No, for years!

Still their lips remained pressed together…. Ah, she longed to feel his arms about her … to be his, body and soul. She would not let him talk any more … he would have to take her unto himself…. He would have to realize that no other woman could love him so well as she did….

Emil rose to his feet and paced up and down the little room a few times. Bertha raised her glass of champagne to her lips again.

"No more, Bertha," said Emil, in a low tone.

Yes, he was right, she thought. What was she really doing? Was she going to make herself drunk, then? Was there any need for that? After all, she was accountable to no one, she was free, she was young; she was determined to taste of happiness at last.

"Ought we not to be thinking of going?" said Emil.

Bertha nodded. He helped her to put on her jacket. She stood before the mirror and stuck the pin through her hat. They went. The young waiter was standing before the door; he bowed. A carriage was standing before the gate; Bertha got in; she did not hear what instructions Emil gave the driver. Emil took his seat by her side. Both were silent; they sat pressing closely against each other. The carriage rolled on, a long, long way. Wherever could it be, then, that Emil lived? But, perhaps, he had purposely told the driver to take a circuitous route, knowing, no doubt, how pleasant it was to drive together through the night like this.

The carriage pulled up. Emil got out.

"Give me your umbrella," he said.

She handed it out to him and he opened it. Then she got out and they both stood under the shelter of the umbrella, on which the rain was rattling down. Was this the street in which he lived? The door opened; they entered the hall; Emil took a candle which the porter handed to him. Before them was a fine broad staircase. When they reached the first floor Emil opened a door. They passed through an ante-chamber into a drawing-room. With the candle which he held in his hand Emil lighted two others upon the table; then he went up to Bertha, who was still standing in the doorway, as though waiting, and led her further into the room. He took the pin out of her hat, and placed the hat upon the table. In the uncertain light of the two feebly-burning candles, Bertha could only see that a few coloured pictures were hanging on the wall—portraits of the Emperor and Empress, so it appeared to her—that, on one side, was a broad divan covered with a Persian rug and that, near

the window, there was an upright piano with a number of framed photographs on the lid. Over the piano a picture was hanging, but Bertha was unable to make it out. Yonder, she saw a pair of red curtains hanging down beside a door, which was standing half open and through the broad folds something white and gleaming could be seen within.

She could no longer restrain the question:

"Do you live here?"

"As you see."

She looked straight before her. On the table stood a couple of little glasses, a decanter containing liqueur and a small epergne, loaded with fruit and pastry.

"Is this your study?" asked Bertha.

Mechanically her eyes sought for a desk such as violin players use. Emil put his arm round her waist and led her to the piano. He sat down on the piano stool and drew her on to his knees.

"I may as well confess to you at once," he said to her, simply and almost drily, "that really I do not live here. It was only for our own sake … that I have … for a short while … I deemed it prudent … Vienna, you know, is a small town, and I didn't want to take you into my house at night-time."

She understood, but was not altogether satisfied. She looked up. She was now able to see the outlines of the picture which was hanging above the piano…. It was a naked female figure. Bertha had a curious desire to examine the picture, close at hand.

"What is that?" she asked.

"It is not a work of art," said Emil.

He struck a match and held it up, so as to throw the light on the picture. Bertha saw that it was merely a wretched daub, but at the same time she felt that the painted

woman, with the bold laughing eyes, was looking down at her, and she was glad when the match went out.

"You might just play something to me upon the piano," said Emil.

She wondered at the coldness of his demeanour. Didn't he realize that she was with him?… But, on the other hand, did she herself feel any special emotion?… No…. A strange sadness seemed to come welling forth from every corner of the room…. Why hadn't he rather taken her to his own house?… What sort of a house was this, she wondered…. She regretted now that she had not drunk more wine…. She wished that she was not so sober….

"Well, won't you play something to me?" said Emil. "Just think how long it is since I have heard you."

She sat down and struck a chord.

"Indeed, I have forgotten everything."

"Oh, do try!"

She played very softly Schumann's Albumblatt, and she remembered how, a few days before, late in the evening, she had improvised as she was sitting at home, and Klingemann had walked up and down in front of the window. She could not help thinking also of the report that he had a scandalous picture in his room. And involuntarily, she glanced up again at the picture of the naked woman over the piano, but now the figure seemed to be gazing into space.

Emil had brought a chair beside Bertha's. He drew her towards him and kissed her while her fingers first continued to play, and at length rested quietly upon the keys. Bertha heard the rain beating against the window-panes and a sensation as of being at home came over her.

Then she felt as though Emil was lifting her up and carrying her. Without letting her out of his arms he had stood up and was slowly bearing her out of the room. She felt

her right arm graze against the curtain…. She kept her eyes closed; she could feel Emil's cool breath upon her hair….

## VIII

When they went out into the street the rain had left off, but the air was permeated with a wondrous mildness and humidity. Most of the street lamps had already been extinguished; the one at the street corner was the nearest that was alight; and, as the sky was still overcast with clouds, deep darkness hung over the city. Emil had offered Bertha his arm; they walked in silence. From a church tower a clock struck—one. Bertha was surprised. She had believed that it must be nearly morning, but now she was glad at heart to wander mutely through the night in the still, soft air, leaning on his arm—because she loved him very much.

They entered an open square; before them lay the Church of St. Charles.

Emil hailed a driver who had fallen asleep, sitting on the footboard of his open carriage.

"It is such a fine night," said Emil; "we can still indulge in a short drive before I take you to your hotel—shall we?"

The carriage started off. Emil had taken off his hat; she laid it in her lap, an action which also afforded her pleasure. She took a sidelong glance at Emil; his eyes seemed to be looking into the distance.

"What are you thinking of?"

"I … To tell the truth, Bertha, I was thinking of a melody out of the opera, which that man I was telling you about played to me this afternoon. But I can't get it quite right."

"You are thinking of melodies now …" said Bertha, smiling, but with a slight-tone of reproach in her voice.

Again there was silence. The carriage drove slowly along the deserted Ringstrasse, past the Opera House, the Museum and the public gardens.

"Emil?"

"What do you want, my darling?"

"When shall I at last have an opportunity of hearing you play again?"

"I am playing at a concert to-day, as a matter of fact," he said, as if it were a joke.

"No, Emil, that was not what I meant—I want you to play to me alone. You will do that just once … won't you? Please!"

"Yes, yes."

"It would mean so much to me. I should like you to know that there was no one in the room except myself listening to you."

"Quite so. But never mind that now, though."

He spoke in such a decided tone of voice that it seemed as if he was defending something from her. She could not understand for what reason her request could have been distasteful to him, and she continued:

"So then it is settled: to-morrow at five o'clock in the evening at your house?"

"Yes, I am curious to see whether you will like it there."

"Oh, of course I shall. Surely it will be much nicer being at your house than at that place where we have been this evening. And shall we spend the evening together? Do you know, I am just thinking whether I ought not to see my cousin…."

"But, my dearest one, please, don't let us map out a definite programme."

In saying this he put his arm round her neck, as if he wanted to make her feel the tenderness which was absent from the tone of his voice.

"Emil!"

"Well?"

"To-morrow we will play the Kreatzer Sonata together—the Andante at least."

"But, my dear child, we've talked enough about music; do let us drop the subject. I am quite prepared to believe that you are immensely interested in it."

Again he spoke in that vague way, from which she could not tell whether he really meant what he said or had spoken ironically. She did not, however, venture to ask. At the same time her yearning at that moment to hear him play the violin was so keen that it was almost painful.

"Ah, here we are near your hotel, I see!" exclaimed Emil; and, as if he had completely forgotten his wish to go for a drive with her before leaving her at her door, he called out the name of the hotel to the driver.

"Emil—"

"Well, dearest?"

"Do you still love me?"

Instead of answering he pressed her close to him and kissed her on the lips.

"Tell me, Emil—"

"Tell you what?"

"But I know you don't like anybody to ask much of you."

"Never mind, my child, ask anything you like."

"What will you…. Tell me, what are you accustomed to do with your forenoons?"

"Oh, I spend them in all sorts of ways. To-morrow, for instance, I am playing the violin solo in Haydn's Mass in the Lerchenfeld Church."

"Really? Then, of course, I won't have to wait any longer than to-morrow morning before I can hear you."

"If you want to. But it is really not worth the trouble…. That is to say, the Mass itself, of course, is very beautiful."

"However does it happen that you are going to play in the Lerchenfeld Church?"

"It is … an act of kindness on my part."

"For whom?"

"For whom … well, for Haydn, of course."

A thrill of pain seemed to seize Bertha. At that moment she felt that there must be some special connexion between it and his taking part in the Mass at the Lerchenfeld Church. Perhaps some woman was singing in the Mass, who…. Ah, what did she know, after all?… But she would go to the church, yes, she must go … she could let no other woman have Emil! He belonged to her, to her alone … he had told her so, indeed…. And she would find a way to hold him fast… She had, she told herself, such infinite tenderness for him … she had reserved all her love for him alone…. She would completely envelop him in it … no more would he yearn for any other woman…. She would move to Vienna, be with him each day, be with him for ever.

"Emil—"

"Well, what is the matter with you, darling?"

He turned towards her and looked at her rather uneasily.

"Do you love me? Good Heavens, here we are already!"

"Really?" said Emil, with surprise.

"Yes—there, do you see?—that's where I am staying. So tell me, please, Emil, tell me once more—"

"Yes, to-morrow at five o'clock, my darling. I am very glad."

"No, not that…. Tell me, do you—" The carriage stopped. Emil waited by Bertha's side until the porter came out and opened the door, then he kissed her hand with the most ceremonious politeness, and said:

"Good-bye till we meet again, dear lady."

He drove away.

Bertha's sleep that night was sound and heavy.

When she awoke, the light of the morning sun was streaming around her. She remembered the previous evening, and she was very glad that something which she had imagined to be so hard, and almost grievous, had been done and had proved to be quite easy and joyous. And then she felt a thrill of pride on recollecting her kisses, which had had nothing in them of the timidity of a first adventure. She could not observe the slightest trace of repentance in her heart, although it occurred to her that it was conventional to be penitent after such things as she had experienced. Words, too, like "sin" and "love affair" passed through her mind, without being able to linger in her thoughts, because they seemed to be devoid of all meaning. She believed herself certain that she replied to Emil's tenderness just like a woman accomplished in the art of love, and was very happy in the thought that all those things which came to other women as the result of the experiences of nights of drunkenness had come to her from the depth of her feelings. It seemed to her as though in the previous evening she had discovered in herself a gift, of the existence of which she had hitherto had no premonition, and she felt a slight emotion of regret stir within her at not having turned that gift to the best advantage earlier. She remembered one of Emil's questions as to her past, on account of which she had not been so shocked as she ought to have been, and now, as she recalled it to mind, the same smile appeared on her lips, as when she had sworn that she had told him the truth, which he had not wanted to believe. Then she thought of their next meeting; she pictured to herself how he would receive her and escort her through his rooms. The idea came to her that she would behave just as if nothing at all had yet happened between them. Not once would he be able to read in her glance the recollection of the previous evening; he would have to win her all over again, he would have to woo her—not with words alone, but also with his music…. Yes…. Wasn't she going to hear him play that very forenoon?… Of course—in the Church…. Then she remembered the sudden jealousy which had seized her the previous evening…. Yes,

but why?… It seemed to her now to be so absurd—jealousy of a singer who perhaps was taking part in singing the Mass, or of some other unknown woman. She would, however, go to the Church in any case. Ah, how fine it would be to stand in the dim light of the Church, unseen by him and unable to see him, and to hear only his playing, which would float down to her from the choir. And she felt as though she rejoiced in the prospect of a new tenderness which should come to her from him without his apprehending it.

Slowly she got up and dressed herself. A gentle thought of her home rose up within her, but it was altogether without strength. She even found it a trouble to think of it. Moreover, she felt no penitence on that account; rather, she was proud of what she had done. She felt herself wholly as Emil's creature; all that had had part in her life previous to his advent seemed to be extinguished. If he were to demand of her that she should live a year, live the coming summer with him, but that then she should die—she would obey him.

Her dishevelled hair fell over her shoulders. Memories came to her which almost made her reel. … Ah, Heaven; why had all this come so late, so late? But there was still a long time before her—there were still five, still ten years during which she might remain beautiful…. Oh, there was even longer so far as he was concerned, if they remained together, since, indeed, he would change together with her. And again the hope flitted through her mind: if he should make her his wife, if they should live together, travel together, sleep together, night after night—but now she began to feel slightly ashamed of herself—why was it that these thoughts were for ever present in her mind? Yet, to live together, did it not mean something further—to have cares in common, to be able to talk with one another on all subjects? Yes, she would, before all things, be his friend. And that was what she would tell him in the evening before everything else. That day he would have at last to tell her everything, tell her about himself; he would have to unfold his whole life before her, from the moment when they had parted twelve years ago until—and she could not help being amazed as she

pursued her thoughts—until the previous morning…. She had seen him again for the first time the morning before, and in the space of that one day she had become so completely his that she could no longer think of anything except him; she was scarcely any longer a mother … no, nothing but his beloved.

She went out into the brightness of the summer day. It occurred to her that she was meeting more people than usual, that most of the shops were shut—of course, it was Sunday! She had not thought of that at all. And now that, too, made her glad. Soon she met a very slender gentleman who was wearing his overcoat open and by whose side was walking a young girl with very dark, laughing eyes. Bertha could not help thinking that she and Emil looked just such another couple … and she pictured to herself how beautiful it must be to stroll about, not merely in the darkness of the night, but, just as these two were doing, openly in the broad light of day, arm in arm, and with happiness and laughter shining in their eyes. Many a time, when a gentleman going past her looked into her face, she felt as though she understood the language of glances, like something new to her. One man looked at her with a sort of grave expression, and he seemed to say: Well, you are also just like the others! Presently came two young people who left off talking to each other when they saw her. She felt as though they knew perfectly well what had happened the previous night. Then another man passed, who appeared to be in a great hurry, and he cast her a rapid sidelong glance which seemed to say: Why are you walking about here as imposingly, as if you were a good woman? Yesterday evening you were in the arms of one of us. Quite distinctly she heard within her that expression "one of us," and, for the first time in her life, she could not help pondering over the fact that all the men who passed by were indeed men, and that all the women were indeed women; that they desired one another, and, if they so wished, found one another. And she had the feeling as though only on the previous day at that time she had been a woman apart, from whom all other women had secrets, whilst now she also was included amongst them and could talk to them. She tried to remember the period

which followed her wedding, and she recalled to mind that she had felt nothing beyond a slight disappointment and shame. Very vague there rose in her mind a certain sentence—she could not tell whether she had once read it or heard it—namely: "It is always the same, indeed, after all." And she seemed to herself much cleverer than the person, whoever it might have been, man or woman, who had spoken or written that sentence.

Presently she noticed that she was following the same route as she had taken on the previous morning. Her eye fell on an advertising column on which was an announcement of the concert in which Emil was one of those taking part. Delightedly she stopped before it. A gentleman stood beside her. She smiled and thought: if he knew that my eyes are resting upon the very name of the man who, last night, was my lover…. Suddenly, she felt very proud. What she had done she considered as something unique. She could scarcely imagine that other women possessed the same courage. She walked on through the public gardens in which there were more people than on the previous day. Once again she saw children playing, governesses and nursemaids gossiping, reading, knitting. She noticed particularly a very old gentleman who had sat down on a seat in the sun; he looked at her, shook his head and followed her with a hard and inexorable glance. The incident created a most unpleasant impression upon her, and she had a feeling of injury in regard to the did gentleman. When, however, she mechanically glanced back, she observed that he was gazing at the sunlit sand and was still shaking his head. She realized then that this was due to his old age, and she asked herself whether Emil, too, would not one day be just such an aged gentleman, who would sit in the sun and shake his head. And all at once she saw herself walking along by his side in the chestnut avenue at home, but she was just as young as she was now, and he was being wheeled in an invalid's chair. She shivered slightly. If Herr Rupius were to know…. No—never, never would he believe that of her! If he had supposed her capable of such things he would not have called her to join him on the balcony

and told her that his wife was intending to leave him….

At that moment she was amazed at what seemed to her to be the great exuberance of her life. She had the impression that she was existing in the midst of such complex relations as no other woman did. And this feeling also contributed to her pride.

As she walked past a group of children, of whom four were dressed exactly alike, she thought how strange it was that she had not for a moment considered the fact that her adventure of the previous day might possibly have consequences. But a connexion between that which had happened the day before between those wild embraces in a strange room—and a being which one day would call her "Mother" seemed to lie without the pale of all possibility.

She left the garden and took the road to the Lerchenfelderstrasse. She wondered whether Emil was now thinking that she was on her way to him. Whether his first thought that morning had been of her. And it seemed to her now that previously her imagination had pictured quite differently the morning after a night such as she had spent…. Yes, she had fancied it as a mutual awakening, breast on breast, and lips pressed to lips.

A detachment of soldiers came towards her. Officers paced along by the side of the pavement; one of them jostled her slightly, as he passed, and said politely:

"I beg your pardon."

He was a very handsome man, and he gave himself no further concern on her account, which vexed her a little. And the thought came to her involuntarily: had he also a beloved? And suddenly she knew for a certainty that he had been with the girl he loved the previous night; also that he loved her only, and concerned himself with other women as little as Emil did.

She was now in front of the church. The notes of the organ came surging forth into the street. A carriage was standing there, and a footman was on the box. How came that carriage there? All at once, it was quite clear to Bertha that some definite

connexion must have subsisted between it and Emil, and she resolved to leave the church before the conclusion of the Mass so as to see who might enter the carriage. She went into the crowded church. She passed forward between the rows of seats until she reached the High Altar, by which the priest was standing. The notes of the organ died away, the string orchestra began to take up the melody. Bertha turned her head in the direction of the choir. Somehow, it seemed strange to her that Emil should, incognito, so to speak, be playing the solo in a Haydn Mass here in the Lerchenfelder Church…. She looked at the female figures in the front seats. She noticed two—three—four young women and several old ladies. Two were sitting in the foremost row; one of them was very fashionably dressed in black silk, the other appeared to be her maid. Bertha thought that in any case the carriage must belong to that aristocratic old lady, and the idea greatly tranquillized her mind. She walked back again, half unconsciously keeping everywhere on the lookout for pretty women. There were still some who were passably good-looking; they all seemed to be absorbed in their devotions, and she felt ashamed that she alone was wandering about the church without any holy thoughts.

Then she noticed that the violin solo had already begun. He was now playing—he! he!… And at that moment she was hearing him play for the first time for more than ten years. And it seemed to her that it was the same sweet tone as of old, just as one recognized the voices of people whom one has not met for years. The soprano joined in. If she could only see the singer! It was a clear, fresh voice, though not very highly trained, and Bertha felt something like a personal connexion between the notes of the violin and the song. It was natural that Emil should know the girl who was now singing…. But was there not something more in the fact of their performing together in the Mass than appeared on the surface? The singing ceased, the notes of the violin continued to resound, and now they spoke to her alone, as though they wished to reassure her. The orchestra joined in, the violin solo hovered over the other instruments, and seemed only to have that one desire to come to an

understanding with her. "I know that you are there," it seemed to say, "and I am playing only for you…."

The organ chimed in, but still the violin solo remained dominant over the rest. Bertha was so moved that tears rose to her eyes. At length the solo came to an end, as though engulfed in the swelling flood of sound from the other instruments, and it arose no more. Bertha scarcely listened, but she found a wonderful solace in the music sounding around her. Many a time she fancied that she could hear Emil's violin playing with the orchestra, and then it seemed quite strange, almost incredible, that she was standing there by a column, down in the body of the church and he was sitting at a desk up in the choir above, and the previous night they had been clasped in each other's arms, and all the hundreds of people there in the church knew nothing at all about it….

She must see him at once—she must! She wanted to wait for him at the bottom of the staircase…. She did not want to speak a word to him—no, but she wished to see him and also the others who came out—including the singer of whom she had been jealous. But she had got completely over that now; she knew that Emil could not deceive her….

The music had ceased; Bertha felt herself thrust forward towards the exit; she wanted to find the staircase, but it was at a considerable distance from her. Indeed, it was just as well that it was so … no, she would not have dared to do it, to put herself forward, to wait for him—what would he have thought of her? He certainly would not have liked it! No, she would disappear with the crowd, and would tell him in the evening that she had heard him play. She was now positively afraid of being observed by him. She stood at the entrance, walked down the steps, and went past the carriage, just as the old lady and her maid were getting into it. Bertha could not help smiling when she called to mind in what a state of apprehension the sight of that carriage had thrown her, and it seemed to her that her suspicion in regard to the

carriage having been removed, all the others must necessarily flicker out! She felt as though she had passed through an extraordinary adventure and was standing now on the brink of an absolutely new existence. For the first time it seemed to her to have a meaning; everything else had been but a fiction of the imagination and became as nothing in comparison with the happiness which was streaming through her pulses, while she slowly sauntered from the church through the streets of the suburbs towards her hotel. It was not until she had nearly reached her destination that she noticed that she had gone the whole way as though lost in a dream and could scarcely remember which way she had taken and whether she had met any people or not.

As she was taking the key of her room the porter handed her a note and a bouquet of violets and lilac blossoms…. Oh, why had not she had a similar idea and sent Emil some flowers? But what could he have to write to her about? With a slight thrill of fear at her heart, she opened the letter and read:

"DEAREST,

"I must thank you once again for that delightful evening. To-day, unfortunately, it is impossible for me to see you. Don't be angry with me, my dear Bertha, and don't forget to let me know in good time on the next occasion when you come to Vienna."

Ever your own,

"EMIL."

She went, she ran up the stairs, into her own room…. Why was he unable to see her that day? Why did he not at least tell her the reason? But then, after all, what did she know of his various obligations of an artistic and social nature?… It would certainly have been going too much into detail, and it would have appeared like an evasion if he had, at full length, given his reasons for putting her off. But in spite of that…. And then, why did he say: the next occasion when you came to Vienna?… Had she not told him that she would be remaining there a few days longer? He had forgotten

that—he must have forgotten it! And immediately she sat down and wrote:

"MY DEAREST EMIL,

"I am very sorry indeed that you have had to put me off to-day, but luckily I am not leaving Vienna yet. Do please write to me at once, dearest, and tell me whether you can spare a little time for me to-morrow or the next day.

"A thousand kisses from your

"BERTHA."

"P.S.—It is most uncertain when I shall be coming to Vienna again, and I should be very sorry in any case to go away without seeing you once more."

She read the letter over. Then she added a further postscript:

"I must see you again!"

She hurried out into the street, handed the letter to a commissionaire, and impressed upon him strongly that he was on no account to come back without an answer. Then she went up to her room again and posted herself at the window. She wanted to keep herself from thinking, she wished only to look down into the street. She forced herself to fix her attention on the passers-by, and she recalled to mind a game, which she used to play as a child, and in which she and her brothers looked out of the window and amused themselves by commenting on how this or that passer-by resembled some one or other of their acquaintances. In the present circumstances, it was a matter of some difficulty for her to discover any such resemblances, for her room was situated on the third story; but, on the other hand, owing to the distance, it was easier for her to discover the arbitrary resemblances which she was looking for. First of all, came a woman who looked like her cousin Agatha; then some one who reminded her of her music teacher at the Conservatoire; he was arm in arm with a woman who looked like her sister-in-law's cook. Yonder was a young man who bore a resemblance to her brother, the actor. Directly behind him, and in the uniform of a captain, a person who was the image of her dead father came along the road; he

stood still awhile before the hotel, glanced up, exactly as if he were seeking her, and then disappeared through the doorway. For a moment Bertha was as greatly alarmed as if it really had been her father, who had come as a ghost from the grave. Then she forced herself to laugh—loudly—and sought to continue the game, but she was not able to play it any longer with success.

Her sole purpose now was to see whether the commissionaire was coming. At length she decided to have dinner, just to while away the time. After she had ordered it, she again went to the window. But now she no longer looked in the direction from which the commissionaire had to come, but her glances followed the crowded omnibuses and trams on their way to the suburbs. Then the captain, whom she had seen a short time before, struck her attention again, as he was just jumping on to a tram, a cigarette in his mouth. He no longer bore the slightest resemblance to her dead father.

She heard a clatter behind her; the waiter had come into the room. Bertha ate but little, and drank her wine very quickly. She grew sleepy, and leaned back in the corner of the divan. Her thoughts gradually grew indistinct; there was a ringing in her ears like the echoes of the organ which she had heard in the church. She shut her eyes and, all at once, as though evoked by magic, she saw the room in which she had been with Emil the previous evening, and behind the red curtains she perceived the gleaming whiteness of the coverlet. It appeared that she herself was sitting again before the piano, but another man was holding her in a close embrace—it was her nephew Richard. With an effort she tore her eyes open, she seemed to herself depraved beyond all measure, and she felt panic-stricken as though some atonement would have to be exacted from her, for these visionary fancies.

Once more she went to the window. She felt as if an eternity had passed since she had sent the commissionaire on his errand. She read through Emil's letter once again. Her glance lingered on the last words: "Ever your own"; and she repeated

them to herself aloud and in a tender tone, and called to mind similar words which he had spoken the previous evening. She concocted a letter which was surely on the point of arriving and would certainly be couched in these terms: "My dearest Bertha! Heaven be thanked that you are going to remain in Vienna until to-morrow! I shall expect you for certain at my house at three o'clock," or: "to-morrow we will spend the whole day together," or even; "I have put off the appointment I had, so we can still see each other to-day. Come to me at once; longingly I am waiting for you!"

Well, whatever his answer might be, she would see him again before leaving Vienna, although not that day perhaps. Indeed, anything else was quite unthinkable. Why, then, was she a prey to this dreadful agitation, as though all were over between them? But why was his answer so long in coming?… He had, in any case, gone out to dinner—of course, he had no one to keep house for him! So the earliest that he could be home again was three o'clock…. But if he were not to return home till the evening?… She had, indeed, told the commissionaire to wait in any case—even till the night, if necessary…. But what was she to do? Of course, she could not stand there looking out of the window all the time! The hours, indeed, seemed endless! She was ready to weep with impatience, with despair!

She paced up and down the room; then she again stood at the window for a while, then she sat down and took up for a short time the novel which she had brought with her in her travelling bag; she attempted, too, to go to sleep—but did not succeed in doing so. At length four o'clock struck—nearly three hours had passed since she had begun her vigil.

There was a knock at the door. The commissionaire came into the room and handed her a letter. She tore open the envelope and with an involuntary movement, so as to conceal the expression on her features from the stranger, she turned towards the window.

She read the letter.

"MY DEAREST BERTHA,

"It is very good of you still to give me a choice between the next few days but, as indeed I have already hinted to you in my former letter, it is, unfortunately, absolutely impossible for me to do just as I like during that time. Believe me, I regret that it is so, at least as much as you do.

"Once more a thousand thanks and a thousand greetings and I trust that we will be able to arrange a delightful time when next we meet.

"Don't forget me completely,

"Your

"EMIL."

When she had finished reading the letter she was quite calm; she paid the commissionaire the fee he demanded and found that, for a person in her circumstances, it was by no means insignificant. Then she sat down at the table and tried to collect her thoughts. She realized immediately that she could no longer remain in Vienna, and her only regret was that there was no train which could take her home at once. On the table stood the half empty bottle of wine, bread crumbs were scattered beside the plate, on the bed lay her spring jacket, beside it were the flowers which he had sent her that very morning.

What could it all mean? Was it at an end?

Indistinctly, but so that it seemed that it must bear some relation to her recent experiences, there occurred to her a sentence which she had once read. It was about men who desire nothing more than "to attain their object…" But she had always considered that to be a phrase of the novelists. But, after all, it was surely not a letter of farewell that she was holding in her hand, was it?… Was it really not a letter of farewell? Might not these kind words be also lies?… Also lies—that was it!… For the first time the positive word forced itself into her thoughts…. Lies!… Then it was certain that, when he brought her home the previous night, he had already made up

his mind not to see her again. And the appointment for the present day and his desire to see her again that day were lies….

She went over the events of the previous evening in her mind, and she asked herself what could she have said or done to put him out of humour or disappoint him…. Really, it had all been so beautiful, and Emil had seemed so happy, just as happy as she had been … was all that going to prove to have been a lie too?… How could she tell?… Perhaps, after all, she had put him out of humour without being aware that she was doing so…. She had, indeed, been nothing more or less than a good woman all her life…. Who could say whether she had not been guilty of something clumsy or stupid?… whether she had not been ludicrous and repellent in some moment when she had believed herself to be sacrificing, tender, enchanted and enchanting?… But what did she know of all these things?… And, all at once, she felt something almost in the nature of repentance that she had set out upon her adventure so utterly unprepared, that, until the previous day, she had been so chaste and good, that she had not had other lovers before Emil…. Then she remembered, too, that he had evaded her shy questions and requests on the subject of his violin playing, as if he had not wanted to admit her into that sphere of his life. He had thus remained strange to her, intentionally strange, so far as concerned the very things which were of the deepest and most vital importance to him. All at once she realized that she had no more in common with him than the pleasures of a night, and that the present morning had found them both as far apart from one another as they had been during all the years in which they had each led a separate existence.

And then jealousy again flared up within her…. But she felt as though she was always thus, as though every conceivable emotion had always been present within her … love and distrust, and hope and penitence, and yearning and jealousy … and, for the first time in her life, she was so stirred, even to the very depths of her soul, that she understood those who in their despair have hurled themselves out of a window to meet their death…. And she perceived that the present state of affairs

was impossible, that only certainty could be of any avail to her…. She must go to him and ask him … but she must ask in the manner of one who is holding a knife to another's breast….

She hurried away through the streets, which were almost deserted, as though all Vienna had gone off into the country…. But would she find him at home?… Would he not, perhaps, have had a presentiment that the idea might come to her to seek him, to take him to task, and would he not have taken steps to evade the chance of such an occurrence?… She was ashamed of having had to think of that, too…. And if he was at home would she find him alone?… And if he was not alone, would she be admitted into his house?

And if she found him in the arms of some other woman, what should she say?… Had he promised her anything? Had he sworn to be true to her? Had she even so much as demanded loyalty of him? How could she have imagined that he was waiting for her here in Vienna until she congratulated him on his Spanish Order?… Yes, could he not say to her: "You have thrown yourself on my neck and have desired nothing more than that I should take you as you are…." And if she asked herself—was he not right?… Had she not come to Vienna to be his beloved?—and for no other reason … without any regard to the past, without any guarantee as to the future?… Yes, that was all she had come for! All other hopes and wishes had only transiently hovered around her passion, and she did not deserve anything better than that which had happened to her…. And if she was candid to herself, she must also admit that of all that she had experienced this had still been the best….

She stopped at a street corner. All was quiet around her; the summer air about her was heavy and sultry. She retraced her steps back to her hotel. She was very tired, and a new thought rose up convulsively within her: was it not possible that he had written to put her off only because he also was tired?… She seemed to herself very experienced when that idea occurred to her…. And yet another thought flashed

through her mind: that he could also love no other woman in the way in which he had loved her…. And suddenly she asked whether, after all, the previous night would remain her only experience—whether she herself would belong to no other man save him? And she rejoiced in the doubt, as if, by cherishing it, she was taking a kind of revenge on his compassionate glance and mocking lips.

And now she was back again in the cheerless room away up in the third storey of the hotel. The remains of her dinner had not yet been cleared away. Her jacket and the flowers were still lying on the bed. She took the flowers in her hand and raised them to her lips, as though about to kiss them. Suddenly, however, as though her whole anger burst forth again, she flung them violently to the ground. Then she threw herself on the bed, her face buried in her hands.

After lying for some time in this position she felt her calmness gradually returning. It was perhaps just as well that she could return home that very day. She thought of her boy, how he was accustomed to lie in his little cot with his whole face beaming with laughter, if his mother leaned over the railings. She yearned for him. Also she yearned in some slight degree for Elly and for Frau Rupius. Yes, it was true—Frau Rupius, of course, was going to leave her husband…. What could there be at the bottom of it all?… A love affair?… But, strangely enough, she was now still less able than before to picture to herself the answer to that question.

It was growing late, it was time for her to get ready for her departure…. So, then, she would be home again by Sunday evening.

She sat in the carriage; on her lap lay the flowers, which she had picked up from the floor…. Yes, she was now travelling home, leaving the town where she … had experienced something—that was the right expression, wasn't it?… Words which she had read or heard in connexion with similar circumstances kept recurring continually to her mind … such words as: "bliss" … "transports of love" … "ecstasy" … and a gentle thrill of pride stirred within her at having experienced what

those words denoted. And yet another thought came to her which caused her to grow singularly calm: if he also—maybe—had an affair with another woman at that very time … she had taken him from her … not for long indeed, but yet as completely as it was possible to take a man from a woman. She grew calmer and calmer, almost cheerful.

It was, indeed, clear to her that she, Bertha, the inexperienced woman, could not, with one assault, completely obtain possession of her beloved…. But might she not be successful on a second occasion, she wondered? She was very glad that she had not carried out her determination to hasten to him at once. Indeed, she even formed the intention of writing him such a cold letter that he would fall into a mild fit of anger; she would be coquettish, subtle…. But she must have him again … of that she was certain … soon, and, if possible, forever!… And so her dreams went on and on as the train carried her homewards…. Ever bolder they grew as the humming of the wheels grew deeper and deeper, lulling her into a semi-slumberous state.

On her arrival she found the little town buried in a deep sleep—she reached home and told the maidservant to fetch Fritz from her sister-in-law's the first thing in the morning. Then she slowly undressed herself. Her glance fell on the portrait of her dead husband, which hung over the bed. She asked herself whether it should remain in that position. Then the thought occurred to her that there are some women who come from their lovers and then are able to sleep by the side of their husbands, and she shuddered…. She could never have done such a thing while her husband had been alive!… And, if she had done it, she would never have returned home again….

## IX

The next morning Bertha was wakened by Fritz. He had jumped on to her bed and had breathed softly on her eyelids. Bertha sat up, embraced and kissed him, and he immediately began to tell her how well he had fared with his uncle and aunt, how

Elly had played with him, and how Richard had once had a fight with him without being able to beat him. On the previous day, too, he had learned to play the piano, and would soon be as clever at it as mamma.

Bertha was content just to listen to him.

"If only Emil could hear his sweet prattle now!" she thought.

She considered whether, on the next occasion, she should not take Fritz with her to Vienna to see Emil, by doing which she would at once remove anything of a suspicious nature in such a visit.

She thought only of the pleasant side of her experiences in Vienna, and of the letters which Emil had written to put her off scarcely anything remained in her memory, other than those words which had reference to a future meeting.

She got up in an almost cheerful frame of mind and, whilst she was dressing herself, she felt a quite new tenderness for her own body, which still seemed to her to be fragrant with the kisses of her beloved.

While the morning was yet young, she went to call on her relations. As she walked by the house of Herr Rupius she deliberated for a moment whether she should not go up and see him there and then. But she had a vague fear of being immediately involved again in the agitated atmosphere of the household, and she deferred the visit until the afternoon.

At her brother-in-law's house Elly was the first to meet her, and she welcomed her as boisterously as if Bertha had returned from a long journey. Her brother-in-law, who was on the point of going out, jestingly shook a threatening finger at Bertha and said:

"Well, have you had a good time?"

Bertha felt herself blushing crimson.

"Yes," he continued; "these are pretty stories that we hear about you!"

He did not, however, notice her embarrassment and, as he went out of the door, greeted her with a glance which plainly meant: "You can't keep your secrets from me."

"Father is always making jokes like that," said Elly. "I don't like him doing that at all!"

Bertha knew that her brother-in-law had only been talking at random, as his usual manner was, and that, if she had told him the truth, he would not have believed her for a moment.

Her sister-in-law came into the room, and Bertha had to relate all about her stay in Vienna.

To her own surprise she succeeded very well in cleverly blending truth with fiction. She told how she had been with her cousin to the public gardens and the picture gallery; on Sunday she had heard Mass at St. Stephen's Church; she had met in the street a teacher from the Conservatoire; and finally she even invented a funny married couple, whom she represented as having had supper one evening at her cousin's. The further she proceeded with her lies, the greater was her desire to tell all about Emil as well, and to inform them how she had met in the street the celebrated violinist Lindbach, who had formerly been with her at the Conservatoire, and how she had had a conversation with him. But a vague fear of not being able to stop at the right time caused her to refrain from making any reference to him.

Frau Albertine Garlan sat on the sofa in an attitude of profound lassitude, and nodded her head. Elly stood, as usual, by the piano, her head resting on her hands, and she gazed open-eyed at her aunt.

From her sister-in-law's Bertha went on to the Mahlmanns' and gave the twins their music lesson. The finger exercises and scales which she had to hear were at first intolerable to her, but finally she ceased to listen to them at all, and let her thoughts wander at will. The cheerful mood of the morning had vanished, Vienna seemed to

her to be infinitely distant, a strange feeling of disquietude came over her and suddenly the fear seized her that Emil might go away immediately after his concert. That would indeed be terrible! He might go away all of a sudden without her having seen him once more—and who could say when he would return?

She wondered whether it would not be well to arrange to be in Vienna in any case on the day of the concert. She had to admit to herself that she had not: the slightest longing to hear him play. Indeed, it seemed to her that she would not in the least mind if he was not a violin virtuoso at all, if he was not even an artist, but just an ordinary kind of man—a bookseller, or something like that! If she could only have him for herself, for herself alone!…

Meanwhile the twins played through their scales. It was surely a terrible doom to have to sit there and give these untalented brats music lessons. How was it that she had been in good spirits only just a little earlier that day?…

Ah, those beautiful days in Vienna! Quite irrespective of Emil—the entire freedom, the sauntering about the streets, the walks in the public gardens…. To be sure, she had spent more money during her stay than she could afford; two dozen lessons to the Mahlmann twins would not recoup her the outlay…. And now, here she had to come back again to her relations, to give music lessons, and really it might even be necessary to look about for fresh pupils, for her accounts would not balance at all that year!… Ah, what a life!…

In the street Bertha met Frau Martin, who asked her how she had enjoyed herself in Vienna. At the same time she threw Bertha a glance which clearly said:

"I'm quite sure you don't enjoy life so much as I do with my husband!"

Bertha had an overwhelming desire to shriek in that person's face:

"I have had a much better time than you think! I have been with an enchanting young man who is a thousand times more charming than your husband! And I understand how to enjoy life quite as well as you do! You have only a husband, but I

have a lover!—a lover!—a lover!"…

Yet, of course, she said nothing of the kind, but related how she had gone with her cousin and the children for a walk in the public gardens.

Bertha also met with some other ladies with whom she was superficially acquainted. She felt that her mental attitude towards those ladies had undergone a complete change since her visit to Vienna—that she was freer, superior. It seemed to her that she was the only woman in the town with any experience, and she was almost sorry that nobody knew anything about it, for although, publicly, they would have despised her, in their hearts all those women would have been filled with unutterable envy of her.

And if, after all, they had known who…. Although in that hole of a town there were certainly many who had not so much as heard Emil's name! If only there was some one in the world to whom she could open her heart! Frau Rupius—yes, there was Frau Rupius!… But, of course, she was in the habit of going away, of taking trips!… And, to tell the truth, thought Bertha, that was also a matter of indifference to her. She would only like to know how things would eventually turn out so far as she and Emil were concerned, she would like to know how matters actually stood. It was the uncertainty that was causing her that terrible uneasiness…. Had she only had a love affair with him, after all?… Ah, but why had she not gone to him once again?… But, of course, that was quite impossible!… That letter…. He didn't want to see her, that was it!… But then, on the other hand, he had sent her flowers….

And now she was back again with her relations. Richard was going to meet her and embrace her in his playful manner. She pushed him away.

"Impudent boy!" she thought to herself. "I know very well what he means by doing that, although he himself does not know. I understand these things—I have a lover in Vienna!…"

The music lesson took its course and, at the end of it, Elly and Richard played as a

duet Beethoven's [Footnote: Query—Brahms (translator's note).] "Festival Overture" which was intended by them to be a birthday surprise for their father.

Bertha thought only of Emil. She was nearly being driven out of her mind by this wretched strumming … no, it was not possible to live on like that, whichever way she looked at it!… She was still a young woman, too…. Yes, that was the secret of it all, the real secret…. She would not be able to live on like that any more…. And yet it would not do for her … any other man…. How could she ever think of such a thing!… What a very wicked person she must be, after all! Who could tell whether it had not been that trait in her character which Emil, with his great experience of life, had perceived in her, and which had been the cause of his being unwilling to see her any more?… Ah, those women surely had the best of it who took everything easily, and, when abandoned by one man, immediately turned to another…. But stay, whatever could it be that was putting such thoughts as these into her head? Had Emil, then, abandoned her?… In three or four days she would be in Vienna again; with him; in his arms!… And had she been able to live for three years as she had done?… Three?—Six years—her whole life!… If he only knew that, if he only believed that!

Her sister-in-law came into the room and invited Bertha to have supper with them that evening…. Yes, that was her only distraction: to go out to dinner or supper occasionally at some other house than her own!

If only there was a man in the town to whom she could talk!… And Frau Rupius was going off on her travels and leaving her husband…. Hadn't a love affair, maybe, something to do with that, Bertha wondered.

The music lesson came to an end and Bertha took her leave. In the presence of her sister-in-law, too, she noticed that she had that feeling of superiority, almost of compassion, which had come over her when she had seen the other ladies. Yes, she was certain that she would not give up that one hour with Emil for a whole life such

as her sister-in-law led. Moreover, as she thought to herself as she was walking homewards, she had not been able to arrive at a complete perception of her happiness, which, indeed, had all slipped by so quickly. And then that room, that whole house, that frightful picture…. No, no, it was all really hideous rather than anything else. After all, the only really beautiful moments had been those which had followed, when Emil had accompanied her to her hotel in the carriage, and her head had rested on his breast….

Ah, he loved her indeed; of course, not so deeply as she loved him; but how could that be possible? What a number of experiences he had had in his life! She thought of that now without any feeling of jealousy; rather, she felt a slight pity for him in having to carry so much in his memory. It was quite evident from his appearance that he was not a man who took life easily…. He was not of a cheerful disposition…. All the hours which she had spent with him seemed in her recollection as if encompassed by an incomprehensible melancholy. If she only knew all about him! He had told her so little about himself … nothing, indeed, absolutely nothing!… But how would that have been possible on the very first day that they had met again? Ah! if only he really knew her! If she were only not so shy, so incapable of expressing herself!

She would have to write to him again before seeing him…. Yes, she would write to him that very day. What a stupid concoction it was, that letter which she had sent him on the previous day! In truth, he could not have sent her any other answer than that which she had received. She would not write to him either defiantly or humbly…. No, after all, she was his beloved! She who, as she walked along the streets here in the little town, was regarded by every one who met her as one of themselves … she was the beloved of that magnificent man whom she had worshipped since her girlhood. How unreservedly and unaffectedly she had given herself to him—not one of all the women she knew would have done that!… Ah, and she would do still more! Oh, yes! She would even live with him without being

married to him, and she would be supremely indifferent to what people might say … she would even be proud of her action! And later on he would marry her, after all … of course he would. She was such a capable housekeeper, too…. And how much good it would be sure to do him, after the unsettled existence which he had been leading during the years of his wanderings, to live in a well-ordered house, with a good wife by his side, who had never loved any man but him.

And now she was home again. Before dinner was served she had made all her preparations for writing the letter. She ate her dinner with feverish impatience; she scarcely allowed herself time to cut up Fritz's dinner and give it to him. Then, instead of undressing him herself and putting him to bed for his afternoon sleep, as she was always accustomed to do, she told the maid to attend to him.

She sat down at the desk and the words flowed without effort from her pen, as though she had long ago composed in her head the whole letter.

"My EMIL, MY BELOVED, MY ALL!

"Since I have returned home again I have been possessed by an overwhelming desire to write to you, and I should like to say to you over and over again how happy, how infinitely happy, you have made me. I was angry with you at first when you wrote and said you could not see me on Sunday. I must confess that to you as well, for I feel that I am under the necessity of telling you everything that passes in my mind. Unfortunately, I could not do so while we were together; I had not the power of expressing myself, but now I can find the words and you must, I fear, put up with my boring you with this scribble. My dearest, my only one—yes, that you are, although it seems to me that you were not quite so certain of it as you ought to have been. I beseech you to believe that it is true. You see, I have no means, of course, wherewith to tell you this, other than these words, Emil, I have never, never loved any man, but you—and I will never love any other. Do with me as you will. I have no ties in the little town where I am living now—on the contrary, indeed, I often find

it a terrible thing to be obliged to live my life here. I will move to Vienna, so as to be near you. Oh, do not fear that I will disturb you! I am not alone, you see, I have my boy, whom I idolize. I will cut down my expenses, and, in the long run, why shouldn't I succeed in finding pupils even in a large town like Vienna just as I do here, perhaps, indeed, even more easily than here, and in that way improve my position? Yet that is a secondary consideration, for I may tell you that it has long been my intention to move to Vienna if only for the sake of my dearly loved boy, when he grows older.

"You cannot imagine how stupid the men are here! And I can no longer bear to look at any one of them at all, since I have again had the happiness of being in your company.

"Write to me, my dearest! Yet you need not trouble to send me a whole long letter. In any case I shall be coming to Vienna again this week. I would have had to do so in any event, because of some pressing commissions, and you will then be able to tell me everything—just what you think of my proposal, and what you consider best for me to do. But you must promise me this, that, when I live in Vienna, you will often visit me. Of course, no one need know anything about it, if you do not care that they should. But you may believe me—every day on which I may be allowed to see you will be a red-letter day for me and that, in all the world, there is nobody who loves you in such a true and life-long manner as I do.

"Farewell, my beloved!

"Your

"BERTHA."

She did not venture to read over what she had written, but left the house at once so as to take the letter herself to the railway station. There she saw Frau Rupius, a few paces in front of her, accompanied by a maid who was carrying a small valise.

What could that mean?

She caught up Frau Rupius, just as the latter was going into the waiting room. The maid laid the valise on the large table in the centre of the room, kissed her mistress's hand, and departed.

"Frau Rupius!" exclaimed Bertha, a note of inquiry in her voice.

"I heard that you had returned already. Well, how did you get on?" said Frau Rupius, extending her hand in a friendly way.

"Very well—very well indeed, but—"

"Why, you are gazing at me as though you were quite frightened! No, Frau Bertha, I am coming back again—no later than to-morrow. The long journey that I had in view came to nothing, so I have had to—settle on something else."

"Something else?"

"Why, of course, staying at home. I shall be back again to-morrow. Well, how did you get on?"

"I told you just now—very well."

"Yes, of course, you did tell me before. But I see you are going to post that letter, are you not?"

And then for the first time Bertha noticed that she was still holding the letter to Emil in her hand. She gazed at it with such enraptured eyes that Frau Rupius smiled.

"Perhaps you would like me to take it with me? It is to go to Vienna, I presume?"

"Yes," answered Bertha, and then she added resolutely, as though she was glad to be able to say it out at last: "to him."

Frau Ropius nodded her head, as if satisfied. But she neither looked at Bertha nor made any reply.

"I am so glad that I have met you again!" said Bertha. "You are the only woman here, you know, whom I trust; indeed, you are the only woman who could understand anything like this."

"Ah, no," said Frau Rupius to herself, as though she were dreaming.

"I do envy you so, because to-day in a few short hours you will see Vienna again. How fortunate you are!"

Frau Rupius had sat down in one of the leather armchairs by the table. She rested her chin on her hand, looked at Bertha, and said:

"It seems to me, on the other hand, that it is you who are fortunate."

"No, I must, you see, remain here."

"Why?" asked Frau Rupius. "You are free, you know. But go and put that letter into the box at once, or I shall see the address, and so learn more than you wish to tell me."

"I will, though not because of that—but I should be glad if the letter went by this train and not later."

Bertha hurried into the vestibule, posted the letter and at once returned to Anna, who was still sitting in the same quiet attitude.

"I might have told you everything, you know," Bertha went on to say; "indeed I might say that I wished to tell you before I actually went to Vienna … but—just fancy, isn't it strange? I did not venture to do so."

"Moreover at that time, too, there probably had not been anything to tell," said Frau Rupius, without looking at Bertha.

Bertha was amazed. How clever that woman was! She could see into everybody's thoughts!

"No, at that time there had not been anything to tell," she repeated, gazing at Frau Rupius with a kind of reverence. "Just think—you will probably find it hard to believe what I am going to tell you now, but I should feel a liar if I kept it secret."

"Well?"

Bertha had sat down on a seat beside Frau Rupius, and she spoke in a lower tone, for

the vestibule door was standing open.

"I wanted to tell you this, Anna: that I do not in the least feel that I have done anything wicked, not even anything immoral."

"It wouldn't be a very clever thing, either, if you had."

"Yes, you are quite right…. What I really meant to say was rather that it seems to me as though I had done something quite good, as if I had done something outstanding. Yes, Frau Rupius, the fact of the matter is, I have been proud of myself ever since."

"Well, there is probably no reason for that either," said Frau Rupius, as if lost in thought, stroking Bertha's hand, which lay upon the table.

"I am aware of that, of course, and yet I am so proud and seem quite different from all the women whom I know. You see if you knew … if you were acquainted with him—it is such a strange affair! You mustn't think, let me tell you, that it is an acquaintanceship which I have made recently—quite the contrary; I have been in love with him, you must know, ever since I was quite a young girl, no less than twelve years ago. For a long time we had completely lost sight of one another, and now—isn't it wonderful?—now he is my … my … my … lover!"

She had said it at last. Her whole face was radiant.

Frau Rupius threw her a glance in which could be detected a little scorn and a great deal of kindliness.

"I am glad that you are happy," she said.

"How very kind you are indeed! But then, you see, on the other hand again, it is a dreadful thing that we are so far apart from one another; he, in Vienna; I, here—I don't think I shall ever be able to endure that. Moreover, I have ceased to feel that I belong to this place, least of all to my relations. If they knew … no, if they knew! However, they would never be able to bring themselves to believe it. A woman like

my sister-in-law, for instance—well, I am perfectly certain that she could never imagine such a thing to be in any way possible."

"But you are really very ingenuous!" said Frau Rupius suddenly, almost with exasperation. Then she listened for a moment. "I thought I could hear the train whistling already."

She rose to her feet, walked over to the large glass door leading on to the platform, and looked out. A porter came and asked for the tickets in order to punch them.

"The train for Vienna is twenty minutes late," he remarked, at the same time.

Bertha had stood up and gone over to Frau Rupius.

"Why do you consider that I am ingenuous?" she asked shyly.

"But, indeed, you know absolutely nothing about men," replied Frau Rupius, as if she were annoyed. "You haven't, you know, the slightest idea among what kind of people you are living. I can assure you, you have no reason at all to be proud."

"I know, of course, that it is very stupid of me."

"Your sister-in-law—that is delightful!—your sister-in-law!"

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that she has had a lover too!"

"Whatever put such an idea as that into your head!"

"Well, she is not the only woman in this town."

"Yes, there are certainly women who … but, Albertine—"

"And do you know who it was? That is very amusing! It was Herr Klingemann!"

"No, that is impossible!"

"Of course, it is now a long time ago, about ten or eleven years."

"But at that time, by the way, you yourself had not come to live here, Frau Rupius!"

"Oh, I have heard it from the best source. It was Herr Klingemann himself who told

me about it."

"Herr Klingemann himself! But is it possible for a man to be so base as all that!"

"I don't think there's the least doubt about that," answered Frau Rupius, sitting down on a seat near the door, whilst Bertha remained standing beside her, listening in amazement to her friend's words. "Yes, Herr Klingemann himself…. As soon as I came to the town, you must know, he did me the honour of making violent love to me, neck or nothing, so to speak. You know yourself, of course, what a loathsome wretch he is. I laughed him to scorn, which probably exasperated him a great deal, and evidently he thought that he would be able conclusively to prove to me how irresistible he was by recounting all his conquests."

"But perhaps he told you some things which were not true."

"A great deal, probably; but this story, as it happens, is true…. Ah, what a rabble these men are!"

There was a note of the deepest hatred in Frau Rupius' voice. Bertha was quite frightened. She had never thought it possible that Frau Rupius could have said such things.

"Yes, why shouldn't you know what kind of men they are amongst whom you are living?" continued Frau Rupius.

"No, I would never have thought it possible! If my brother-in-law knew about it!—"

"If he knew about it? He knows about it as well as you or I do!"

"What do you say! No, no!"

"Indeed, he caught them together—you understand me! Herr Klingemann and Albertine! So that, however much inclined he might have been to make the best of things, there was no doubt possible!"

"But, for Heaven's sake—what did he do, then?"

"Well, as you can see for yourself, he has not turned her out!"

"Well, yes, the children … of course!"

"The children—pooh-pooh! He forgave her for the sake of convenience—and chiefly because he could do as he liked after that. You can see for yourself how he treats her. When all is said and done, she is but little better than his servant; you know as well as I do in what a miserable, brow-beaten way she slinks about. He has brought it to this, that, ever since that moment, she has always had to look upon herself as a woman who has been treated with mercy. And I believe she has even a perpetual fear that he is reserving the punishment for some future day. But it is stupid of her to be afraid of that, for he wouldn't look out for another housekeeper for anything…. Ah, my dear Frau Bertha, we are not by any means angels, as you know now from your own experiences, but men are infamous so long"—she seemed to hesitate to complete the phrase—"so long as they are men."

Bertha was as though crushed; not so much on account of the things which Frau Rupius had told her as on account of the manner in which she had done so. She seemed to have become a quite different woman, and Bertha was pained at heart.

The door leading to the platform was opened and the low, incessant tinkling of the telegraph was heard. Frau Rupius stood up slowly, her features assumed a mild expression, and, stretching out her hand to Bertha, she said:

"Forgive me, I was only a little bit vexed. Things can be also very nice; of course, there are certainly decent men in the world as well as others. Oh, yes, things can be very nice, no doubt."

She looked out on to the railway lines and seemed to be following the iron track into the distance. Then she went on to say with that same soft, harmonious voice which appealed so strongly to Bertha:

"I shalt be home again to-morrow evening…. Oh, yes, of course, my travelling case!"

She hurried to the table and took her valise.

"It would have been a terrible catastrophe if I had forgotten that! I cannot travel without my ten bottles! Well, good-bye! And don't forget, though, that all I have been telling you happened ten years ago."

The train came into the station. Frau Rupius hurried to a compartment, got in, and, looking out of the window, nodded affably to Bertha. The latter endeavoured to respond as cheerfully, but she felt that her wave of the hand to the departing Frau Rupius was stiff and forced.

Slowly she walked homewards again. In vain she sought to persuade herself that all that she had heard was not the least concern of hers; the long past affair of her sister-in-law, the mean conduct of her brother-in-law, the baseness of Klingemann, the strange whims of that incomprehensible Frau Rupius; all had nothing to do with her. She could not explain it to herself, but somehow, it seemed to her as though all these things were mysteriously related to her own adventure.

Suddenly the gnawing doubts appeared again…. Why hadn't Emil wanted to see her again? Not on the following day, or on the second or on the third day? How was it? He had attained his object, that was sufficient for him…. However had she been able to write him that mad, shameless letter?

And a thrill of fear arose within her…. If he were to show her letter to another woman, maybe … make merry over it with her…. No, how on earth could such an idea come into her head? It was ridiculous even to think of such a thing!… It was possible, of course, that he would not answer the letter and would throw it into the wastepaper basket—but nothing worse than that…. No…. However, she must just have patience, and in two or three days all would be decided. She could not say anything with certainty, but she felt that this unendurable confusion within her mind could not last much longer. The question would have to be settled, somehow.

Late in the afternoon she again went for a walk amongst the vine-trellises with Fritz, but she did not go into the cemetery. Then she walked slowly down the hill and

sauntered along under the chestnut trees. She chatted with Fritz, asked him about all sorts of things, listened to his stories and, as her frequent custom was, instilled some knowledge into his head on several subjects. She tried to explain to him how far the sun is distant from the earth, how the rain comes from the clouds, and how the bunches of grapes grow, from which wine is made. She was not annoyed, as often happened, if the boy did not pay proper attention to her, because she realized well enough that she was only talking for the sake of distracting her own thoughts.

Then she walked down the hill, under the chestnut trees, and so back to the town. Presently she saw Herr Klingemann approaching, but the fact made not the slightest impression upon her. He spoke to her with forced politeness; all the time he held his straw hat in his hand and affected a great and almost gloomy gravity. He seemed very changed, and she observed, too, that his clothes in reality were not at all elegant, but positively shabby. Suddenly she could not help picturing him tenderly embracing her sister-in-law, and she felt extremely disgusted.

Later on she sat down on a bench and watched Fritz playing with some other children, all the time making an effort to keep her attention fixed on him so that she would not have to think of anything else.

In the evening she went to her relatives. She had a sensation as though she had had a presentiment of everything long before, for otherwise how could she have failed to have been struck before this by the kind of relations which existed between her brother-in-law and his wife? The former again made jocular remarks about Bertha's visit to Vienna. He asked when she was going there again, and whether they would not soon be hearing of her engagement. Bertha entered into the joke, and told how at least a dozen men had proposed to her, amongst others, a Government official; but she felt that her lips alone were speaking and smiling, while her soul remained serious and silent.

Richard sat beside her, and his knee touched hers, by chance. And as he was pouring

out a glass of wine for her and she seized his hand to stop him, she felt a comforting glow steal up her arm as far as her shoulder. It made her feel happy. It seemed to her that she was being unfaithful to Emil. And that was quite as she wished; she wanted Emil to know that her senses were on the alert, that she was just the same as other women, and that she could accept the embraces of her nephew in just the same way as she did his…. Ah, yes, if he only knew it! That was what she ought to have written in her letter, not that humble, longing letter!…

But even while these thoughts were surging through her mind, she remained serious in the depths of her soul, and a feeling of solitude actually came over her, for she knew that no one could imagine what was taking place within her.

Afterwards, when she was walking homewards through the deserted streets, she met an officer whom she knew by sight. With him he had a pretty woman whom she had never seen before.

"Evidently a woman from Vienna!" she thought, for she knew that the officers often had such visitors.

She had a feeling of envy towards the woman; she wished that she was also being accompanied by a handsome young officer at that moment…. And why not?… After all, everybody was like that…. And now she herself had ceased to be a respectable woman. Emil, of course, did not believe that, any more than anybody else, and, anyhow, it was all just the same!

She reached home, undressed and went to bed. But the air was too sultry. She got up again, went to the window and opened it. Outside, all was dark. Perhaps somebody could see her standing there at the window, could see her skin gleaming through the darkness…. Indeed, she would not mind at all if anybody did see her like that!… Then she lay down on the bed again…. Ah, yes, she was no better than any of the others! And there was no good reason either why she should be….

Her thoughts grew indistinct…. Yes, he was the cause of it all, he had brought her to

this, he had just taken her like a woman of the street—and then cast her off!… Ah, it was shameful, shameful!—-how base men were! And yet … it was delightful….

She fell asleep.

## X

A warm rain was gently falling the next morning. Thus Bertha was able to endure her immense impatience more easily than if the sun had been blazing down. She felt as though during her sleep much had been smoothed out within her. In the soft grey of the morning everything seemed so simple and so utterly commonplace. On the morrow she would receive the letter she was expecting, and the present day was just like a hundred others.

She gave her pupils their music lessons. She was very strict with her nephew that day and rapped him on the knuckles when he played unbearably badly. He was a lazy pupil—that was all.

In the afternoon she was struck by an idea, which seemed to herself to be extremely praiseworthy. She had for a long time past intended to teach Fritz how to read, and she would make a start that very day. For a whole hour she slaved away, instilling a few letters into his head.

The rain still kept falling; it was a pity that she could not go for a walk. The afternoon would be long, very long. Surely she ought to go and see Herr Rupius without further delay. It was too bad of her that she had not called on him since her return from Vienna. It was quite possible that he would feel somewhat ashamed of himself in her presence, because just lately he had been using such big words, and now Anna was still with him, after all….

Bertha left the house. In spite of the rain, she walked, first of all, out into the open country. It was long since she had been so tranquil as she was that day; she rejoiced in the day without agitation, without fear, and without expectation. Oh, if it could be

always like that! She was astonished at the indifference with which she could think of Emil. She would be more than content if she should not hear another word from him, and could continue in her present state of tranquillity forever…. Yes, it was good and pleasant to be like that—to live in the little town, to give the few music lessons, which, after all, required no great effort, to educate her boy, to teach him to read, to write, and to count! Were her experiences of the last few days, she asked herself, worth so much anxiety—nay, so much humiliation? No, she was not intended for such things. It seemed as though the din of the great city, which had not disturbed her on her last visit, was now for the first time ringing in her ears, and she rejoiced in the beautiful calm which encompassed her in her present surroundings.

Thus the state of profound lassitude into which her soul had fallen after the unaccustomed agitations of the last few days appeared to Bertha as a state of tranquillity that would be final…. And yet, only a short time later, when she was wending her way back to the town, the internal quietude gradually disappeared, and vague forebodings of fresh agitations and sorrows awoke within her.

The sight of a young couple who passed her, pressed close to one another under an open umbrella, aroused in her a yearning for Emil. She did not resist it, for she already realized that everything within her was in such a state of upheaval that every breath brought some fresh and generally unexpected thing on to the surface of her soul.

It was growing dusk when Bertha entered Herr Rupius' room. He was sitting at the table, with a portfolio of pictures before him. The hanging lamp was lighted.

He looked up and returned her greeting.

"Let me see; you, of course, came back from Vienna on the evening of the day before yesterday," he said.

It sounded like a reproach, and Bertha had a sensation of guilt.

"Well, sit down," he continued; "and tell me what happened to you in Vienna."

"Nothing at all," answered Bertha. "I went to the Museum, and I have seen the originals of several of your pictures."

Herr Rupius made no reply.

"Your wife is coming back this very evening?"

"I believe not"—he was silent for a time, and then said, with intentional dryness: "I must ask your pardon for having told you recently things which I am sure could not possibly have been of any interest to you. For the rest, I do not think that my wife will return to-day."

"But…. She told me so herself, you know."

"Yes, she told me also. She simply wanted to spare me the farewell, or rather the comedy of farewell. By that I don't mean anything at all untruthful, but just the things which usually accompany farewells: touching words, tears…. However, enough of that. Will you be good enough to come and see me at times? I shall be rather lonely, you know, when my wife is no longer with me."

All this he said in a tone the sharpness of which was so little in keeping with the meaning of his words that Bertha sought in vain for a reply.

Rupius, however, continued at once:

"Well, and what else did you see besides the Museum?"

With great animation, Bertha began to tell all sorts of things about her visit to Vienna. She also mentioned that she had met an old friend of her schooldays, whom she had not seen for a long time. Strangely, too, the meeting had taken place exactly in front of the Falckenborg picture.

While she was speaking of Emil in this way without mentioning his name, her yearning for him increased until it seemed boundless, and she thought of writing to him again that day.

Then she noticed that Herr Rupius was keeping his gaze fixed intently on the door.

His wife had come into the room. She went up to him, smiling.

"Here I am, back again!" she said, kissing him on the forehead; and then she held out her hand to Bertha.

"Good evening, Frau Rupius," said Bertha, highly delighted.

Herr Rupius spoke not a word, but signs of violent agitation could be seen on his face. His wife, who had not yet taken off her hat, turned away for a moment, and then Bertha noticed how Herr Rupius had rested his face on both his hands, and had begun to sob inwardly.

Bertha left them. She was glad that Frau Rupius had returned; it seemed to be something in the nature of a good omen. By an early hour on the morrow she might receive the letter which would, perhaps, decide her fate. Her sense of restfulness had again completely vanished, but her being was filled with a different yearning from that which she had experienced before. She wished only to have Emil there, near her; she would have liked only to see him, to walk by his side.

In the evening, after she had put her little boy to bed, she stopped on for a long time alone in the dining-room; she went to the piano and played a few chords, then she walked over to the window and gazed out into the darkness. The rain had ceased, the earth was imbibing the moisture, the clouds were still hanging heavily over the landscape.

Bertha's whole being became imbued with yearning; everything within her called to him; her eyes sought to see him before her in the darkness; her lips breathed a kiss into the air, as though it could reach his lips; and, unconsciously, as if her wishes had to soar aloft, away from all else that surrounded her, she looked up to Heaven and whispered:

"Give him back to me!…"

Never had she been as at that moment. She had an impression that for the first time she now really loved him. Her love was free from all the elements which had

previously disturbed it; there was no fear, no care, no doubt. Everything within her was the purest tenderness, and now, when a faint breeze came blowing and stirring the hair on her forehead, she felt as though it was a breath from the lips of Emil.

The next morning came, but no letter. Bertha was a little disappointed, but not disquieted. Soon Elly, who had suddenly acquired a great liking for playing with Fritz, made her appearance. The servant, on returning from the market, brought the news that the doctor had been summoned in the greatest haste to Herr Rupius' house, though she did not know whether it was Herr Rupius or his wife who was ill. Bertha decided to go and inquire herself without waiting until after dinner.

She gave the Mahlmaan twins their music lesson, feeling very absent-minded and nervous all the time, and then went to Herr Rupius' house. The servant told her that her mistress was ill in bed, but that it was nothing dangerous, although Doctor Friedrich had strictly forbidden that any visitors should be admitted. Bertha was frightened. She would have liked to speak to Herr Rupius, but did not wish to appear importunate.

In the afternoon she made an attempt at continuing Fritz's education, but, do what she could, she met with no success. Again, she had the impression that her own hopes were influenced by Anna having been taken ill; if Anna had been well, it would have surely happened also that the letter would have arrived by that time. She knew that such an idea was utter nonsense, but she could not resist it.

Soon after five o'clock she again set out to call on Herr Rupius. The maid admitted her. Herr Rupius himself wanted to speak to her. He was sitting in his easy-chair by the table.

"Well?" asked Bertha.

"The doctor is with her just at this moment—if you will wait a few minutes …"

Bertha did not venture to ask any questions, and both remained silent. After a few seconds, Doctor Friedrich came out from the bedroom.

"Well, I cannot say anything definite yet," he said slowly; then, with a sudden resolution, he added: "Excuse me, Frau Garlan, but it is absolutely necessary for me to have a few words with Herr Rupius alone."

Herr Rupius winced.

"Then I won't disturb you," said Bertha mechanically, and she left them.

But she was so agitated that it was impossible for her to go home, and she walked along the pathway leading between the vine-trellises to the cemetery. She felt that something mysterious was happening in that house. The thought occurred to her that Anna might, perhaps, have made an attempt to commit suicide. If only she did not die, Bertha said to herself. And immediately the thought followed: if only a nice letter were to come from Emil!

She seemed to herself to be encompassed by nothing but dangers. She went into the cemetery. It was a beautiful, warm summer's day, and the flowers and blossoms were fragrant and fresh after the rain of the previous day. Bertha followed her accustomed path towards her husband's grave, but she felt that she had absolutely no object in going there. It was almost painful to her to read the words on the tombstone; they had no longer the least significance for her:

"Victor Mathias Garlan, died the 6th June, 1895."

It seemed to her, then, that any of her walks with Emil, which had happened ten years before, were nearer than the years she had spent by the side of her husband. Those years were as though they had not even existed … she would not have been able to believe in them if Fritz had not been alive…. Suddenly the idea passed through her mind that Fritz was not Garlan's son at all … perhaps he was really Emil's son…. Were not such things possible, after all?… And she felt at that moment that she could understand the doctrine of the Holy Ghost…. Then she was alarmed at the madness of her own thoughts.

She looked at the broad roadway, stretching straight from the cemetery gate to the

opposite wall, and all at once she knew, for a positive fact, that in a few days a coffin, with the corpse of Frau Rupius within it, would be borne along that road. She wanted to banish the idea, but the picture was there in full detail; the hearse was standing before the gate; the grave, which two men were digging yonder just at that moment, was destined for Frau Rupius; Herr Rupius was waiting by the open grave. He was sitting in his invalid chair, his plaid rug across his knees, and was staring at the coffin, which the black-garbed undertakers were slowly carrying along…. The vision was more than a mere presentiment; it was a precognition…. But whence had this idea come to her?

Then she heard people talking behind her. Two women walked past her—one was the widow of a lieutenant-colonel who had recently died, the other was her daughter. Both greeted Bertha and walked slowly on. Bertha thought that these two women would consider her a faithful widow who still grieved for her husband, and she seemed to herself to be an impostor, and she retired hastily.

Possibly there would be some news awaiting her at home, a telegram from Emil, perhaps—though that, indeed, would be nothing extraordinary … after all, the two things were closely connected…. She wondered whether Frau Rupius still thought of what Bertha had told her at the railway station, and whether, perhaps, she would speak of it in her delirium … however, that was a matter of indifference, indeed. The only matters of importance were that Emil should write and that Frau Rupius should get better…. She would have to call again and see Herr Rupius; he would be sure to tell her what the doctor had had to say…. And Bertha hastened homewards between the vine-trellises down the hill….

Nothing had arrived, no letter, no telegram…. Fritz had gone out with the maid. Ah, how lonely she was. She hurried to Herr Rupius' house once more, and the maid opened the door to her. Things were progressing very badly, Herr Rupius was unable to see anyone….

"But what is the matter with her? Don't you know what the doctor said?"

"An inflammation, so the doctor said."

"What kind of an inflammation?"

"Or it might even be blood poisoning, he said. A nurse from the hospital will be here immediately."

Bertha went away. On the square in front of the restaurant a few people were sitting, and one table, right in front, was occupied by some officers, as was usual at that time of the day.

They didn't know what was going on up yonder, thought Bertha, otherwise they wouldn't be sitting there and laughing…. Blood poisoning—well, what could that mean?… Obviously Frau Rupius had attempted to commit suicide!… But why?… Because she was unable to go away—or did not wish to?—but she wouldn't die—no, she must not die!

Bertha called on her relatives, so as to pass the time. Only her sister-in-law was at home; she already knew that Frau Rupius had been taken ill, but that did not affect her very much, and she soon began to talk of other things. Bertha could not endure it, and took her departure.

In the evening she tried to tell Fritz stories, then she read the paper, in which, amongst other things, she found another announcement of the concert at which Emil was to play. It struck her as very strange that the concert was still an event which was announced to take place, and not one long since over.

She was unable to go to bed without making one more inquiry at Herr Rupius' house. She met the nurse in the anteroom. It was the one Doctor Friedrich always sent to his private patients. She had a cheerful-looking face, and a comforting expression in her eyes.

"The doctor will be sure to pull Frau Rupius through," she said.

And, although Bertha knew that the nurse was always making such observations, she felt more reassured.

She walked home, went to bed, and fell quietly asleep.

## XI

The next morning Bertha was late in waking up. She was fresh after her good night's rest. A letter was lying beside the bed. And then, for the first time that morning, everything came back to her mind; Frau Rupius was very ill, and here was a letter from Emil. She seized it so hurriedly that she set the little candlestick shaking violently; she opened the envelope and read the letter.

"My DEAR BERTHA,

"Many thanks for your nice letter. I was very pleased to get it. But I must tell you that your idea of coming to live permanently in Vienna requires again to be carefully considered by you. Circumstances here are quite different from what you seem to imagine. Even the native, fully accredited musicians have the greatest difficulty in obtaining pupils at anything like decent fees, and for you it would be—at the beginning, at least—almost a matter of impossibility. Where you are now you have your assured income, your circle of relations and friends, your home; and, finally, it is the place where you lived with your husband, where your child was born, and so it is the place where you ought to be.

"And, apart from all these considerations, it would be a very foolish procedure on your part to plunge into the exhausting struggle for a livelihood in the city. I purposely refrain from saying anything about the part which your affection for me (you know I return it with all my heart) seems to play in your proposals; to bring that in would carry the whole question over to another domain, and we must not let that happen. I will accept no sacrifice from you, under any condition. I need not assure you that I would like to see you again, and soon, too, for there is nothing I

desire so much as to spend another such an hour with you as that which you recently gave me (and for which I am very grateful to you).

"So, then, arrange matters, my child, in such a way that, say, every four or six weeks you can come to Vienna for a day and a night. We will often be very happy again, I trust. I regret I cannot see you during the next few days, and, moreover, I start off on a tour immediately after the concert. I have to play in London during the season there, and after that I am going on to Scotland. So I look forward to the joyful prospect of meeting you again in the autumn.

"I greet you and kiss that sweet spot behind your ear, which I love best of all.

"Your

"EMIL."

When Bertha had read the letter to the end, for some little time she sat bolt upright in the bed. A shudder seemed to pass through her whole body. She was not surprised; she knew that she had expected no other kind of letter. She shook herself….

Every four or six weeks … excellent! Yes, for a day and a night…. It was shameful, shameful!… And how afraid he was that she might go to Vienna…. And then that observation right at the end, as if his object had been, while he was still at a safe distance, so to speak, to stimulate her senses, because that, forsooth, was the only kind of relations he desired to keep up with her…. It was shameful, shameful!… What sort of a woman had she been! She felt a loathing—loathing!…

She sprang out of bed and dressed herself…. Well, what was going to happen after that?… It was over, over, over! He had not time to spare for her—no time at all!… One night every, six weeks, after the autumn…. Yes, my dear sir, I at once accept your honourable proposals with pleasure. Indeed, for myself, I desire nothing better! I will go on turning sour; I will go on giving music lessons and growing imbecile in this hole of a town…. You will fiddle away, turn women's heads, travel, be rich, famous and happy—and every four or six weeks I may hope to be taken for one

night to some shabby room where you entertain your women of the street…. It was shameful, shameful, shameful!…

Quick! She would get ready to go to Frau Rupius—Anna was ill, seriously ill—what mattered anything else?

Before she went out, Bertha pressed Fritz to her heart, and she recalled the passage in Emil's letter: it is the place where your child was born…. Indeed, that was quite right, too; but Emil had not said that because it was true, but only to avoid the danger of having to see her more than once in six weeks.

She hurried off…. How was it, then, that she did not feel any nervousness on Frau Rupius' account?… Ah, of course, she had known that Frau Rupius had been better the previous evening. But where was the letter, though?… She had again thrust it quite mechanically into her bodice.

Some officers were sitting in front of the restaurant having breakfast. They were all covered with dust, having just returned from the manoeuvres. One of them gazed after Bertha. He was a very young man, and could only have obtained his commission quite recently….

Pray, don't be afraid, thought Bertha. I am altogether at your disposal. I have an engagement which takes me into Vienna only once every four or six weeks … please, tell me when you would like …

The balcony door was open, the red velvet piano cover was hanging over the balustrade. Well, evidently order had been restored again—otherwise, would the cover have been hanging over the balustrade?… Of course not, so forward then, and upstairs without fear….

The maid opened the door. There was no need for Bertha to ask her any questions; in her wide-open eyes there was an expression of terrified amazement, such as is only called forth by the proximity of an appalling death.

Bertha went in. She entered the drawing-room first; the door leading to the bedroom

was open to its full extent. The bed was standing in the middle of the room, away from the wall, and free on all sides. At the foot was sitting the nurse, looking very tired, with her head sunk upon her breast, Herr Rupius was sitting in his invalid's chair by the head of the bed. The room was so dark that it was not until Bertha had come quite close that she could see Anna's face clearly. Frau Rupius seemed to be asleep. Bertha came nearer. She could hear the patient's breathing; it was regular, but inconceivably rapid—she had never heard a human being breathe like that before. Then Bertha felt that the eyes of the two others were fixed upon her. Her surprise at having been admitted in this unceremonious manner lasted only for a moment, since she understood that all precautionary measures had now become superfluous; the matter had been decided.

Suddenly another pair of eyes turned towards Bertha. Frau Rupius opened her eyes, and was watching her friend attentively. The nurse made room for Bertha, and went into the adjoining room. Bertha sat down, moving her chair closer to the bed. She noticed that Anna was slowly stretching out her hand towards her. She grasped it.

"Dear Frau Rupius," she said, "you are already getting on much better now, are you not?"

She felt that she was again saying something awkward, but she knew she could not help doing so. It was just her fate to say such things in the presence of Frau Rupius, even in her last hour.

Anna smiled; she looked as pale and young as a girl.

"Thank you, dear Bertha," she said.

"But whatever for, my dear, dear Anna?"

She had the greatest difficulty in restraining her tears. At the same time, however, she was very curious to hear what had actually happened.

A long interval of silence ensued. Anna closed her eyes again and appeared to sleep. Herr Rupius sat motionless in his chair. Bertha looked sometimes at Anna and

sometimes at him.

In any case, she must wait, she thought. She wondered what Emil would say if she were suddenly to die. Ah, surely it would cause him some slight grief if he had to think that she whom he had held in his arms a few days before now lay mouldering in the grave. He might even weep. Yes, he would weep if she were to die … wretched egoist though he was at other times….

Ah, but where were her thoughts flying to again? Wasn't she still holding her friend's hand in her own? Oh, if she could only save her!… Who was now in the worse plight—this woman who was doomed to die, or Bertha herself—who had been so ignominiously deceived? Was it necessary, though, to put it so strongly as that, because of one night?… Ah, but that had much too fine a sound!… for the sake of one hour—to humiliate her so—to ruin her so—was not that unscrupulous and shameless?… How she hated him! How she hated him!… If only he were to break down at the next concert, so that all the people would laugh him to scorn, and he would be put to shame, and all the papers would have the news—"The career of Herr Emil Lindbach is absolutely ended." And all his women would say: "Ah, I don't like that a bit, a fiddler who breaks down!"…

Yes, then he would probably remember her, the only woman who had loved him since the days of her girlhood, who loved him truly … and whom he was now treating so basely!… Then he would be sure to come back to her and beg her to forgive him—and she would say to him: "Do you see, Emil; do you see, Emil?"… for, naturally, anything more intelligent than that would not occur to her….

And there she was thinking again of him, always of him—and here somebody was dying, and she was sitting by the bed, and that silent person there was the husband…. It was all so quiet; only from the street, as though wafted up over the balcony and through the open door, came a confused murmur—men's voices, the rumble of the traffic, the jingle of a cyclist's bell, the clattering of a sabre on the

pavement, and, now and then, the twitter of the birds—but it all seemed so far away, so utterly unconnected with actuality.

Anna became restless and tossed her head to and fro—several times, quickly, quicker and quicker….

"Now it's beginning!" said a soft voice behind Bertha.

She turned round. It was the nurse with the cheerful features; but Bertha now perceived that that expression did not denote cheerfulness at all, but was only the result of a strained effort never to allow sorrow to be noticeable, and she considered the face to be indescribably fearful…. What was it the nurse had said?… "Now it's beginning."… Yes, like a concert or a play … and Bertha remembered that once the same words had been spoken beside her own bed, at the time when she began to feel the pangs of childbirth….

Suddenly Anna opened her eyes, opened them very wide, so that they appeared immense; she fixed them on her husband, and, vainly striving, meanwhile, to raise herself up, said in a quite clear voice:

"It was only you, only you … believe me, it was only you whom I have…"

The last word was unintelligible, but Bertha guessed it.

Then Herr Rupius bent down, and kissed the dying woman on the forehead. Anna threw her arms around him; his lips lingered long on her eyes.

The nurse had gone out of the room again. Suddenly Anna pushed her husband away from her; she no longer recognized him; delirium had set in.

Bertha rose to her feet in great alarm, but she remained standing by the bed.

"Go now!" said Herr Rupius to her.

She lingered.

"Go!" he repeated, this time in a stern voice.

Bertha realized that she must go. She left the room quietly on tip-toes, as though

Anna might still be disturbed by the sound of footsteps. Just as she entered the adjoining room she saw Doctor Friedrich, who was taking off his overcoat and, at the same time, was talking to a young doctor, the assistant at the hospital.

He did not notice Bertha, and she heard him say:

"In any other case I would have notified the authorities, but, as this affair falls out as it does…. Besides, there would be a terrible scandal, and poor Rupius would be the worst sufferer—" then he saw Bertha—"Good day, Frau Garlan."

"Oh, doctor, what is really the matter, then?"

Doctor Friedrich threw his colleague a rapid glance.

"Blood poisoning," he replied. "You are, of course, aware, my dear Frau Garlan, that people often cut their fingers and die as a result; the wound cannot always he located. It is a great misfortune…. Yes, indeed!"

He went into the room, followed by the assistant.

Bertha went into the street like one stupified. What could be the meaning of the words which she had overheard—"information?"—"scandal?" Yes, had Herr Rupius, perhaps, murdered his own wife?… No, what nonsense! But some injury had been done to her, it was quite obvious … and it must have been, in some way, connected with the visit to Vienna; for she had been taken ill during the night subsequent to her journey…. And the words of the dying woman recurred to Bertha: "It was only you, only you whom I have loved!…" Had they not sounded like a prayer for forgiveness? "Loved only you"—but … another … of course, she had a lover in Vienna…. Well, yes, but what followed?… Yes, she had wished to go away, and had not done so after all…. What could it have been that she said on that occasion at the railway station?… "I have made up my mind to do something else."… Yes, of course, she had taken leave of her lover in Vienna, and, on her return—had poisoned herself?… But why should she do that, though, if she loved only her husband?… And that was not a lie, certainly not!

Bertha could not understand….

Why ever had she gone away, then?… What should she do now, too?… She could not rest. She could neither go home nor to her relatives, she must go back again…. She wondered, too, whether Anna would have to die if another letter from Emil came that day?… In truth, she was losing her reason…. Of course, these two things had not the least connection between them … and yet … why was she unable to dissociate them one from the other?…

Once more she hurried up the steps. Not a quarter of an hour had elapsed since she had left the house. The hall door was open, the nurse was in the anteroom.

"It is all over," she said.

Bertha went on. Herr Rupius was sitting by the table, all alone; the door leading to the death-chamber was closed. He made Bertha come quite close to him, then he seized the hand which she stretched out to him.

"Why, why did she do it?" he said. "Why did she do that?"

Bertha was silent.

"It wasn't necessary," continued Herr Rupius, "Heaven knows, it wasn't necessary. What difference could the other men make to me—tell me that?"

Bertha nodded.

"The main point is to live—yes, that is it! Why did she do that?"

It sounded like a suppressed wail, although he seemed to be speaking very quietly. Bertha burst into tears.

"No, it wasn't necessary! I would have brought it up—brought it up as my own child!"

Bertha looked up sharply. All at once she understood everything, and a terrible fear ran through her whole being. She thought of herself. If in that night she also … in that one hour?… So great was her terror that she believed that she must be losing her

reason. What had hitherto been scarcely more than a vague possibility floating through her mind now loomed suddenly before her, an indisputable certainty. It could not possibly be otherwise, the death of Anna was an omen, the pointing of the finger of God.

At the same time there arose within her mind the recollection of the day, twelve years ago, when she had been walking with Emil on the bank of the Wien, and he had kissed her and for the first time she had felt an ardent yearning for a child. How was it that she had not experienced the same yearning when, recently, she felt his arms about her?… Yes, she knew now; she had desired nothing more than the pleasures of the moment; she had been no better than a woman of the streets. It would be only the just punishment of Heaven if she also perished in her shame, like the poor woman lying in the next room.

"I would like to see her once more," she said.

Rupius pointed towards the door. Bertha opened it, went up slowly to the bed on which lay the body of the dead woman, gazed upon her friend for a long time, and kissed her on both eyes. Then a sense of unequalled restfulness stole over her. She would have liked to have remained beside the corpse for hours together, for, in proximity to it, her own sorrow and disappointment became as nothing to her. She knelt down by the bed and clasped her hands, but she did not pray.

All at once everything danced before her eyes. Suddenly a well-known attack of weakness came over her, a dizziness which passed off immediately. At first she trembled slightly, but then she drew a deep breath, as one who has been rescued, because, indeed, with the approach of that lassitude, she felt at the same time that, at that moment, not only her previous apprehensions, but all the illusion of that confused day, the last tremors of the desires of womanhood, everything which she had considered to be love, had begun to merge and to fade away into nothingness. And kneeling by the death-bed, she realized that she was not one of those women

who are gifted with a cheerful temperament and can quaff the joys of life without trepidation. She thought with disgust of that hour of pleasure that had been granted her, and, in comparison with the purity of that yearning kiss, the recollection of which had beautified her whole existence, the shameless joys which she then had tasted seemed to her like an immense falsehood.

The relations which had existed between the paralysed man in the room beyond and this woman, who had had to die for her deceit, seemed now to be spread out before her with wonderful clearness. And, while she gazed upon the pallid brow of the dead woman she could not help thinking of the unknown man, on account of whom Anna had had to die, and who, exempt from punishment, and, perhaps, remorseless, too, dared to go about in a great town and to live on, like any other—no, like thousands and thousands of others who had stared at her with covetous, indecent glances. Bertha divined what an enormous wrong had been wrought against the world in that the longing for pleasure is placed in woman just as in man: and that with women that longing is a sin, demanding expiation, if the yearning for pleasure is not at the same time a yearning for motherhood.

She rose, threw a last farewell glance at her dearly loved friend, and left the death-chamber.

Herr Rupius was sitting in the adjoining room, exactly as she had left him. She was seized with a profound desire to speak some words of consolation to him. For a moment it seemed to her as though her own destiny had only had this one purpose: to enable her fully to understand the misery of that man. She would have liked to have been able to tell him so, but she felt that he was one of those who desire to be alone with their sorrow. And so, without speaking, she sat down opposite to him.

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