VICTORIA

Knut Hamsun



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KNUT HAMSUN

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I

The Miller's son walked in thought. He was a big lad of fourteen, tanned by sun and wind and full of all manner of ideas.

When he grew up he would go to work in a match factory. It was so jolly and dangerous; he might get his fingers covered with sulphur so that nobody would dare shake hands with him. He would be thought a lot of by his chums on account of his lurid trade.

He looked about in the wood for his birds. For he knew them all, knew where their nests were, understood their cries and had different calls to answer them. More than once he had given them dough balls made of flour from his father's mill.

All these trees along the path were good friends of his. In spring he had drawn their sap and in winter had been a little father to them, freeing them of snow and helping them to hold up their boughs. And even up in the abandoned granite quarry there wasn't a stone that was a stranger to him, he had cut letters and signs on them and set them up, arranged them like a congregation around their parson. All kinds of strange things happened in that old granite quarry.

He turned off and came down to the mill-dam. The mill was at work; an immense and ponderous noise surrounded him. He was in the habit of wandering about here, talking to himself aloud. Every bead of foam seemed to have a little life to talk about, and over by the sluice the water fell straight down and looked like a shining sheet of stuff hung out to dry. In the pool below the fall there were fish; he had stood there with his rod many a time.

When he grew up he would be a diver. That was it. Then he would step down into the sea from the deck of a ship and enter strange realms and

countries where great and wonderful forests stood swaying and a castle of coral lay at the bottom. And the Princess beckoned to him from a window and said "Come in!"

Then he heard his name called; his father stood behind him and shouted "Johannes!"

"There's a message for you from the Castle. You're to row the children over to the island!"

He went off in a hurry. A new favour and a great one had been vouchsafed to the Miller's son.

"The Mansion" looked like a little castle in the green landscape, indeed it was like a stupendous palace in its solitude. The house was built of wood and painted white, with many bow-windows in its walls and roof, and a flag flew on the round tower when there were visitors. People called it the Castle. And outside its grounds lay the bay to one side, and to the other the great forests; far away some little farms were to be seen.

Johannes appeared at the landing-stage and got the young people into the boat. He knew them of old; they were the children of the "Castle" and their friends from town. They all had on high boots for wading; but Victoria, who only had little shoes on and besides was not more than ten, she had to be carried ashore when they reached the island.

"Shall I carry you?" asked Johannes.

"Let me!" said Otto, the gentleman from town, a man nearly old enough to leave school, and he took her in his arms.

Johannes stood and watched her being carried high up on land and heard her thanks. Then Otto looked back:

"Well, you'll look after the boat—what was his name?"

"Johannes," answered Victoria. "Yes, he'll look after the boat."

He was left behind. The others went off into the island, carrying baskets for collecting eggs. He stood pondering for a while; he would have liked to go with the others and they could have dragged the boat ashore for the mat-

ter of that. Too heavy? It wasn't too heavy. And he laid his fist on the boat and hauled it up a little way.

He heard the laughter and chatter of the young party growing fainter. All right, good-bye for the present. But they might have taken him with them. He knew of nests that he could have taken them to, wonderful hidden holes in the rock, where lived birds of prey with tufts on their beaks. And once he had seen a stoat.

He shoved the boat off and started to row round to the other side of the island. He had rowed a good way when they shouted to him:

"Row back. You're scaring the birds."

"I only wanted to show you where the stoat lives?" he answered tentatively. He waited a moment. "And then we could smoke out the snakes' nest? I've got some matches."

He got no answer. Then he turned the boat and rowed back to the landing-place. He drew the boat up.

When he grew up he would buy an island of the Sultan and forbid any one to approach it. A gunboat should guard his shores. Your Lordship, the slaves would come and tell him, there's a boat aground on the reef; she has struck, the young people in her will perish. Let them perish! he answers. Your Lordship, they are calling for help; we can save them yet and there is a woman in white among them. Save them! he commands in a voice of thunder. Then he meets the children of the Castle again after many years and Victoria throws herself at his feet and thanks him for her rescue. Nothing to thank me for, it was but my duty, he answers; go freely where you will within my domains. And then he has the gates of the palace thrown open to the company and feasts them on golden dishes and three hundred brown slave girls sing and dance the whole night long. But when it is time for the children of the Castle to leave, Victoria cannot go. She throws herself in the dust before him and sobs because she loves him. Let me stay here, thrust me not away, Your Lordship, let me be one of your slaves....

He began to walk quickly across the island, thrilled through with emotion. Very well, he would rescue the Castle children. Who knows, perhaps they had lost their way? Perhaps Victoria had got stuck between two rocks

and could not get out? He would only have to reach out his arm to set her free.

But the children looked at him in astonishment when he came. Had he left the boat?

"I hold you responsible for the boat," said Otto.

"I could show you where there are some wild raspberries?" suggested Johannes.

Silence among the party. Victoria came to the rescue.

"No? Where are they?"

But the gentleman from town put temptation aside and said:

"We can't bother about that now."

Johannes said:

"I know where we can find mussels, too."

Silence again.

"Are there pearls in them?" asked Otto.

"Fancy, if there were!" said Victoria.

Johannes replied, No, he didn't know about that; but the mussels were a long way out on the white sand; they would have to have the boat and dive for them.

That finished that idea, and Otto remarked:

"Yes, you look like a diver, don't you?"

Johannes began to breathe heavily.

"If you like I can go up the rocks there and roll a big stone down into the sea," he said.

"What for?"

"Oh nothing. But you could watch it."

But that proposal was not accepted either and Johannes held his tongue and felt ashamed. Then he went off to look for eggs a long way from the

others, in another part of the island.

When the whole party came together again down by the boat Johannes had many more eggs than the rest; he carried them carefully in his cap.

"How is it that you found so many?" asked Otto.

"I know where the nests are," answered Johannes, feeling happy. "Now I'll put them with yours, Victoria."

"Stop!" cried Otto. "What are you doing that for?"

Everybody looked at him. Otto pointed to his cap and said:

"How am I to know that that cap is clean?"

Johannes said nothing. His happiness came to an abrupt end. Then he began walking up the island again, taking the eggs with him.

"What's the matter with him? Where's he going?" said Otto impatiently.

"Where are you going, Johannes?" cried Victoria running after him.

He stopped and answered quietly:

"I'm going to put the eggs back in the nests."

They stood for a moment looking at each other.

"And then I'm going up to the quarry this afternoon," he said.

She made no answer.

"Then I could show you the cave."

"Oh, but I'm so frightened," she answered. "You said it was so dark."

Then Johannes smiled in spite of his great sorrow and said courageously:

"Yes, but I shall be with you."

All his life he had played in the old granite quarry. People had heard him working and holding forth up there though he was all alone; sometimes he had been a parson and had held a service.

The place had been abandoned long ago, moss grew on the stones and the marks of boring and blasting were almost obliterated. But the Miller's son had cleared the inside of the secret cave and decked it out most ingeniously, and there he dwelt, chief of the world's bravest robber band.

He rings a silver bell. A little manikin, a dwarf with a diamond clasp in his cap, hops in. This is his servant. He bows to the dust. When Princess Victoria comes, bring her in! says Johannes in a loud voice. The dwarf bows to the dust again and vanishes. Johannes stretches himself comfortably on the soft divan and thinks. There he would lead her to a seat and offer her costly dishes of gold and silver plate; a blazing fire should light up the cave; behind the heavy curtain of gold brocade at the back of the cave her couch should be prepared and twelve knights should stand on guard....

Johannes got up, crept out of the cave and listened. There was a rustling of twigs and leaves on the path.

"Victoria!" he called.

"Yes," came the answer.

He went to meet her.

"I hardly dare," she said.

He swayed his shoulders and answered:

"I've just been in there. I've only just come out."

They went into the cave. He showed her to a seat on a stone and said:

"That's the stone the giant was sitting on."

"Ugh, stop, don't tell me! Weren't you frightened?"

"No."

"Well, but you said he only had one eye; then he must have been a troll."

Johannes thought a moment.

"He had two eyes, but he was blind of one. He said so himself."

"What else did he say? No, don't tell me!"

"He asked if I would serve him."

"Oh, but you wouldn't, would you? How awful!"

"Well I didn't say no. Not right out."

"Are you mad? Do you want to be shut up inside the mountain?"

"Well, I don't know. Things are pretty bad on earth too."

Pause.

"Since these town boys came you spend all your time with them," he said.

Another pause.

Johannes went on:

"But I have more strength to lift you out of the boat and carry you than any of them. I'm sure I'm strong enough to hold you up a whole hour. Look here."

He took her in his arms and lifted her up. She held on to his neck.

"There, now you mustn't hold me any longer."

He put her down. She said:

"Yes, but Otto is strong too. And he has fought grown-up men too."

Johannes asked doubtfully:

"Grown-up men?"

"Yes, he has. In town."

Pause. Johannes was thinking.

"Very well, that's the end of that," he said. "I know what I shall do."

"What will you do?"

"I shall take service with the giant."

"Oh, but you're mad, do you hear!" screamed Victoria.

"Oh well, it's all the same to me. I shall do it."

Victoria was thinking of a way out.

"Yes, but perhaps he won't come back again?"

Johannes answered:

"He'll come."

"Here?" she asked quickly.

"Yes."

Victoria got up and made for the entrance.

"Come along, we'd better go out again."

"There's no hurry," said Johannes, who had turned pale himself. "He won't come before tonight. At the hour of midnight."

Victoria felt reassured and was going to sit down again. But Johannes didn't find it easy to lay the uncanny feeling he had himself called up, the cave was getting too dangerous for him and he said:

"If you really want to go out again I have a stone out there with your name on it. I'll show it you."

They crept out of the cave and found the stone. Victoria was proud of it and happy. Johannes was touched, he could have cried, and he said:

"When you look at it you must think of me sometimes when I am gone. Give me a kind thought."

"Of course," answered Victoria. "But you'll come back, won't you?"

"Oh, goodness knows. No, I don't suppose I shall."

They began to walk homewards. Johannes was near to tears.

"Well, good-bye," said Victoria.

"No, I can go with you a little farther."

But her heartlessness in being so ready to bid him good-bye had made him bitter, stirred up the wrath in his wounded heart. He stopped abruptly and said with righteous indignation: "But I'll tell you this, Victoria, you won't get anybody who would have been so kind to you as I should. That's all I've got to say."

"Well, but Otto is kind too," she objected.

"All right, take him."

They went a few paces in silence.

"I shall have a splendid time. Don't be afraid about that. You don't even know what my reward's going to be."

"No. What is it going to be?"

"Half of the kingdom. That was the first thing."

"Fancy, are you going to have that?"

"And then I'm to get the Princess."

Victoria stopped still.

"That's not true, is it?"

"Yes, it is," he said.

Pause. Victoria remarked absently:

"I wonder what she looks like?"

"Oh, bless you, she's prettier than any one on earth. And that we knew before."

Victoria was conquered.

"Will you take her then?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, "that's what it will come to." But as Victoria was really moved he added: "But maybe I'll come back some time. I might come up to earth for a trip again."

"Well, but don't bring her with you then," she begged. "Why should you bring her with you?"

"No, I could come by myself, I dare say."

"Will you promise me that?"

"Oh yes, I can promise that. But what does it matter to you? I can't expect you to care."

"You mustn't say that, do you hear?" answered Victoria. "I'm certain she isn't so fond of you as I am."

A glow of rapture thrilled his young heart. He could have sunk into the earth from joy and bashfulness at her words. He dared not look at her, he looked away. Then he picked up a stick off the ground, scraped off its bark and hit himself on the hand with it. At last he began to whistle in his embarrassment.

"Well, I shall have to be going home," he said.

"Good-bye then," she answered and gave him her hand.

II

The Miller's son went away. He stayed away a long time, went to school and learned a great deal, grew up, big and strong, and got down on his upper lip. It was so far to town, the journey there and back cost so much, that the thrifty Miller kept his son in town summer and winter for many years. He studied all the time.

But now he was grown into a man; he was eighteen or twenty.

Then one afternoon in spring he landed from the steamer. The flag was flying at the Castle in honour of the son who had also come home for his holidays by the same boat; a carriage had been sent down to the pier to fetch him. Johannes bowed to the Master and Mistress of the Castle and Victoria. How big and tall Victoria had grown! She did not return his greeting.

He took off his cap again and heard her ask her brother:

"Look, Ditlef, who's that bowing?"

Her brother answered:

"That's Johannes. Johannes Miller."

She darted her eyes at him again; but he was too bashful to bow any more. Then the carriage drove off.

Johannes took himself home.

Dear me, what a funny little place it was! He could hardly get into the door without stooping. His parents brought out wine for the occasion. His feelings gripped him, it was all so dear and so touching, his father and mother so good and so grey, they gave him their hands in turn and welcomed him home again.

The very same evening he walked round and looked at everything, the mill, the quarry and the place where he used to fish, listened with a touch of sadness to the birds he knew which were already building their nests in the trees, and took a turn round by the big anthill in the woods. The ants were gone, the hill was deserted. He dug into it, there was not a sign of life. As he wandered about he noticed that a lot of trees had been cut down in the Castle woods.

"Do you recognize the place again?" his father asked jokingly. "Have you found your old thrushes?"

"I find some changes. There's been some felling."

"It's the Master's wood," his father answered. "It's not for us to count his trees. Anybody may be in want of money; the Master wants a deal of money."

The days came and went, mild, lovely days, wonderful hours of solitude, with gentle memories of childhood, the call of earth and sky, of air and hills.

He walked along the road to the Castle. He had been stung by a wasp that morning and his upper lip was swollen; if he met any one he would just bow and pass on. He met nobody. In the Castle garden he saw a lady; when he came nearer he bowed deeply and passed on. It was the Lady of the house. His heart still beat as of old when he went past the Castle. Respect

for the big house, the many windows, the Master's severe and dignified person was still in his blood.

He took the road to the pier.

Then suddenly he met Ditlef and Victoria. Johannes felt uncomfortable; they might think he had gone to look for them. Besides, he had a swollen upper lip. He reduced his pace, uncertain whether to go on. He went on. While still a long way off he took off his cap and carried it in his hand as he passed. They both acknowledged his greeting in silence and walked slowly past. Victoria looked straight at him; her face changed a little.

Johannes went on down to the quay; a restlessness had taken hold of him, his steps became nervous. Why, what a big girl Victoria was now, quite grown up, lovelier than ever. Her eye-brows nearly met above her nose, they were like two fine velvet strokes. Her eyes had got darker, very dark blue.

On his way home he struck into a path which led through the wood, avoiding the Castle garden. Nobody should say that he dogged the steps of the Castle children. He came up a hill, found a stone and sat down. The birds kept up a wild and passionate music, calling and chasing each other, and flew with twigs in their beaks. A sweet smell of mould, of bursting buds and decaying trees filled the air.

He had strayed into Victoria's path, she was coming straight towards him from the opposite direction.

A helpless feeling of annoyance seized him, he wished himself far, far away; of course she must think this time that he had followed her. Should he greet her again? He might perhaps look another way; besides, he had this wasp sting.

But when she came near enough he got up and took his cap off. She smiled and nodded.

"Good evening. Welcome back," she said.

Again her lips seemed to quiver a little; but she recovered herself at once.

He said:

"It looks rather funny, Victoria; but I didn't know you were here."

"Naturally you didn't," she replied. "It was just a whim of mine; I thought I would walk round here."

Whew! he'd been too familiar.

"How long are you going to stay at home?" she asked.

"Till the holidays are over."

It was hard work answering her, she seemed all of a sudden to have gone so far away. Then why had she spoken to him?

"Ditlef says you're so clever, Johannes. You always come out top. And he says you write poetry too; is that true?"

He answered curtly with a squirm:

"Yes, of course. Everybody does."

Now, he thought, she wouldn't stay much longer, for she said nothing more.

"Did you ever see anything like it, I was stung by a wasp this morning," he said, showing his mouth. "That's why I look like this."

"Then you've been away too long, the wasps don't recognize you."

It made no difference to her whether he had been disfigured by a wasp or not. All right. She stood there twirling a red gold-mounted parasol on her shoulder and nothing else mattered to her. And yet he had carried her ladyship in his arms more than once.

"I don't recognize the wasps," he answered; "they used to be friends of mine."

But she didn't see the deep meaning in his words; she didn't answer. Oh, but it was so deep.

"I don't recognize anything here now. Even the woods have been cut down."

A little twitch passed over her face.

"Then perhaps you can't write poetry here," she answered. "Fancy if you would write me a poem some day. No, what am I talking about! That shows you how little I know about it."

He looked at the ground, stung and silent. She was making a fool of him in the friendliest way, she talked patronizingly and watched him for the effect. Begging her pardon, he hadn't wasted all his time in writing, he had studied more than most....

"Well, we shall meet another time. Good-bye for the present."

He took off his cap and went without making a reply.

If she only knew it, it was to her and no one else he had written his poems, every one of them, even the one to Night, even the one to the Spirit of the Mere. She should never find that out.

On Sunday Ditlef called and wanted him to come over to the island. I'm to be boatman again, he thought. He went. There was a group of Sunday idlers on the pier, otherwise all was quiet and the sun was bright and warm. Suddenly a distant sound of music came from over the water, from the islands outside; the mail-boat swung in towards the pier in a great curve; there was a band on board.

Johannes cast off the boat and took the oars. He was in a yielding, pliant mood, this bright day and the music from the ship were weaving a tissue of flowers and golden grain before his eyes....

Why didn't Ditlef come? He was standing on shore looking at the people and the ship as if he didn't mean to go any farther. Johannes thought: I'm not going to sit holding these oars any longer, I'm going ashore. He began to turn the boat.

Then he suddenly saw a gleam of white and heard a splash; a desperate cry of many voices rose from the ship and from people ashore and hands and eyes all pointed to the place where the white flash had disappeared. The band stopped playing at once.

In an instant Johannes was on the spot. He acted altogether instinctively, without thinking, without making up his mind. He did not hear the screams of the mother on deck: "My girl, my girl!" He no longer saw anybody. He jumped straight away out of the boat and dived.

For a moment he was gone, a minute; they could see the water seething where he had jumped in and knew he was at work. The cries of distress still came from the ship.

Then he came up again, farther out, several fathoms from the scene of the accident. They shouted to him, pointing like mad: "No, *here* it was, *here*!"

And he dived again.

Another interval of torture, an unbroken cry of anguish from a woman and a man on deck wringing their hands. Another man dived off the ship, the mate who had thrown off his jacket and shoes. He carefully searched the place where the girl had gone down and they all set their hopes on him.

Then Johannes' head appeared again above the surface, still farther out, many fathoms farther than before. He had lost his cap and his head shone like a seal's in the sunlight. They could see that he was struggling with something, he swam with difficulty, one of his hands was hampered. A moment later he had got hold of something in his mouth, between his teeth, a huge bundle; it was the girl. Shouts of surprise reached him from the ship and from the shore, even the mate must have heard the difference; he put his head out of the water and looked around.

At last Johannes reached the boat, which had drifted off; he got the girl on board and climbed in himself; all without any stopping to think. They saw him bend over the girl and literally tear the clothes upon her back, then he grasped the oars and pulled furiously to the ship. When the victim was seized and dragged on board everybody cheered wildly.

"What made you try so far out?" they asked him.

He answered:

"I know the shoals. And there's a current here. I knew that."

A man forced his way to the side of the ship; he was pale as death, with a tortured smile and tears hanging on his eyelashes.

"Come on board a moment!" he called down. "I want to thank you. We owe you so many thanks. Only a moment."

And the man left the rail again, pale as death.

The gangway was thrown open and Johannes climbed on board.

He did not stay long; he gave his name and address, a woman embraced him, soaking as he was; the pale, distracted man pressed his watch into his hand. Johannes found himself in a cabin where two men were busy with the

drowning girl. They said: "Now she's coming round, her pulse is going!" Johannes looked at the sufferer, a fair young girl in a short frock; her frock was all torn open at the back. Then a man put a hat on his head and he was led out.

He did not know exactly how he got ashore and pulled the boat up. He heard another cheer raised and the band playing a gay tune as the ship steamed away. A luxurious wave of rapture, cold and sweet, rolled through him from head to foot; he smiled and moved his lips.

"No row for us today then," said Ditlef. He looked annoyed about it.

Victoria had come, she joined them and said quickly:

"What are you thinking of? He must go home and change his clothes."

Ah, what an event, in his nineteenth year!

Johannes started off home. The music and the loud cheering still rang in his ears, a powerful emotion drove him on and on. He went past his home and took the path through the wood to the quarry. Here he looked out for a good place were the sun was warm. His clothes were steaming. He sat down. A wild, blissful unrest made him get up and walk about again. How full of happiness he was! He fell on his knees and thanked God with hot tears for this day. She was standing below there, she had heard the cheering. Go home and put on dry clothes, she said.

He sat down and laughed again and again, rapt with joy. Yes, she had seen him do it, this heroic deed; she had watched him with pride as he came back with the drowning girl in his teeth. Victoria, Victoria! Did she know how unspeakably he was hers every minute of his life? He would be her servant and her slave and sweep a way for her with his shoulders. And he would kiss her little shoes and draw her carriage and put logs in her stove on cold days. Gilt logs he would put in her stove, Victoria.

He looked around. Nobody heard him, he was all by himself. In his hand he held the valuable watch, it was ticking, it went.

Thanks, thanks for this good day! He patted the moss on the stones and the fallen twigs. Victoria had not smiled at him; no, but that was not her way. She simply stood on the pier; a little tinge of red flew over her cheeks. Perhaps she would have liked his watch if he had given it her?

The sun sank and the warmth began to fail. He felt he was wet. And then he ran home, light as a feather.

There were summer visitors at the Castle, a party from town, with dancing and revelry. And the flag flew night and day from the round tower for a week.

And there was the hay to be carried, but the horses were all taken up by the holiday makers and the hay was left out. And there were fields and fields of uncut grass, but all the farm hands were pressed into service as coachmen and boatmen and the grass was left to spoil.

And the music never ceased in the yellow drawing-room.

The old Miller stopped his mill and locked it up while this went on. He had learnt wisdom, for he had known the times when the rollicking towns-people had come in a body and played practical jokes with his sacks of corn. For the nights were so warm and light and they invented all manner of diversions. The rich Chamberlain in his young days had once with his very own hands carried an ant-heap in a trough into the mill and left it there. Now the Chamberlain was well on in years but Otto his son still came to the Castle and found strange ways of amusing himself. Many tales were told about him....

The sound of hoofs and shouting come through the wood. The young people were out for a ride and the Castle horses were glossy and fresh. The party came up to the Miller's house, knocked with their whips and wanted to ride in. The door was so low and yet they wanted to ride in.

"Good day, good day," they cried. "We came to say how d'ye do."

The Miller laughed obsequiously at the joke.

Then they dismounted, tied up their horses and started the mill.

"The hopper's empty!" yelled the Miller. "You'll smash up the mill."

But nobody heard him in the roar.

"Johannes!" shouted the Miller with the full force of his lungs in the direction of the quarry.

Johannes came.

"They're grinding up my millstones," his father cried, pointing.

Johannes went quietly towards the group. He was fearfully pale and the veins on his temples grew bigger. He recognized Otto, the Chamberlain's son, who was in cadet's uniform; there were two others besides him. One of them smiled a greeting to smooth things over.

Johannes made no sound or sign, but went on. He was making straight for Otto. At that moment he saw two ladies on horseback coming out of the wood; one of them was Victoria. She had on a green habit and was riding the white mare from the Castle. She did not get off, but sat watching them all with questioning eyes.

Then Johannes altered his course; he turned off, went up on the weir and opened the sluice; the noise gradually subsided, the mill stopped.

Otto called out:

"No, let it go on. What are you doing that for? Let the mill go on, I tell you."

"Was it you who started the mill?" asked Victoria.

"Yes," he answered with a laugh. "What's it stopped for? Why mayn't it go on?"

"Because it's empty," answered Johannes, with a catch in his breath, looking at him. "Do you understand? The mill is empty."

"It was empty, do you hear?" Victoria repeated.

"How was I to know that?" asked Otto laughing. "Why was it empty I want to know. Wasn't there any corn in it?"

"Get up again!" broke in one of his companions, to put an end to it.

They mounted. One of them apologized to Johannes before they rode off.

Victoria was the last. When she had gone a little way she turned her horse and came back.

"You must please ask your father to excuse this," she said.

"It would have been more proper if the Cadet had done that himself," answered Johannes.

"I know. Of course, but—He is always taking things into his head.... How long it is since I saw you, Johannes!"

He looked up at her, wondering if he had heard aright. Had she forgotten last Sunday, his great day!

He answered:

"I saw you on the pier on Sunday."

"Oh yes," she said at once. "What a lucky thing you were able to help the mate with the dragging. You found the girl, didn't you?"

He answered shortly in a hurt tone:

"Yes, we found the girl."

"Or how was it?" she went on, as though something had struck her; "was it you alone.... Oh, it doesn't matter. Well then, I hope you'll speak to your father about that. Good-night."

She nodded with a smile, picked up her reins and rode away.

When Victoria was out of sight Johannes wandered on into the wood, indignant and restless. He found Victoria standing by a tree quite alone. She was leaning against the tree and sobbing.

Had she fallen off? had she hurt herself?

He went up to her and asked:

"Is there anything wrong?"

She took a step towards him, spread out her arms and gave him a radiant look. Then she stopped, let her arms drop and answered:

"No, there's nothing wrong with me; I got off and let the mare go home by herself.... Johannes, you mustn't look at me like that. You were looking at me down by the pond. What do you want?"

He stammered:

"What do I want? I don't understand...."

"You're so broad there," she said, suddenly laying her hand on his. "You're so broad there, about the wrist. And then you're quite brown with the sun, brown as a berry...."

He moved his hand, trying to take hers. Then she picked up her habit and said:

"No, there was nothing the matter, you see. I only thought I'd go home on foot. Good-night."

III

Johannes went back to town. And days and years passed, a long, eventful time of work and dreams, of lectures and verse. He was getting on well, he had succeeded in writing a poem about Esther, "a Jew Girl who was made Queen of Persia," a work which was printed and for which he got paid. A second poem, "Love's Labyrinth," which he put into the mouth of Friar Vendt, made his name known.

Ah, what was Love? A breeze whispering in the roses; no, a yellow phosphorescence in the blood. Love was a music hot as hell which stirs even old men's hearts to dance. It was like the daisy that opens wide to the coming of night, and it was like the anemone that closes at a breath and dies at a touch.

Such a thing was Love.

It might ruin its man, raise him up again and brand him anew; it might love me today, you tomorrow and him tomorrow night, so inconstant was it. But again it might hold like an unbreakable seal and burn with an unquenchable flame even to the hour of death, for so eternal was it. How then was Love?

Oh, Love is the summer night with stars in the sky and fragrance on the earth. But why does it make the youth seek hidden paths and why does it make the greybeard stand tiptoe in his lonely chamber? Ah, Love turns the heart of man to a garden of fungus, a luxuriant and shameless garden wherein mysterious and immodest toadstools raise their heads.

Does it not lead the friar to slink into closed gardens and glue his eyes to the windows of the sleepers at night? And does it not possess the nun with folly and darken the understanding of the princess? It casts the king's head to the ground so that his hair sweeps all the dust of the highway, and he whispers unseemly words to himself the while and laughs and puts out his tongue.

Such was Love.

No, no, it was again something very different and it was like nothing else in the whole world. It came to earth one spring night when a youth saw two eyes, two eyes. He gazed and saw. He kissed a mouth, and then it was as though two lights met in his heart, a sun flashing towards a star. He fell into an embrace, and then he heard and saw no more in all the world.

Love is the first word of God, the first thought that sailed through his brain. He said: Let there be light! and then Love was. And all that he had made was very good and he wished none of it unmade again. And Love became the origin of the world and its ruler; but all its ways are full of blossoms and blood, blossoms and blood.

A September day.

This out-of-the-way street was his daily walk; he went up and down it as in his own room, because he never met any one and it had gardens on both sides and trees with red and yellow leaves.

Why was Victoria walking here? how could this lie in her way? He was not mistaken, it was she, and perhaps it was she who had been walking here the evening before when he looked out of his window.

His heart beat violently. He knew Victoria was in town, he had heard so; but she mixed in circles which were closed to the Miller's son. He never met

Ditlef either.

He pulled himself together and went to meet the lady. Didn't she know him? She walked on, serious and full of her thoughts, carrying her head proudly on her long neck.

He bowed.

"Good afternoon," she said, quite low.

She made no sign of stopping and he passed by in silence. His legs gave a jerk. At the end of the little road he turned round, as he always did. I shall keep my eyes fixed on the pavement and not look up, he thought. Not till he had gone a dozen paces did he look up.

She had stopped in front of a window.

Should he steal away, into the next street? What was she standing there for? The window was a poor one, a little shop-window which showed some crass bars of red soap, a glass jar of meal, and some foreign stamps for sale.

Perhaps he could go on another dozen paces and then turn.

Then she looked at him and suddenly came towards him again. She walked quickly, as though she had plucked up courage, and when she spoke her breath came with difficulty. She smiled nervously.

"Good afternoon. I'm so glad to meet you."

Heavens, what a struggle there was in his heart; it wasn't beating, it shivered. He tried to say something but didn't succeed, only his lips moved. A fragrance issued from her clothes, her yellow dress, or perhaps it was from her mouth. At that moment he had no clear impression of her face; but he recognized her fine shoulders and her long, slender hand on the handle of her parasol. It was her right hand. There was a ring on it.

For the first few seconds he did not reflect upon this and had no feeling of disaster. But her hand was wonderfully beautiful.

"I've been a whole week in town," she went on; "but I haven't seen you. Oh yes, I saw you once in the street; somebody told me it was you. You've grown so much."

He muttered:

"I knew you were in town. Are you staying long?"

"A few days. No, not long. I'm going home again."

"Thank you for stopping to talk to me," said he.

Pause.

"Oh, by the bye, I've lost my way," she said again. "I'm staying at the Chamberlain's; how do I get there from here?"

"I'll take you there if you'll let me."

They began to walk.

"Is Otto at home?" he asked for the sake of saying something.

"Yes, he's at home," she answered shortly.

Some men came out of a doorway carrying a piano between them and barring the pavement. Victoria turned off to the left, leaning her whole side against her companion. Johannes looked at her.

"I beg your pardon," she said.

A voluptuous feeling swept through him at the contact; for an instant her breath came straight against his cheek.

"I see you're wearing a ring," he said. And he smiled and put on an air of indifference. "Perhaps I am to congratulate you?"

What would she answer? He did not look at her, but held his breath.

"And you?" she answered, "haven't you a ring? No? I'm sure somebody told me.... One hears so much about you nowadays, your name is in the papers."

"It's some poems I have written," he answered. "But you won't have seen them."

"Wasn't it a whole book? I thought...."

"Yes, there was a little book too."

They came to a square, she was in no hurry though she had to go to the Chamberlain's; she sat down on a seat. He stood in front of her.

Then she suddenly put out her hand to him and said:

"Sit down too."

And only when he had sat down did she release his hand.

Now or never! he thought. He made another attempt to assume a light and indifferent tone, he smiled, looked up into the air. Good.

"So then you're engaged and won't even tell me. And I'm your neighbor at home."

She thought a moment.

"That was not exactly what I wanted to talk to you about today," she answered.

He at once became serious and said in a low voice:

"Well well, I dare say I know all about it."

Pause.

He began again:

"Of course I knew all the time that it couldn't be any use ... I mean, that it was not I who ... I was only the Miller's son, and you.... Of course that is so. And I can't even make out how I dare sit here beside you and hint at it. I ought to stand before you, or kneel over there, on the ground. That's how it ought to be. But somehow.... And then all these years I have been away have made a difference. I seem to have more confidence now. For I know that I'm no longer a child and I know that you can't throw me into prison, if you wanted to. That gives me courage to speak. But you mustn't be angry with me; I'd rather keep it to myself."

"No, go on. Say what you want to say."

"May I? What I want to say? If you mean that, then your ring is not to stop me."

"No," she said in a low voice, "it is not to stop you. No."

"What? Well, but what does it mean? Oh, God bless you, Victoria, can I be right?" He sprang up and leaned over to look her in the face. "Tell me, doesn't the ring mean anything?"

"Sit down again."

He sat down.

"Oh, but if you knew how much I have thought about you; heavens, has there ever been another scrap of thought in my heart? Of all the people I saw or heard of there was nobody in the world but you. I simply couldn't have any thought but this—Victoria is the most beautiful, the most glorious of all, and I know her! *Miss* Victoria, you always were to me. Though of course I saw that no one was farther from you than I; but I knew you were there—and that meant so much to me—that there you were, alive, and perhaps you remembered me sometimes. Of course you did not remember me; but I have sat in my chair so often in the evening and thought perhaps you remembered me sometimes. Do you know, that seemed to throw heaven open to me, Miss Victoria, and then I wrote poems to you and bought flowers for you with all I possessed and brought them home and put them in vases. All my poems are to you, there are only a few that are not, and they are not printed. But you won't have read those that are printed either. Now I've begun on a big book. God, how thankful I am to you, for I am so full of you and that is all my joy. At every moment of the day, at night too, I see or hear something that reminds me of you. I have written your name on the ceiling and I lie and look at it; but the girl who does my room can't see it, I have written it so small to keep it to myself. It brings me a kind of joy."

She turned away, opened the bosom of her dress and took out a paper.

"Look here!" she said, breathing heavily. "I cut it out and kept it. You may as well know it, I read it at night. Papa showed it me first and I took it to the window to read. 'Where is it? I can't find it,' I said and turned over the paper. But I had found it and read it at once. And I was so glad."

The paper was fragrant of her bosom; she opened it herself and showed it to him, one of his first poems, four little verses addressed to her, to the Lady on the White Horse. It was a heart's simple and passionate confession, an outburst not to be restrained, which flashed out from the lines like stars at evening.

"Yes," he said, "I wrote that. It was a long time ago, one night when there was such a rustling in the poplars outside my window, that was when I wrote it. No, are you really going to keep it? Thanks I You have kept it. Oh!" he broke out in sudden rapture, and his voice was quite low, "to think that you are sitting so close to me now. I feel your arm against mine, I feel a

warmth from you. Many a time when I have been alone and thought of you I've shivered with emotion; but now I am warm. When I was home last you were lovely, but you are lovelier now. It is your eyes and your eye-brows, your smile—oh, I don't know, it's everything, everything about you."

She smiled and looked at him with half-closed eyes, there was a dark-blue gleam under the long lashes. A warm tinge was over her. She seemed to be a prey to the most intense joy, and with an unconscious movement she felt for his hand.

"Thanks!" she said.

"No, Victoria, don't thank me," he answered. All his soul welled out to her and he wanted to say more, say more; nothing came but confused and broken outbursts, he was as though intoxicated. "Ah but, Victoria, if you care for me a little ... I don't know, but say you do even if it is not so. Do, please! Oh, I promise you I would do things, great things, unheard-of things almost. You have no idea what I could do; I ponder over it sometimes and feel that I am simply full of things to be done. Often and often it pours out of me, at night I swing up and down my room because I am so full of visions. There's a man in the room next to me, he can't sleep, he knocks on the wall. When it begins to dawn he comes into my room and he's furious. That doesn't matter, I don't worry about him, for then I have thought so long about you that you seem to be with me. I go to the window and sing, it begins to get light, the poplars are rustling outside. Good-night! I say to the day. That is for you. Now she's asleep, I think, good-night, God bless her! Then I go to bed. So it is night after night. But I have never thought you were so lovely as you are. Now I shall remember you like this when you have gone; as you are now. I shall remember you so clearly...."

"Are you not coming home?"

"No. I'm not ready. Yes, I'll come. I shall leave now. I'm not ready, but I'll do anything in the world. Do you sometimes stroll in the garden at home now? Do you ever go out in the evening? I might see you, I might be able to greet you perhaps, nothing more. But if you care for me a little, if you can bear me, if you don't hate me, then say ... let me have that comfort.... Do you know, there is a palm that flowers only once in its lifetime, though it lives seventy years—the talipot palm. But it only flowers once. Now is my flowering time. Yes, I'll get some money and go home. I'll sell what I've

written; I'm writing a big book, you know, and I'll sell it now, tomorrow morning, all I have finished. I shall get a lot for it. Do you want me to come home?"

"Yes."

"Thanks, thanks! Forgive me if I hope too much, believe too much; it is so lovely to believe beyond all bounds. This is the happiest day I have known...."

He took his hat off and laid it beside him.

Victoria looked about her, a lady was coming down the street and farther off a woman with a basket. Victoria grew uneasy, she took out her watch.

"Must you go now?" he asked. "Say something before you go, let me hear your.... I love you and tell you so now. It will depend on your answer whether I ... I am so utterly in your hands. What is your answer?"

Pause.

He dropped his head.

"No, don't say it!" he begged.

"Not here," she answered. "When we get there."

They walked on.

"They say you're going to marry that little girl, that girl whose life you saved; what was her name?"

"Camilla, do you mean?"

"Camilla Seier. They say you are going to marry her."

"Do they? Why do you ask that? She is not grown up. I have been to her home, it is a big, fine house, a castle like your own; I have been there many times. No, she is not grown up."

"She is fifteen. I have met her, we have been together. I was much taken with her. How charming she is!"

"I am not going to marry her," he said.

"Indeed."

He looked at her. His face twitched.

"But why do you say that now? Is it because you want to call my attention to another?"

She went on with rapid steps and did not answer. They found themselves outside the Chamberlain's. She took his hand and drew him into the gateway and up the stairs.

"I'm not going in," he said, half surprised.

She pressed the bell, then turned to him, and her bosom was heaving.

"I love you," she said. "Do you understand? It is you I love."

Suddenly she drew him downstairs again, quickly, three or four steps, threw her arms around him and kissed him. She trembled against him.

"It is you I love," she said.

The hall door opened above. She tore herself from him and hurried up the stairs.

IV

It was getting on for morning; day dawned, a purple, quivering September morning.

There was a gentle murmur among the poplars in the garden. A window was thrown open, a man leaned out of it humming. He had no coat on, he looked out upon the world like a dishevelled maniac who had been drinking himself drunk in happiness all night.

He suddenly turned away from the window and looked towards his door; somebody had knocked. He called: "Come In!" A man entered.

"Good-morning," he greeted the visitor.

It was an elderly man, he was pale with fury and carried a lamp in his hand as it was not yet full daylight.

"I put it to you once more, Mr. Miller, Mr. Johannes Miller, do you call this reasonable behaviour?" the man stammered with indignation.

"No," answered Johannes, "you are right. I've been writing something, it came so easily; look, I've written all that, I've been lucky tonight. But now I have finished. I opened the window and sang a little."

"You roared," said the man. "It was the loudest song I have ever heard, I tell you. And it's still the middle of the night."

Johannes plunged his hands among the papers on his table and picked up a handful of sheets large and small.

"Look here!" he cried. "I tell you, I've never done so well. It was like one long flash of lightning. I once saw a flash run along a telegraph wire; God help you, it looked like a sheet of fire. That's how it has been streaming through me tonight. What am I to do? I don't think you will be angry with me any more when you hear all about it. I sat here writing, you see, I didn't move; I remembered you and kept quiet. Then there came a moment when I didn't remember it any longer, my breast was ready to burst, perhaps I got up then, perhaps I got up once more in the course of the night and walked round the room a few times. I was so happy."

"I didn't hear you so much tonight," said the man. "But it is altogether unpardonable of you to open the window at this time of night and yell like that."

"Oh yes. It is unpardonable, no doubt. But now I have explained. I've had a night like no other night, I tell you. Something happened to me yesterday. I was walking in the street and I met the joy of my life; oh, listen to me, I met my star and my joy. And then, do you know, she kissed me. Her mouth was so red, and I love her; she kissed me and made me intoxicated. Has your mouth ever trembled so that you could not speak? I could not speak, my heart shook my whole body. I ran home and fell asleep; I sat here in this

chair and slept. When evening came I awoke. My soul was swinging up and down in me with emotion and I began to write. What did I write? Here it is! I was under the sway of a strange and glorious train of ideas, the heavens were opened, it was like a warm summer day to my soul, an angel brought me wine, I drank it, it was strong wine, I drank it from a cup of garnet. Did I hear the clock strike? Did I see that the lamp went out? God grant you could understand! I lived it all over again, I walked again with my beloved in the street and every one turned to look at her. We went into the Park, we met the King, I took my hat off and swept the ground from joy, and the King turned to look at my beloved, for she is so tall and lovely. We went down into the town again and all the school-children turned to look at her, for she is young and has a light dress. Then we came to a red brick house and went in. I followed her upstairs and wanted to kneel to her. Then she threw her arms about me and kissed me. This happened to me yesterday evening, no longer ago than that. If you asked me what I have written, it is one continuous song to joy, to happiness. It was as though joy lay naked before me with a long, laughing throat and was coming to me."

"Well, I really can't listen to you any longer," said the man, in despair and irritation. "I have spoken to you for the last time."

Johannes stopped him at the door.

"Wait a moment. Oh, you ought to have seen how your face lighted up. I saw it as you turned, it was the lamp, it sent a gleam of sunshine over your forehead. You were not so angry any more, I saw that. I opened the window, I know, and I sang too loud. I was the happy brother of all the world. It sometimes happens like that. One takes leave of one's senses. I ought to have thought that you were still asleep...."

"The whole town is still asleep."

"Yes, it's early. I should like to make you a present. Will you accept this? It is silver, it was given to me. A little girl whose life I once saved gave it me. Please take it. It holds twenty cigarettes. You won't have it? I see, you don't smoke, but you ought to learn. May I come and see you tomorrow and make my excuses? I should like to do something, beg your forgiveness...."

"Good-night."

"Good-night. I'm going to bed now, I promise you that. You shan't hear another sound. And in future I'll be more careful."

The man went.

Johannes suddenly opened the door again and added:

"By the bye, I'm leaving. I shan't disturb you any more. I'm leaving to-morrow. I forgot to tell you."

He did not leave. Various things kept him, he had business to do, things to buy, bills to pay, the morning passed and evening came. He rushed about as though out of his wits.

At last he rang at the Chamberlain's door. Was Victoria at home?

Victoria was out shopping.

He explained that they came from the same place, Miss Victoria and he, he only wanted to pay her his compliments if she had been in, to take the liberty of paying his compliments. There was a message he wanted to send home. All right.

Then he went into the town. Perhaps there was a chance of meeting her, coming across her; she might be sitting in a carriage. He wandered about till the evening. Outside the Theatre he saw her; he bowed, smiled and bowed, and she returned his greeting. He was going up to her, a few paces away—when he saw that she was not alone, she had Otto with her, the Chamberlain's son. He was in lieutenant's uniform.

Johannes thought: now perhaps she'll give me a sign, a little glance of the eyes? She hurried into the theatre, blushing, with her head bowed, as though she did not wish to be seen.

Perhaps he could see her inside? He took a ticket and went in.

He knew where the Chamberlain's box was; of course, these rich people, they had boxes. There she sat in all her glory looking about her. Did she look at him? Never!

When the act was over he waited for her outside in the corridor. He bowed again; she looked at him, rather surprised, and nodded.

"This is where you can get a glass of water," said Otto, pointing.

They walked past.

Johannes followed them with his eyes. A strange twilight settled about him. All these people were annoyed with him and shoved him as they passed; he mechanically excused himself and stayed where he was. She had disappeared.

When she came back she bowed deeply and said:

"Excuse me...."

"It's Johannes," she said, introducing him. "Do you recognize him?"

Otto made some answer and puckered his eyes as he looked at him.

"I suppose you want to know how your people are," she continued, and her face was calm and handsome. "I really don't know, but I expect they're quite well. Very well indeed. I'll give them your love."

"Thank you. Are you going home soon, Miss Victoria?"

"One of these days. All right, I'll give them your love."

She nodded and passed on.

Johannes' eyes followed her again till she had vanished, then he went out. He killed time with an everlasting ramble, a dull and dismal tramp up one street and down another. At ten o'clock he was waiting outside the Chamberlain's house. Now the theatres would soon be over, now she would come. He might open the carriage door perhaps, and take his hat off, open the carriage door and bow to the ground.

At last, half an hour later, she came. Could he stand by the gateway and remind her once more of his existence? He hastened up the street without looking round. He heard the gates of the Chamberlain's house being thrown open, the carriage driving in and the gates closing again. Then he turned.

He continued to stroll up and down in front of the house for an hour. He was not waiting for anybody and had no message to give. Suddenly the gate was opened from within and Victoria stepped out into the street. She had no hat on and had only thrown a shawl over her shoulders. She smiled, half afraid and half embarrassed, and asked as an opening:

"Are you walking about with your thoughts?"

"No," he answered. "My thoughts? No, I'm just walking here."

"I saw you walking up and down outside here and I wanted to.... I saw you from my window. I must go in again directly."

"Thank you for coming, Victoria. I was in such despair a little while ago and now it is gone. Excuse me for speaking to you at the theatre; I'm sorry to say I asked for you here at the Chamberlain's too, I wanted to see you and find out what you meant, what your meaning was."

"Well," she said, "you must know that. I said so much the day before yesterday that you couldn't misunderstand me."

"I am still quite uncertain about it all."

"Don't let us talk any more about it. I have said enough, I have said much too much, and now I am hurting you. I love you, I was not telling you a lie the other day and I'm not telling you one now; but there is so much that keeps us apart. I am very fond of you, I like talking to you, would rather talk to you than to any one else, but.... Well, I daren't stay here any longer, they can see us from the windows. Johannes, there are so many reasons that you don't know, so you must not ask me any more what I mean. I have thought of it night and day; I mean what I said. But it will be impossible."

"What will be impossible?"

"The whole thing. All of it. Look here, Johannes, you must not force me to have pride for both of us."

"Very well. All right, I'll spare you that! But it comes to this, that you made a fool of me the other day. It so happened that you met me in the street and you were in good humour and so...."

She turned and was going in.

"Have I done anything wrong?" he asked. His face was pale and unrecognizable. "I mean, how have I forfeited your.... Have I committed any crime in these two days and two nights?"

"No. That's not it. I have thought it over, that's all; haven't you done the same? It has been impossible all along, you know. I am fond of you, appreciate you...."

"And respect you."

She looked at him, his smile offended her and she continued with more heat:

"Good heavens, don't you see yourself that Papa would forbid it? Why do you force me to say it? You know it yourself. What could it have led to? Am I not right?"

Pause.

"Yes," he answered.

"Besides," she went on, "there are so many reasons.... No, you really mustn't follow me into the theatre any more, you frightened me. You must never do it again."

"No," he said.

She took his hand.

"Can't you come home for a bit? I should look forward to it very much. How warm your hand is; I'm freezing. No, I must go now. Good-night."

"Good-night," he answered.

The street lay cold and grey before him, looking like a belt of sand, an everlasting road to traverse. He came upon a boy who was selling old spoilt roses; he called to him, took a rose, gave the boy a little five-crown piece in gold for a present, and went on. Soon after he saw a group of children playing about a doorway. A boy of ten was sitting still and looking on; he had old blue eyes which followed the game, hollow cheeks and a square chin, and on his head was a linen cap. It was the lining of a cap. This child wore a wig, a skin disease had disfigured his head for life. Perhaps his soul was also withered.

All this he noticed though he had no clear idea of what part of the town he was in or where he was going. It began to rain too, he didn't feel it and didn't put up his umbrella, though he had carried it all day.

When at last he came to a square where there were seats he sat down. It was raining more and more, he put up his umbrella unconsciously and remained seated. After a short time an invincible drowsiness came over him, he shut his eyes and began to nod and doze.

A little while after he was roused by the loud voices of some passers-by. He got up and wandered on. His brain had cleared, he remembered what had happened, every incident, even the boy to whom he had given five crowns for a rose. He pictured to himself the little man's delight when he discovered this wonderful coin among his coppers and saw that it was not a nickel but a five-crown piece in gold. God be with him!

And the other children had perhaps been driven into the doorway by the rain and were going on with their game there, playing hop-scotch or marbles. And the disfigured old man of ten sat looking on. Who knows, perhaps he was feeling pleased about something, perhaps he had some toy in the little backyard room, a jack-in-the-box or a pegtop. Perhaps he had not lost the whole of life, there might be hope in his withered soul.

A slight and graceful lady came in view ahead of him. He gave a start and stopped. No, he didn't know her. She had come from a side street and was hurrying along and she had no umbrella though the rain was pouring down. He caught up with her, looked at her and walked past. How dainty she was and young! She was getting wet, she would catch cold and he dared not approach her. Then he closed his umbrella so that she should not be the only one to get wet. When he got home it was past midnight.

There was a letter on his table, a card; it was an invitation. The Seiers would be glad if he could come to them tomorrow evening. He would meet people he knew, amongst others—could he guess?—Victoria, from the Castle. Kind regards.

He fell asleep in his chair. An hour or two later he woke up feeling cold. Half awake, half asleep, shivering all over, wearied with the day's reverses, he sat down at the table and tried to answer the card, this invitation that he did not intend to accept.

He wrote his answer and was going to take it down and post it. Suddenly it struck him that Victoria was also invited. So that was it, she had said nothing to him, she had been afraid he might come, she wanted to be rid of him amongst these strangers.

He tore up his letter, wrote another thanking them, he would come. His hand trembled with internal excitement, a peculiar happy exasperation seized him. Why shouldn't he go? why should he hide himself? Enough.

His violent emotions ran away with him. With one wrench he tore off a handful of leaves from his date pad on the wall and put himself on a week. He imagined to himself that he was glad about something, delighted beyond measure; he would enjoy this hour, he would light his pipe, sit in his chair and hug himself. His pipe was hopelessly stopped up, he searched in vain for a knife, a scraper, and suddenly pulled one of the hands off the clock in the corner to clean his pipe with. The sight of the mischief he had done did him good, it made him laugh inwardly, and he looked about to see what else he could make a mess of.

The time went on. At last he threw himself on his bed in all his wet clothes and fell asleep.

When he awoke the day was far advanced. It was still raining, the street was wet. His head was in disorder, scraps of his dreams were confused with the events of the day before; he felt no fever, on the contrary, his heat had subsided, a coolness surrounded him as though he had been wandering in a sultry forest and had now come to the borders of a lake.

There was a knock, the postman brought him a letter. He opened it, looked at it, read it and had difficulty in understanding it. It was from Victoria, a note, a half sheet; she had forgotten to tell him that she was going to the Seiers' this evening; she wanted to meet him there, she would explain things better to him, ask him to forget her, to take it like a man. Excuse the wretched paper. Kind regards.

He went into the town, dined, went home again and finally wrote refusing the Seiers'; he could not come, he would look forward to seeing them some other evening, tomorrow for instance.

This letter he sent by hand.

V

Autumn came, Victoria had gone home and the little out-of-the-way street and its houses was as quiet as before. At night there was a light in Johannes' room. It made its appearance with the stars at evening and was extinguished when day dawned. He was working with all his might, writing his great book.

Weeks and months passed; he was alone and visited nobody, he no longer went to the Seiers'. Often his imagination played him tricks and slipped irrelevant fancies into his book which he afterwards had to strike out and throw away. This put him back a great deal. A sudden noise in the stillness of the night, the rumbling of a cart in the street, might give his thoughts a jolt and throw them off the line:

Out of the way of this cart in the street, look out there!

Why? Why should one look out for this cart anyway? It was rolling past, perhaps it had now reached the corner. Perhaps there's a man standing there with no overcoat, no cap, he stoops down and meets the cart with his head, he will be run over, hopelessly mangled, killed. The man wants to die, that is his affair. He won't button his shirt any more and he has given up tying his shoes in the morning, he wears everything open, his chest is bare and skinny; he is to die.... A man was lying at the point of death, he wrote a letter to a friend, a note, a little request. The man died and left this letter. It had a date and signature, it was written with capitals and small letters although he who wrote it was to die in an hour. That was so strange. He had even put the usual flourish under his name. And an hour later he was dead.... There was another man. He was lying alone in a little room which was wood-panelled and painted blue. What then? Nothing. In the whole wide world he is the one who has got to die. That fills his mind; he thinks about it till he is worn out. He sees that it is evening, that it is eight by the clock on the wall, and he can't make out why it doesn't strike. Poor man, his brain is already falling asleep; the clock *has* struck and he didn't notice it. Then he makes a hole through his mother's portrait on the wall—what does he want with this picture now, and why should it be left whole when he is gone? His tired eyes fall upon the flower-pot on the table and he reaches out his hand and pulls the big flower-pot slowly and deliberately so that it falls on the floor and is smashed to pieces. Why should it be left unbroken? Then he throws his amber cigarette-holder out of the window. What does he want with it

any more? It seems so obvious to him that he need not leave it behind. And in a week the man was dead....

Johannes got up and walked up and down his room. His neighbour in the next room woke up, his snoring ceased and a sigh was heard, a tortured groan. Johannes went on tiptoe to the table and sat down again. The wind howling in the poplars outside his window made him feel cold. The old poplars were stripped of leaves and looked like sad monstrosities; a few knotted branches scraped against the wall of the house with a creaking sound, like a piece of wooden machinery, a cracked stamp-mill which worked on and on.

He dropped his eyes on his papers and read them over. Well well, his fancy had run away with him again. He had nothing to do with death and a passing cart. He was writing about a garden, a green luxuriant garden by his home, the Castle garden. That was what he was writing about. It was lying dead and snowed under now, but he was writing about it all the same, and not of winter and snow at all, but spring and fragrance and mild breezes. And it was evening. The water below lay deep and still, like a leaden lake; the lilacs shed their perfume, hedge after hedge was in bud and green leaves, and the air was so still that the blackcock could be heard calling on the other side of the bay. On one of the paths of the garden stood Victoria, she was alone, dressed in white, twenty years old. There she stood. Taller than the tallest rose-bushes, she looked out over the water, out to the forests, to the sleeping mountains in the distance; she seemed like a white soul in the midst of the green garden. Footsteps sounded on the road below, she took a few steps forward to the lonely summer-house, leaned her elbows on the wall and looked down. The man in the road took his hat off almost to the ground and bowed. She nodded back. The man looked about him, there was nobody on the road watching him and he advanced towards the wall. Then she retreated, crying, "No, no!" and she waved him off with her hand. "Victoria," he said, "what you said once was the real truth, I can't have imagined it, that is impossible." "Yes," she answered, "but what do you want?" He was now quite close to her, only the wall separated them, and he answered: "What do I want? Oh, you know, I only want to stay here a minute. It's the last time. I want to come as near to you as I can; now I'm not far away!" She said nothing. So that minute passed. "Good-night," he said,

taking off his hat again and sweeping the ground with it. "Good-night," she answered. And he went away without looking back....

What had he to do with death? He crumpled up the written sheets and threw them away to the stove. Other written sheets were lying there waiting to be burnt, all the fugitive waste of an imagination that overflowed its banks. And he began again to write of the man on the road, a wanderer who bowed and said good-bye when his minute was done. And he left the girl behind in the garden, and she was dressed in white and twenty years old. She would not have him; no, she wouldn't. But he had stood against the wall behind which she lived. As close as that to her he had been.

Again weeks and months went by and spring came. The snow was already gone, far out in space was a foaming of freed waters. The swallows had come and the woods outside the town quickened with the life of all kinds of hopping beasts and birds with foreign note. A fresh, sweet smell floated up from the ground.

His work had taken him all the winter. Night and day the dry branches of the poplars had lashed the wall with their refrain; now spring had come, the storms were over and the mill had creaked to a standstill.

He opened the window and looked out; the street was quiet already though it was not yet midnight, the stars blinked in a cloudless sky, it looked like a warm, bright day tomorrow. He heard the roar of the town blended with the everlasting hum of the distance. Suddenly a steam-whistle shrieked, the night train's signal; it sounded like a single cockcrow in the stillness of the night. Now it was time for work; that train-whistle had been like an order to him the whole winter.

And he shut the window and sat down again at his table. He threw aside the books he had been reading and got out his papers. He took up his pen.

Now his great work was nearly finished, it only wanted a final chapter, a farewell message from a ship under way, and he had it already in his head:

A man was sitting in a roadside inn, he was passing through and was on a long, long journey. His hair and beard were grey and many years had passed over him; but he was still big and strong and scarcely so old as he looked.

His carriage stood outside, the horses were resting, the driver was happy and pleased, for the stranger had given him wine and food. When the traveller entered his name the host recognized him, bowed and showed him great honour. "Who lives at the Castle now?" the stranger asked. The host replied: "The Captain; he is very rich. His lady is kind to every one." To every one? the traveller asks himself with a curious smile—to me too? And he sat down and began to write something, and when it was finished he read it over; it was a poem, mournful and calm, but with many bitter words. But presently he tore the paper to pieces and went on tearing it into still smaller pieces as he sat there. Then there was a knock at his door and a woman dressed in yellow walked in. She threw off her veil, it was the lady of the Castle, the Lady Victoria. There was a majesty about her. The man rose abruptly; at the same instant his dark soul was illumined as if by torch-light. "You are so kind to every one," he said bitterly. "You even come to me." She made no answer, simply stood looking at him and her face turned dark red. "What do you want?" he asked as bitterly as before; "have you come to remind me of the past? If so, it is for the last time, my lady, for now I am going away for ever." And still the young mistress of the Castle made no answer, but her lips were trembling. He said: "If you are not satisfied with my acknowledging my folly once, then listen, I do it again: my heart was set upon you, but I was not worthy of you—are you satisfied now?" He went on with rising vehemence: "You gave me No, you took another; I was a clown, a bear, a barbarian who in my boyhood had stumbled into a royal preserve!" But then the man threw himself into a chair sobbing and begging her: "Oh, go! forgive me, go away!" Now all the flush had left the lady's cheeks. And she spoke, and uttered the words so slowly and so well: "I love you; do not misunderstand me any longer, it is you I love. Farewell!" And it was the Castle lady fair, she flung hands before her face and fled out of the door.... He laid down his pen and leaned back. There—full stop, Finis. There was the book, all the sheets he had written, nine months' work. A warm ripple of satisfaction ran through him at the finishing of his work. And as he sat there looking towards the window through which day was dawning, there was a throbbing in his head and his spirit went on working. He was full of ideas and feelings, his brain was like a wild ungathered garden with mists rising from the ground:

In some mysterious way he has come into a deep, deserted valley where no living thing is to be seen. Far away, alone and forgotten, an organ is

playing. He goes nearer, examines it; the organ is bleeding, blood runs out of its side as it plays. Farther on he comes to a market-place. It is all deserted, not a tree to be seen, not a sound to be heard, it is nothing but a deserted market-place. But in the sand are prints of people's shoes and the air seems still to hold the last words spoken in the place, so lately was it abandoned. A strange feeling comes over him; these words left in the air over the market-place alarm him, they come nearer, press upon him. He casts them off and they come again; they are not words, they are old men, a group of old men dancing; he sees them now. Why are they dancing, and why are they not the least gay when they dance? A cold air blows from this company of old men, they do not see him, they are blind, and when he calls to them they do not hear him, they are dead. He wanders towards the east, towards the sun, and he comes to a mountain. A voice cries: Are you at a mountain? Yes, he answers, I am standing by a mountain. Then says the voice: The mountain you are standing by is my foot; I am lying bound in the uttermost land, come and set me free! So he sets off to the uttermost land. At a bridge stands a man waiting for him, he is collecting shadows; the man is of musk. A freezing terror seizes him at the sight of this man who wants to take his shadow. He spits at him and threatens him with clenched fists; the man does not budge but stands waiting for him. Turn back! cries a voice behind him. He turns and sees a head rolling along the road and showing him the way. The head is a human head and now and then laughs quietly and silently. He follows it. It rolls for days and nights and he follows it; by the seashore it slips into the ground and hides. He wades out into the sea and dives. He finds himself in front of a huge doorway and meets a great barking fish. It has a mane on its back and it barks at him like a dog. Behind the fish stands Victoria. He stretches out his hands to her, she has no clothes on, she laughs to him and a storm blows through her hair. Then he calls to her, he hears his own cry—and wakes.

Johannes rose and went to the window. It was almost light and in the little mirror on the window-post he saw that his temples were red. He put out the lamp and in the grey light of day read once more the last page of his book. Then he lay down.

By the afternoon of the same day Johannes had paid for his room, delivered his manuscript and left town. He had gone abroad, nobody knew where.

VI

The great book was out, a kingdom, a little humming world of moods, voices and visions. It was sold, read and laid aside. Some months passed; when autumn came Johannes flung off a new book. What now? His name was instantly on every one's lips, fortune followed him; this new book was written far away, far from the events of home, and it was still and strong as wine:

"Dear reader, here is the tale of Didrik and Iselin. Written in the good season, in the days of small sorrows, when everything was easy to bear, written with the very best intention about Didrik whom God smote with love...."

Johannes was in a foreign country, no one knew where. And more than a year passed before any one heard.

"I thought I heard a knock," said the old Miller one evening.

And his wife and he sat still and listened.

"No, it was nothing," she said after a while; "it's ten o'clock, it will soon be night."

Several minutes passed.

Then there came a hard, decided knock at the door, as though some one had plucked up courage to do it. The Miller opened. Outside stood the young lady from the Castle.

"Don't be alarmed, it's only me," she said with a shy smile. She walked in; they offered her a chair, but she did not sit down. She had only a shawl

over her head and on her feet little low shoes though it was not yet spring-time and the roads were not dry.

"I only wanted to tell you that the Lieutenant is coming this spring," she said; "the Lieutenant, you know, my fiancé. And perhaps he will shoot woodcock out here. I thought I'd give you word about it, so that you shouldn't be alarmed."

The Miller and his wife looked at the young lady in surprise. They had never before had notice when visitors at the Castle were to shoot in the woods and fields. They thanked her humbly; how kind it was of her!

Victoria went back to the door.

"That's all I wanted. I thought as you were old people there was no harm in letting you know."

The Miller answered:

"So good of you, Miss. And now you have got your little shoes wet."

"No, the road's dry," she said shortly. "I was taking a turn round here anyhow. Good-night."

"Good-night."

She raised the latch and went out. Then she turned in the doorway and asked:

"By the bye—Johannes, have you heard from him?"

"No, nothing from him, thank you for asking. Nothing."

"I suppose he'll be coming soon. I thought you might have heard."

"No, not since last spring. Johannes is in foreign parts, it seems."

"Yes, in foreign parts. He is well. He writes himself in a book that he is in the days of small sorrows. So he must be well."

"Oh yes, oh yes, God knows. We are waiting for him."

"Perhaps he is better off where he is, since his sorrows are small. Well, that's his affair. I only wanted to know whether he was coming home this spring. Good-night again."

"Good-night."

The Miller and his wife followed her out.

They saw her return to the Castle with her head held high, stepping over the puddles in the muddy road with her thin shoes.

A day or two after a letter arrived from Johannes. He was coming home in a little over a month, when he had finished another new book. He had got on well all this time, his new work went rapidly, all life had been surging through his brain....

The Miller betook himself to the Castle. On the way he found a pocket handkerchief marked with Victoria's initials; she had dropped it the other evening.

Miss Victoria was upstairs, but a maid offered to take her a message—what was it?

The Miller declined. He would rather wait.

At last Victoria came. "I hear you want to speak to me?" she said, opening the door of a room.

The Miller went in, handed her a handkerchief and said: "And then we have had a letter from Johannes."

A bright look passed over her face for an instant, a brief instant. She answered:

"Thank you very much. Yes, the handkerchief is mine."

"He is coming home again," the Miller went on, almost in a whisper.

Her look turned cold.

"Speak up, Miller; who is coming?" she said.

"Johannes."

"Johannes. Well, what then?"

"Oh, why—we thought I ought to tell you. We talked about it, my wife and I, and she thought so too. You were asking the day before yesterday if he was coming home this spring. Yes, he's coming."

"Then I am sure you must be glad," said the young lady. "When is he coming?"

"In a month."

"I see. Well, there was nothing else?"

"No. We only thought, as you had asked.... No, there was nothing else. It was only that."

The Miller had dropped his voice again.

She went out with him. In the passage they met her father and she said to him as they passed, aloud and in a casual tone:

"The Miller tells me Johannes is coming home again. You remember Johannes, don't you?"

And the Miller went out of the Castle gate and promised himself that never, never again would he be such a fool as to listen to his wife when she wanted to poke her nose into secrets. He'd let her know that.

VII

Once he had wanted to make a fishing-rod of the slender rowan tree by the mill-pond; now many years had passed and the tree had grown thicker than his arm. He looked at it in wonder and walked on.

The impenetrable wilderness of bracken still grew along the bank of the stream, a whole forest on whose floor the cattle had trampled regular paths over which the fronds of the bracken closed. He strode through the wilderness as in the days of his childhood, swimming with his hands and feeling his way with his feet. Insects and creeping things fled before the mighty man.

Up by the granite quarry he found black-thorn, wood anemones and violets. He plucked a quantity, their homely scent recalled to him bygone days. In the distance the mountain ridges showed in a purple haze and on the far side of the bay the cuckoo was beginning to call.

He sat down; after a while he began to hum. Then he heard footsteps on the path below.

It was evening, the sun was down, but the air was still quivering with warmth. An infinite peace lay over forest, mountain and bay. A woman was coming up towards the quarry. It was Victoria. She was carrying a basket.

Johannes rose, bowed and was going away.

"I didn't want to disturb you," she said. "I came to get some flowers."

He made no answer. And he never reflected that she had all kinds of flowers in her garden.

"I brought a basket to put the flowers in," she went on. "But perhaps I shan't find any. We want them for a party, for the table. We are going to give a party."

"Here are anemones and violets," he said. "Higher up there are generally hops. But perhaps it is too early in the year for them."

"You are paler than when I saw you last," she remarked to him. "That is over two years ago. You have been away, I've heard. I have read your books."

Still he did not answer. It occurred to him that perhaps he might say: "Well, good evening, Miss Victoria," and go. From the place where he stood it was one step down to the next stone and from there one to her, and then he could withdraw as though quite naturally. She stood right in his path. She had on a yellow dress and a red hat, she was strangely beautiful; her throat was bare.

"I am blocking your way," he mumbled and stepped down. He controlled himself so as not to show any emotion.

There was now one pace between them. She did not make way for him, but stood still. They looked one another in the face. Suddenly she turned

very red, dropped her eyes and stepped aside; an irresolute expression came over her face, but she smiled.

He went past her and stopped, her sad smile struck him, his heart flew back to her and he said at random:

"Well, of course you have been in town many times since? Since that time?... Now I know where there used to be flowers in old days: on the knoll by your flagstaff."

She turned towards him and he saw with surprise that her face had become pale and agitated.

"Will you come to us that evening?" she said. "Will you come to our party? We are giving a party," she went on, and her face began to flush again. "Some people are coming from town. It will be before long, but I'll let you know. What is your answer?"

He did not answer. It was no party for him, his place was not at the Castle.

"You mustn't say No. You won't be bored, I have thought about that and I have a surprise for you."

Pause.

"You cannot surprise me any more," he answered.

She bit her lip; the despairing smile crossed her face again.

"What do you want of me?" she said in a toneless voice.

"I want nothing of you, Miss Victoria. I sat here on a stone and I offered to move."

"Oh well, I was at home with nothing to do, I had been there the whole day, and then I came here. I might have gone up the river another way, then I shouldn't have come just here...."

"My dear Miss Victoria, the place is yours and not mine."

"I wronged you once, Johannes; I wanted to make it good again, to put it right. I really have a surprise which I think ... I mean, which I hope will please you. I can't say more. But I will ask you to come this time."

"If it will give you any pleasure I shall come."

"Will you?"

"Yes; thank you for your kindness."

When he had come down into the wood he turned and looked back. She had sat down; her basket lay by her side. He did not go home, but continued to stroll up and down the road. A thousand thoughts were conflicting within him. A surprise? That was what she said just now, only a moment ago, and her voice trembled. A warm, nervous joy came over him, making his heart beat violently, and he felt himself lifted up from the road on which he was walking. And was it a mere chance that she was dressed in yellow today again? He had looked at her hand where the ring had been—she had no ring.

An hour passed. The scent of the woods and fields surrounded him, penetrated his breath, entered his heart. He sat down, leaned back with his hands clasped behind his neck and listened for a while to the song of the cuckoo on the other side of the bay. All round him the air thrilled with a passionate song of birds.

So once more it had happened! When she came up to him in the quarry in her yellow dress and blood-red hat she looked like a wandering butterfly that flitted from stone to stone and stopped before him. I don't want to disturb you, she said, and smiled; her smile was red, her whole face lit up, she strewed stars about her. She had delicate blue veins on her neck and the few freckles under her eyes gave her a warm tint. She was in her twentieth year.

A surprise? What did she intend? Would she perhaps show him his books, produce those two or three volumes, to please him by showing that she had bought them all and cut them? There, you see, a small attention, a little bit of charity! Pray don't despise my poor contribution!

He rose impetuously and stood still. Victoria was coming back, her basket was empty.

"You didn't find any flowers?" he asked absently.

"No, I gave it up. I wasn't looking for them either; I just sat there."

He said:

"While I remember it: you must not go on thinking that you have done me any wrong. You have nothing to make good again with any kind of

charity."

"Haven't I?" she answered, taken aback. She thought it over again, looked at him and pondered. "Haven't I? I thought that time.... I didn't want you to go on bearing me a grudge for what happened."

"No, I don't bear you a grudge."

She thought again for a while. Suddenly she gave a cast of her neck.

"Then that's all right," she said. "Well, I might have known it. Of course it didn't make so deep an impression as all that. Very well then, we won't talk about it any more."

"Good-bye," she said. "Till we meet again."

"Good-bye," he answered.

They went their different ways. He stopped and turned. There she went. He stretched out his hands and whispered tender words to himself: I bear you no grudge, oh no, I do not; I love you still, I love you....

"Victoria!" he cried.

She heard; she started and turned round, but walked on.

Some days passed. Johannes was in a profoundly disturbed state and could not work or sleep; he spent nearly the whole day in the woods. He went up to the big fir-clad knoll where the Castle flagstaff stood; the flag was hoisted. There was also a flag flying from the round tower of the Castle.

A strange excitement seized him. Visitors were coming to the Castle, there were to be great doings.

The afternoon was still and warm; the river ran like a pulse through the heated landscape. A steamer glided in towards land, leaving a fan of white streaks over the surface of the bay. Then four carriages drove out of the Castle yard and took the road down to the pier.

The boat came alongside, some ladies and gentlemen landed and took their seats in the carriages. Then a series of shots began to ring out from the Castle; two men stood on the top of the round tower with shot-guns, loading

and firing by turns. By the time they had shot off twenty-one rounds the carriages were rolling in through the gate and the firing ceased.

Of course, there were to be great doings at the Castle; the flags and salutes were in honor of the visitors. In the carriages were some officers in uniform; perhaps Otto was among them, the Lieutenant.

Johannes came down from the knoll and was making for home. He was overtaken by a man from the Castle who stopped him. The man had a letter in his cap, he had been sent by Miss Victoria and wanted an answer.

Johannes read the letter with a beating heart. Victoria invited him after all, wrote in cordial terms and asked him to come. This was the time she wanted him to come. Answer by the messenger.

A strange and unexpected joy came upon him. The blood mounted to his head and he answered the man that he would come; yes, thanks, he would come at once.

He handed the messenger a ridiculously big tip and hurried home to dress.

VIII

For the first time in his life he entered the door of the Castle and ascended the stairs to the first floor. A hum of voices came from within; his heart was beating violently; he knocked and entered.

The Lady of the Castle, still young, came towards him and greeted him in a friendly fashion, pressing his hand. Very glad to see him; she remembered him when he was no higher than that; now he was a great man.... And it

seemed as though the Lady would have said more, she held his hand a long time and looked at him searchingly.

Then the Master came up and gave him his hand. As his wife had said, a great man, in more senses than one. A famous man. Very glad to see him....

He was introduced to gentlemen and ladies, to the Chamberlain who was wearing his orders, to the Chamberlain's Lady, to a neighbouring Laird, to Otto, the Lieutenant. Victoria he did not see.

Some time went by. Victoria came in, pale, hesitating indeed; she was leading a young girl by the hand. They made a round of the drawing-room, shaking hands and saying something to every one. They stopped at Johannes.

Victoria smiled and said:

"Look, here is Camilla, isn't this a surprise? You know one another."

She stood looking at them both for a moment, then she went out of the room.

For the first instant Johannes stood motionless, stiff and dazed. This was the surprise; Victoria had been kind enough to provide a substitute. Look here, you two people, go and take each other! Spring is in full bloom, the sun is shining; open the windows if you like, for the garden is full of the scent of flowers and the starlings are playing in the birch-tops. Why don't you talk to one another? Laugh, for goodness' sake!

"Yes, we know each other," said Camilla frankly. "It was here you pulled me out of the water that time."

She was young and fair, bright, dressed in a rose-coloured frock, and was in her seventeenth year. Johannes clenched his teeth and laughed and joked. Little by little her cheerful talk actually began to wake him up; they talked a long time, the beating of his heart subsided. She kept the charming habit she had had as a child of putting her head on one side and listening expectantly when he said anything. He recognized her, she was no surprise to him.

Victoria came in again; she took the Lieutenant's arm, carried him off and said to Johannes:

"Do you know Otto—my fiancé? You remember him, don't you?"

The men remembered each other. They said the necessary words, made the necessary bows and separated. Johannes and Victoria were left alone. He said:

"Was that the surprise?"

"Yes," she answered, worried and impatient; "I did the best I could, I didn't know of anything else to do. Don't be unreasonable now, you ought rather to thank me; I could see you were glad."

"Thank you. Yes, I was glad."

An irreparable despair fell upon him, his face turned pale as a corpse. If she had once wronged him it was now so abundantly made good and healed. He was sincerely grateful to her.

"And then I notice that you have your ring on today," he said dully. "Mind you don't take it off again."

Pause.

"No, now I am sure not to take it off any more," she answered.

They looked into each other's eyes. His lips quivered, he indicated the Lieutenant with his head and said hoarsely and rudely:

"You have taste, Miss Victoria. He's a handsome man. His epaulettes give him shoulders."

She gave him his answer very calmly:

"No, he is not handsome. But he is a well-bred man. And that means something."

"That was one for me, thanks!" He laughed aloud and added with insolence: "And there's money in his pockets; that means more."

She left him at once.

He drifted about from one wall to the other like an outlaw. Camilla talked to him, asked a question and he did not hear it and made no answer. Again she said something, touched his arm even and asked another question in vain.

"Oh, now he's lost in thought," she cried with a laugh. "He's thinking, he's thinking!"

Victoria heard and answered:

"He wants to be alone. He sent me away too." But suddenly she came right up to him and said aloud: "I expect you're thinking out some apology to me. You need not trouble about that. On the contrary, I owe you an apology for sending you the invitation so late. It was very neglectful of me. I forgot you till the very last, I nearly forgot you altogether. But I hope you'll forgive me, for I had so much to think about."

He stared at her speechless; even Camilla looked from one to the other and seemed astonished. Victoria stood right in front of them with her cold, pale face and looked satisfied. She had had her revenge.

"Now you can see our young men," she said to Camilla. "We mustn't expect too much of them. Over there sits my fiancé talking about elk-shooting and here is the poet deep in thought.... Say something, poet!"

He gave a start; the veins in his temples swelled.

"Very well. You want me to say something? Very well."

"Oh, not if it's such an effort."

She was going already.

"To come straight to the point," he said slowly, smiling, but with a quiver in his voice; "to begin right in the middle—have you been in love lately, Miss Victoria?"

For a few seconds there was dead silence; all three could hear their hearts beating. Camilla put in timidly:

"Of course Victoria is in love with her fiancé. She is just engaged, don't you know that?"

The doors to the dining-room were thrown open.

Johannes found his place and was standing by it. The whole table heaved up and down before his eyes, he saw a crowd of people and heard a buzz of voices.

"Yes, that's right, that is your place," said the hostess kindly. "If only everybody would sit down."

"Excuse me!" said Victoria suddenly, just behind him.

He stepped aside.

She took his card and moved it several places down, seven places down, beside an old man who had once been tutor at the Castle and who was supposed to drink. She brought back another card and sat down.

The hostess, much upset, found something to do on the other side of the table and avoided looking at him.

His confusion became even worse than before and he withdrew bewildered to his new place; his first seat was occupied by one of Ditlef's friends from town, a young man with diamond studs in his shirt-front. On his left sat Victoria, on his right Camilla.

And the dinner began.

The old Tutor remembered Johannes as a boy and a conversation was started between them. He said that he too had written poetry in his young days, he had kept his manuscripts, Johannes could read them some day. Now they had sent for him on this great occasion that he might participate in the joy of the family over Victoria's engagement. The Master and Mistress of the Castle had given him this surprise for the sake of old friendship.

"I have read nothing of yours," he said; "I read myself when I want to read anything; I have a drawer full of poems and tales. They are to be published when I am dead; after all, I should like the public to know what manner of man I was. Ah yes, we who are somewhat older in the craft are not in such a hurry to rush into print as they are nowadays. Your health!"

The meal wore on. The Master rapped on his glass and stood up. His thin, aristocratic face was alive with emotion and he gave the impression of being very happy. Johannes bent his head low. There was nothing in his glass and nobody gave him anything; he filled it himself to the brim and bent down again. Now for it!

The speech was long and eloquent and was received with joyful cheers; the engagement was announced. From all parts of the table good wishes poured in upon the daughter of the Castle and the Chamberlain's son.

Johannes emptied his glass.

A few minutes later his agitation had vanished, his calm had returned; the champagne glowed softly through his veins. He heard that the Chamberlain also made a speech and that there were more bravos and hurrahs and clinking of glasses. Once he looked towards Victoria's place; she was pale and seemed distressed; she did not look up. But Camilla nodded to him and smiled and he nodded back.

The Tutor by his side went on talking:

"It's a fine thing, it's a fine thing when two young people come together. It did not fall to my lot. I was a young student, fine prospects, great gifts; my father had an ancient name, a great home, wealth, many, many ships. So I think I may say I had *very* fine prospects. She was young too and belonged to the best set. I come to her and open my heart. *No*, she answers. Can you understand her? No, she wouldn't, she said. So I did what I could, I went on with my work and took it like a man. Then came my father's bad years, wrecks, liabilities—to make a long story short, he went bankrupt. What did I do then? Took it like a man again. And now she positively didn't hold back any longer, the girl I'm talking about. She came back, hunted me up in town. What did she want with me, you may ask? I was a poor man, I had got a little job as a teacher, all my prospects had vanished and my poems were thrown into a drawer—and now she came and said yes. Said yes!"

The Tutor looked at Johannes and asked:

"Can you understand her?"

"But then it was you who wouldn't have it?"

"*Could* I, I ask you? Cleaned out, stripped, a teacher's job, one pipe of tobacco on Sundays—what are you thinking of? I couldn't do her such a wrong. But all I say is: can you understand her?"

"And what became of her afterwards?"

"Good Lord, you don't answer my question! She married a captain. That was the year after. A captain in the artillery. Your health!"

Johannes said:

"They say some women are always looking for an object for their compassion. If the man is getting on well they hate him and think themselves superfluous; if things go against him and he is down they crow over him and say: here I am."

"But why didn't she accept me in the good days? I had the prospects of a little god."

"Goodness knows. She wanted to wait till you were brought low."

"But I wasn't brought low. Never. I kept my pride and sent her about her business. What do you say to that?"

Johannes said nothing.

"But perhaps you're right," said the old Tutor. "Yes, by God and all his angels, what you say is right," he exclaimed with sudden excitement and took another drink. "She took an old captain at last; she nurses him, cuts up his food for him and is master of the house. A captain in the artillery."

Johannes looked up. Victoria sat with her glass in her hand staring in his direction. She held her glass high in the air. He felt a shock all through him and seized his glass too. His hand shook.

Then she called aloud to his neighbour and laughed; it was the Tutor's name she called.

Johannes put down his glass in humiliation and sat with an embarrassed smile on his face. Everybody had looked at him.

The old Tutor was touched to tears by this friendly attention of his pupil's. He made haste to empty his glass.

"And here I am, an old man," he continued, "here I am tramping the earth, alone and unknown. That has been my lot. Nobody knows what there is in me; but nobody has ever heard me grumble. How is that?—do you know the turtledove? Isn't it the turtledove, that melancholy being which makes the gay, bright spring water muddy before it drinks it?"

"I don't know."

"No, I dare say not. But it is. And I do the same. I did not get her whom I should have had; but I am not altogether without joys for all that. Only I stir up the mud in them. Every time I stir up the mud. Then I can't be beaten by

the disappointment afterwards. There you see Victoria. She drank with me just now. I have been her tutor; now she's to be married and I'm glad about it, it gives me a purely personal sense of happiness as if she was my own daughter. Now perhaps I shall be tutor to her children. Oh yes, there are really a number of joys left in life. But what you said about compassion and woman and the man brought low—the more I think about it, the more you are right. Yes, God knows you are.... Excuse me a second."

He got up, seized his glass and went along to Victoria. He was already a little unsteady on his legs and stooped a great deal.

More speeches were made, the Lieutenant made one, the neighbour Laird gave the toast of the ladies, the Lady of the house. Suddenly the young man with the diamond studs got up and spoke Johannes' name. He had received permission for what he was doing, he wanted to hail the young poet in the name of the young. His words were most friendly, a kindly expression of thanks from contemporaries, full of appreciation and admiration.

Johannes hardly believed his own ears. He whispered to the Tutor:

"Is it me he's talking about?"

The Tutor answered:

"Yes. He's forestalled me. I was going to do it myself; Victoria asked me to some hours ago."

"Who asked you to, did you say?"

The Tutor stared at him.

"Nobody," he said.

During the speech the eyes of all were turned upon Johannes; even the Master nodded to him, and the Chamberlain's Lady put up her glasses and looked at him. When the speech was finished they all drank.

"Give it him back now," said the Tutor. "He stood up and made you that speech. It ought to have fallen to one who is your senior in the craft. Besides, I didn't agree with him at all. Not at all."

Johannes looked along the table to Victoria. It was she who had got the young man with the diamond studs to speak; why had she done it? First she had applied to another about it, quite early in the day she had had it in her

thoughts; why had she? Now she sat looking down and not a muscle of her face betrayed her.

Suddenly his eyes were bedewed with a deep and violent emotion, he could have thrown himself at her feet and thanked her, thanked her. He would do it later, after dinner.

Camilla sat talking to right and left and smiling all over her face. She was pleased, her seventeen years had brought her nothing but happiness. She nodded again and again to Johannes and made signs to him to get up.

He got up.

He spoke briefly, his voice sounded deep and stirred: On this occasion, when the House was celebrating a joyful event, he too—who was entirely outside the circle—was drawn from his obscurity. He wished to thank the originator of this amiable suggestion and the speaker who had addressed to him so many agreeable words. But at the same time he could not fail to appreciate the kindness with which the whole company had listened to his—the outsider's—praise. The only claim he had to be present on this occasion was that he was the son of the Castle's neighbour....

"Yes!" Victoria cried suddenly, with flaming eyes.

Everybody looked at her, her cheeks were red and her breast heaved up and down. Johannes broke off. A painful silence ensued.

"Victoria?" said her father in surprise.

"Go on!" she cried again. "That is your only claim; but go on!" The light in her eyes went out abruptly, she began to smile helplessly and shake her head. Then she turned to her father and said: "I only meant to exaggerate things. You see, he's exaggerating himself. No, I won't interrupt...."

Johannes listened to this explanation and found a way out of the difficulty; his heart was beating audibly. He noticed that Victoria's mother was looking at her with tears in her eyes and with infinite forbearance.

Yes, he had exaggerated, he said; Miss Victoria was right. She had been so kind as to remind him that he was not only their neighbour's son, but also the playmate of the Castle children, and it was to this latter circumstance he owed his presence here. He thanked her, that was how it was. He belonged to the place, the Castle woods were once his whole world, beyond them

loomed the unknown country, fairyland. But in those days he would often have a message from Ditlef and Victoria that they wanted him to join them in an excursion or a game—those were the great events of his childhood. Later, when he had thought over it, he was bound to acknowledge that those hours had had a significance in his life which no one knew of, and if it was true—as they had just heard—that what he wrote had sometimes a *flame* in it, that was because the memories of that time kindled him; it was the reflection of that happiness his two playmates had bestowed on him in childhood. Therefore they also had a great share in what he produced. To the general good wishes on the occasion of the engagement he would therefore add his personal thanks to both the Castle children for the good years of childhood, when neither time nor things had come between them, the glad, short summer day....

A speech, a regular attempt at a speech. It was not amusing, but it didn't go so badly, the company drank, went on eating and took up their conversation again. Ditlef remarked dryly to his mother:

"I never knew it was really me that had written his books, what?"

But his mother did not laugh. She drank with her children and said:

"Thank him, thank him. It was very easy to understand, when he was so lonely as a child.... What are you doing, Victoria?"

"I'm going to send the maid to him with this sprig of lilac for my thanks. Mayn't I?"

"No," answered the Lieutenant.

After dinner the company scattered themselves about the rooms, the big balcony and even the garden. Johannes went down to the ground floor and entered the garden room. It was not empty, there were a couple of men smoking, the Laird and another, and they were talking in undertones about the Master's finances. His land was neglected, choked with weeds, the fences were down, the timber shockingly thinned; it was said he even had difficulty in paying the astonishingly high insurances on the buildings and their contents.

"How much is the place insured for?"

The Laird mentioned the sum, a whacking sum.

For that matter money was never considered at the Castle, the sums were always big there. What did a dinner like this cost, for instance? But now according to all accounts the bottom had been reached, even of their hostess's famous jewel-case, and so the son-in-law's money would have to refill the coffers.

"What's he worth, do you suppose?"

"Oh tut! there's no counting it."

Johannes got up again and went out into the garden. The lilacs were in bloom, a fragrant wave of auricula, narcissus, jasmine and lily-of-the-valley swept round him. He found a corner by the wall and sat down on a stone; a shrub hid him from all eyes. He was worn out by emotion, thoroughly fagged, and his wits were clouded; he thought of getting up and going home, but sat on in dull apathy. Then he heard a murmur on the pathway, some one was coming; he recognized Victoria's voice. He held his breath and waited a moment; then he caught a glimpse of the Lieutenant's uniform through the leaves. The engaged couple were walking together.

"It doesn't seem to me," he was saying, "that this will hold water. You listen to what he says, you hang on to every word of his speech and then shout out. What does it all mean?"

She stopped and stood before him at her full height.

"Do you want to know?" she asked.

"Yes."

She was silent.

"It's all the same to me if it meant nothing," he went on. "Then you needn't tell me."

She collapsed again.

"No, it didn't mean anything," she answered.

They began to walk again. The Lieutenant shrugged his epaulettes nervously and said aloud:

"He'd better look out, or he might feel an officer's hand about his ears."

They went in the direction of the summer-house.

Johannes remained seated on the stone for some time, in the same dull pain as before. It was all becoming indifferent to him. The Lieutenant had taken it into his head to suspect him and his fiancé immediately began to defend herself. She said what had to be said, calmed the officer's heart, and walked on with him. And the starlings chattered on the boughs above their heads. Very well. God vouchsafe them a long life.... He had made her a speech at the dinner and torn his heart out; it had cost him sorely to make good and cover up her insolent interruption and she had not thanked him for doing so. She had seized her glass and drunk. Here's your good health, look at me and see how nicely I drink.... By the bye, you should always look at a woman from the side when she's drinking. Let her drink of a cup, a glass, anything you like, but look at her from the side. It's shocking to see what an air she gives herself. She purses up her mouth and dips the extreme tip of it into the drink and she gets desperate if you watch her hand while she is doing it. You must never in any circumstances look at a woman's hand. She can't stand it, she capitulates. She begins at once to draw in her hand, to pose it more and more elegantly, always with the object of concealing a wrinkle, a crookedness of the fingers or a rather misshapen nail. At last she can bear it no longer and asks, quite beside herself: what are you looking at?... She had once kissed him, once, one summer. It was so long ago, God knew if it was even true. How was it, weren't they sitting on a bench? They talked a long time and when they walked away he came so close to her that he touched her arm. On a staircase she had kissed him. I love you, she said.... Now they had gone past, perhaps they were still sitting in the summer-house. The Lieutenant would give him a box on the ears, he said. He heard it quite plainly, he was not asleep, but still he did not get up and come forward. An officer's hand, he said. Oh well, it didn't matter to him....

He rose from the stone and went after them to the summer-house. It was empty. Up in the verandah of the house stood Camilla calling for him: Come along, there was coffee in the garden room. He followed her. The engaged couple were sitting in the garden room; several others were there besides. He took his coffee, retired and found a place.

Camilla began talking to him. Her face was so bright and her eyes looked at him so frankly that he could not resist her; he talked too, answered her questions and laughed. Where had he been? In the garden? What a story! Why, she'd looked for him in the garden and couldn't find him. Oh no, he hadn't been in the garden.

"Was he in the garden, Victoria?" she asked.

Victoria answered:

"No, I didn't see him."

The Lieutenant threw her a glance of annoyance, and to give his fiancé a lesson he called over to the Laird in a needlessly loud voice:

"Didn't you say you'd let me join your shoot?"

"Yes, of course," answered the Laird. "You're welcome."

The Lieutenant looked at Victoria. She said nothing and sat as before, making no attempt to keep him from joining the Laird's shooting party. His face clouded over more and more, he pulled nervously at his mustache.

Camilla addressed another question to Victoria.

Then the Lieutenant rose hastily and said to the Laird:

"All right then, I'll go with you this evening, at once."

With that he left the room.

The Laird and a few others followed.

There was a short pause.

Suddenly the door was thrown open and the Lieutenant came in again. He was greatly excited.

"Have you forgotten something?" asked Victoria, getting up.

He danced about by the door as if unable to stand still and then went straight up to Johannes and gave him a blow with his hand as though in passing. After that he ran back to the door and danced about again.

"Look out, man, you hit me in the eye," said Johannes with a hollow laugh.

"You're mistaken," answered the Lieutenant, "I gave you a box on the ears. Understand? Understand?"

Johannes pulled out his handkerchief, dried his eye, and said:

"You don't mean that. You know I can double you up and put you in my pocket."

As he said it he stood up.

Then the Lieutenant hurriedly opened the door and stepped outside.

"I do mean it!" he yelled back. "I do mean it, you clown!"

And he slammed the door.

Johannes sat down again.

Victoria was still standing near the middle of the room. She was looking at him and was as pale as a corpse.

"Did he hit you?" asked Camilla in the greatest astonishment.

"By accident. He got me in the eye. Would you like to look?"

"Heavens, it's all red, there's blood. No, don't rub it, let me bathe it with water. Your handkerchief is too coarse, look here, take it back; I'll use my own. Did you ever hear such a thing, right in his eye!"

Victoria held out her handkerchief too. Then she went quite slowly to the glass door and stood there with her back to the room, looking out. She was tearing her handkerchief into little strips. A few minutes later she opened the door and left the room quietly and without saying a word.

IX

Camilla came walking down to the Mill, frank and cheerful. She was alone. She went straight into the little room and said with a titter:

"Excuse me for not knocking. The stream makes such a roar that I thought it was no use." She looked about her and exclaimed: "How awfully nice it is here, charming! Where's Johannes? I know Johannes. How's his eye?"

She got a chair and sat down.

Johannes was fetched from the mill. His eye was sore and bloodshot.

"I've come of my own accord," said Camilla as soon as she saw him; "I wanted to come down here. You must go on using cold water for your eye."

"It's all right," he answered. "But, God bless you, what brought you here? Would you like to see the mill? Thanks for coming!" He took his mother round the waist and brought her forward and said: "Here is my mother."

They went into the mill. The old Miller took off his cap with a low bow and said something; Camilla didn't hear what it was, but she smiled and said at random:

"Thanks, thanks. Yes, I should like so much to see it."

The noise frightened her, she held Johannes' hand and glanced up at the two men with big, listening eyes in case they should say something. She looked like a deaf person. All the wheels and machinery of the mill filled her with astonishment, she laughed, shook Johannes' hand in her excitement and pointed in all directions. The mill was stopped and started again so that she might see it.

Even for a good while after she had left the mill Camilla talked in a comically loud voice, as though the noise were still in her ears.

Johannes walked with her back to the Castle.

"Can you imagine his daring to hit you in the eye?" she said. "But then he went off at once, he left with the Laird to go shooting. It was a frightfully unpleasant thing to happen. Victoria didn't sleep a wink all night, she told me."

"Then she'll be able to sleep tonight," he answered. "When do you think you'll be going home again?"

"Tomorrow. When are you coming to town?"

"In the autumn. Can I meet you this afternoon?"

She exclaimed:

"Oh yes, do! You told me about your cave; you must show me that."

"I'll come and fetch you," he said.

On his way home he sat for a long while on a stone and pondered. A warm and happy idea had flashed upon him.

In the afternoon he walked up to the Castle, stopped outside and sent in a message for Camilla. While he stood waiting Victoria appeared for an instant at one of the first-floor windows; she stared down at him, turned round and disappeared into the room.

Camilla came out and he took her to the quarry and the cave. He was in an unusually calm and happy mood, the young girl amused him, her light, cheerful talk fluttered about him like little blessings. Today the good spirits were near....

"I remember, Camilla, that you once gave me a dagger. It had a silver sheath. I put it away in a box with a lot of other things, as I had no use for it."

"No, you had no use for it; but what then?"

"Well, you see, I've lost it."

"Oh I say, that was unlucky. But perhaps I can get a pair to it somewhere. I'll try."

They walked towards home.

"And do you remember the big medallion you gave me once? It was a thick, heavy gold one and stood in a frame. You had written some kind of words on it."

"Yes, I remember."

"Last year while I was abroad I gave away that medallion, Camilla."

"Oh no, you didn't? Fancy your giving it away! Why did you?"

"It was a young friend of mine who had it as a souvenir. He was a Russian. He fell on his knees and thanked me for it."

"Was he so glad as that? Oh, I'm sure he must have been wildly glad if he fell on his knees! You shall have another medallion instead of it to keep for yourself."

They had come to the road that ran between the Mill and the Castle.

Johannes stopped and said:

"Here by these bushes something happened to me once. I was walking one evening as I so often did in my loneliness, and it was summer and fine weather. I lay down behind the bushes and was lost in thought. Then two people came quietly walking along the road. The lady stopped. Her companion asked: why do you stop? And as he got no answer he asked again: Is anything the matter? No, she answered; but you mustn't look at me like that. I only looked at you, he said. Yes, she answered, I know very well that you love me, but Papa won't allow it, you understand; it is impossible. He murmured: Yes, I suppose it's impossible. Then she said: You are so broad here, about the hand; you have such oddly broad wrists! And then she took hold of his wrist."

"Well, what happened?" asked Camilla.

"I don't know," replied Johannes. "Why did she say that about his wrists?"

"Perhaps they were nice. And then he had a white shirt above them—oh, of course I know why. I expect she was fond of him too."

"Camilla!" he said; "if I was very fond of you and waited a few years, I only ask.... In one word, I am not worthy of you; but do you think you would be mine some day if I ask you next year or in two years' time?"

Pause.

Camilla had suddenly turned fiery red with embarrassment, she twisted her slight figure this way and that and clasped her hands. He put his arm round her and asked:

"Do you think you could some day? Will you?"

"Yes," she answered, and fell into his arms.

The next day he saw her down to the pier. He kissed her little hands with their childish, innocent expression and was full of thankfulness and joy.

Victoria was not there.

"Why has nobody come with you?"

Camilla told him with scared eyes that the Castle was in the most terrible trouble. A telegram had come in the morning, the Master had gone as pale as death, the old Chamberlain and his wife had cried out with pain—Otto had been killed out shooting the evening before.

Johannes seized Camilla's arm.

"Killed? The Lieutenant?"

"Yes. They're on the way with his body. It is terrible."

They walked on, lost in their own thoughts, and only woke at the sight of the people on the pier and the sound of orders shouted from the ship. Camilla bashfully gave him her hand; he kissed it and said:

"Well, well, I'm not worthy of you, Camilla, no, not in any sense. But I shall be as good to you as I possibly can if you will be mine."

"I will be yours. I have wanted it the whole time, the whole time."

"I shall follow in a few days," he said. "In a week I shall see you again."

She was on board. He waved to her, went on waving as long as he could see her. When he turned to go home Victoria was standing behind him; she too held her handkerchief in the air and waved to Camilla.

"I came a little too late," she said.

He did not answer. What was he to say? Condole with her loss, congratulate her, press her hand? Her voice was so toneless and her face showed such distraction, a tragic experience had left its mark there.

People were leaving the pier.

"Your eye is still red," she said, as she began to walk away. She looked round for him.

He was standing still.

Then all at once she turned round and went up to him.

"Otto is dead," she said in a hard voice, and her eyes were burning. "You don't say a word, you are so superior. He was a hundred thousand times better than you, do you hear? Do you know how he died? He was shot, his whole head was blown to pieces, his whole silly little head. He was a hundred thousand...."

She burst into sobs and began to walk towards home with long, despairing steps.

Late that evening there was a knock at the Miller's door; Johannes opened it and looked out; Victoria stood outside and beckoned to him. He followed her. She seized his hand impetuously and led him up to the road; her hand was icy cold.

"Sit down, won't you?" he said. "Sit down and rest a little. You are so exhausted."

They sat down.

She murmured:

"What must you think of me, never leaving you in peace!"

"You are very unhappy," he said. "Now you must obey me and calm yourself, Victoria. Can I help you in any way?"

"For God in Heaven's sake you must forgive me what I said today," she begged. "Yes, I am very unhappy, I have been unhappy for many years. I said he was a hundred thousand times better than you; that was not true, forgive me! He is dead and he was my fiancé, that is all. Do you think it was of my own free will? Johannes, do you see this? It is my engagement ring, I was given it long ago—long, long ago; now I throw it away—throw it away!" And she threw her ring into the wood; they both heard it fall. "It was Papa who would have it. Papa is poor, he is completely beggared, and Otto

would have had so much money one day. You've got to do it, said Papa to me. I won't, I answered. Think of your parents, said he, think of the Castle, our old name, my honour. Well then, I will, I answered; wait three years and then I will. Papa thanked me and waited, Otto waited, they all waited; but I was given the ring at once. Then a long time went by and I saw there was no help for me. Why should we wait any longer, come along with my husband, I said to Papa. God bless you, he said and thanked me again for what I was going to do. Then Otto came. I didn't go to meet him at the pier, I stood at my window and saw him drive up. Then I ran in to Mamma and threw myself on my knees before her. What is the matter, my child? she asked. I can't, I told her; no I can't take him; he's come, he's waiting downstairs; but let us insure my life instead and then I will be lost in the bay or the waterfall, it will be better for me. Mamma turned as pale as death and wept over me. Papa came. Now then, my dear Victoria, you must come down and receive him, he said. I can't, I can't, I answered and repeated what I had said, that he should take pity on me and insure my life. Papa did not answer a word, but sat down on a chair and began to tremble at his thoughts. When I saw that I said: Come along with my husband; I'll take him."

Victoria broke off. She was shaking. Johannes took her other hand in his and warmed it.

"Thanks," she said. "Johannes, be kind to me and hold my hand fast. Do me that kindness! Oh, how warm you are! I am so thankful to you. But you must forgive me what I said on the pier."

"Yes, that's forgotten long ago. Would you like me to fetch you a shawl?"

"No thanks. But I can't understand why I'm trembling, my head is so hot. Johannes, I have to ask your forgiveness for so much...."

"No, no, don't do that. There, now you are calmer. Sit still."

"You made me a speech at the dinner. I didn't know a thing from the time you got up till you sat down again; I simply heard your voice. It was like an organ and I was desperate at the power it had over me. Papa asked me why I called out to you and interrupted you; he was very sorry about it. But Mamma didn't ask me, she understood. I had told Mamma all, many years

ago I told her, and two years ago I told her again, when I came back from town. That was the time I met you."

"Don't let us talk about that."

"No, but forgive me, do you hear, be merciful! What in the world am I to do? Now there is Papa at home, walking up and down his study, it is such a terrible thing for him. It's Sunday tomorrow; he has decided that all the servants are to have the day off; that is the only thing he has decided today. He is grey in the face and he doesn't say a word, so hard has his son-in-law's death hit him. I told Mamma that I was going to you. You and I must both go to town with the Chamberlains tomorrow, she answered. I am going to Johannes, I repeated. Papa can't find the money for all three of us, he will stay here himself, she said and went on talking about other things. Then I went to the door. Mamma looked at me. Now I'm going to him, I said for the last time. Mamma followed me to the door and kissed me and said: Well well, God bless you both!"

Johannes dropped her hands and said:

"There, now you're warm."

"Thank you so much, yes, now I'm quite warm.... God bless you both, she said. I have told Mamma all, she has known it the whole time. But dear me, who is it you're in love with, child? she asked. Can you ask me that again? I answered; it is Johannes I love, it is he alone I have loved all my life, loved, loved...."

He made a movement.

"It's late. Don't you think they will be getting anxious about you at home?"

"No," she answered. "You know that it is you I love, Johannes, you must have seen that? I have longed so for you all these years, nobody knows how much. I have walked along the road here and thought to myself, now I'll go a little way into the wood by the side of the road, for that is where *he* used to go. And then I did so. The day I heard you had come I put on a light dress, light yellow, I was sick with excitement and longing and I kept going in and out of all the rooms. How radiant you are today! said Mamma. I was saying to myself all the time: now he's come home again! He is glorious and now he has come back, both those things are true! The next day I could

not endure it any longer, I put on my light dress again and went up to the quarry to find you. Do you remember? I found you, too, but I did not gather any flowers as I said I would, and that was not why I came either. You were no longer glad to see me again; but thanks all the same that I met you. It was getting on for three years ago. You had a twig in your hand and sat switching with it when I came; after you had gone I picked up the twig and hid it and took it home with me...."

"Yes but, Victoria," he said in a shaking voice, "you mustn't say such things to me any more."

"No," she answered uneasily, seizing his hand. "No, I mustn't. No, you don't like it, I see." She began to pat his hand nervously. "No, I can't expect you to. And besides, I have hurt you so much. Don't you think you can forgive me in time?"

"Yes, yes, everything. It isn't that."

"What is it then?"

Pause.

"I am engaged," he answered.

X

The next day—Sunday—the Master of the Castle came in person to the Miller and asked him to come up about noon and drive Lieutenant Otto's body down to the steamer. The Miller could not understand and stared at him; but the Master explained curtly that all his men had the day off and had gone to church, none of his servants were at home.

The Master could not have slept that night, he looked like a dead man and was unshaven besides. But he swung his walking-stick in his usual way and held himself erect.

The Miller put on his best coat and went. When he had put the horses in, the Master himself lent him a hand in getting the body into the carriage. It was all done quietly, almost secretly, there was nobody to look on.

The Miller drove away to the pier. After him came the Chamberlain and his Lady, besides the Lady of the Castle and Victoria. They were all on foot. The Master was seen standing alone on the steps and making repeated gestures of farewell; the wind ruffled his grey hair.

When the body was carried on board the mourners followed. From the railing the Lady of the Castle called ashore to the Miller that he was to say good-bye to the Master for her, and Victoria asked him the same.

Then the boat steamed away. The Miller stood a long while watching her. There was a stiff breeze and the bay was rough; it was a quarter of an hour before the boat disappeared behind the islands. The Miller drove home.

He put the horses in the stable, gave them a feed and was going in to deliver the message he had for the Master. The kitchen door, however, proved to be locked. He walked round the house and tried to get in by the front door; that too was locked. It's the dinner hour and the Master's asleep, he thought. But as he was a punctilious man and wished to carry out what he had undertaken, he went into the servants' hall to find somebody to whom he could give his messages. In the servants' hall there was not a soul. He went out again, looked all about, and even tried the maids' room. There was nobody there either. The whole place was deserted.

He was just going out again when he saw the glimmer of a candle in the Castle cellar. He stopped. Through the little barred windows he could plainly see a man come into the cellar with a candle in one hand and a chair upholstered in red silk in the other. It was the Master. He was shaved and dressed as though for a great occasion. Perhaps I might knock at the window and give him the Lady's message, thought the Miller, but stood still.

The Master looked about him, held out the candle and looked about him. He pulled forward a sack which seemed to be full of hay or straw and laid it against the entrance door. Then he poured some liquid over the sack from a

can. After that he brought packing-cases, straw and a discarded flower-stand up to the door and poured some of the liquid over them; the Miller noticed that in doing so he was careful not to soil his fingers or his clothes. He took the little candle-end, placed it on top of the sack and carefully surrounded it with straw. Then the Master sat down on the chair.

The Miller gazed at all these preparations with increasing amazement, his eyes were glued to the cellar window and a dark suspicion fell upon his soul. The Master sat quite quietly in his chair and watched the candle burning lower and lower; he kept his hands folded. The Miller saw him flip a speck of dust from the sleeve of his dress coat and fold his arms again.

Then the terrified old Miller uttered a shriek.

The Master turned his head and looked out of the window. Suddenly he jumped up and came close to the window, where he stood staring out. It was a face in which a world of suffering was depicted. His mouth was strangely distorted, he shook both his clenched fists at the window, silently threatening; at last he only threatened with one hand as he walked backwards across the cellar floor. As he struck against the chair the candle upset. At the same instant a huge flame shot up.

The Miller shrieked and ran out. For a moment he tore about the yard quite out of his wits and not knowing what to do. He ran to the cellar window, kicked in the glass and shouted; then he stooped down, seized the iron bars in his fists and shook them, bent them, tore them out.

Then he heard a voice from the cellar, a voice without words, a groan, as from a dead man in the ground; it sounded twice, and the Miller fled terror-struck from the window, across the yard, down the road and home. He dared not look behind him.

When a few minutes later he and Johannes came to the place, the whole Castle, the big old timber house, was in flames. A couple of men from the pier had also come up; but they could not do anything either. Everything was destroyed.

But the Miller's lips were silent as the grave.

XI

Ask of some what Love is and it will be no more than a breeze murmuring among the roses and then dying away. But again it is often like an inviolable seal that lasts for life, lasts till death. God has created it of many kinds and seen it endure or perish:

Two mothers are walking along a road and talking together. One of them is dressed in gay blue garments because her lover has come home from a journey. The other is dressed in mourning. She had three daughters, two of them dark, the third fair, and the fair one died. That is ten years ago, ten whole years, and still the mother wears mourning for her.

"It is so glorious today!" cries the blue-clad mother exulting, and claps her hands. "The warmth goes to my head, love has gone to my head, I am full of happiness. I could strip myself naked here on the road and stretch out my arms to the sun and send it kisses."

But the black-clad mother is silent and neither smiles nor makes reply.

"Are you still sorrowing for your little girl?" asks the Blue one in the innocence of her heart. "Is it not ten years since she died?"

The Black one answers:

"Yes. She would have been fifteen now."

Then the Blue one says to console her:

"But you have other daughters alive, you have two left."

The Black one sobs:

"Yes. But neither of them is fair. She who died was so fair and bright."

And the two mothers part and go their several ways, each with her love....

But the same two dark daughters had also, each her love, and they loved the same man.

He came to the elder and said:

"I wish to ask your advice, for I love your sister. Yesterday I was untrue to her, she surprised me kissing your servant girl in the passage; she gave a little scream, it was like a whimper, and passed by. What am I to do now? I love your sister; for Heaven's sake speak to her and help me!"

And the elder sister paled and put her hand to her heart; but she smiled as though she would bless him and answered:

"I will help you."

The next day he went to the younger and threw himself on his knees before her and confessed his love.

She looked him up and down and answered:

"Unfortunately I can't spare more than ten shillings, if that is what you mean. But go to my sister, she has more."

With that she left him, holding her head proudly.

But when she had reached her room she threw herself upon the floor and wrung her hands with love.

It was winter and the streets were cold, with fog, dust and wind. Johannes was back in town, in his old room where he heard the creaking of the poplars against the wooden wall and from whose window he had more than once greeted the dawning day. Now the sun was gone.

His work had occupied him the whole time, the big sheets he had filled, growing and growing as the winter wore on. It was a series of fairy tales from the land of his fancy, an endless night in a crimson sunset glow.

But the days were not all alike, he had both good and bad, and sometimes when his work was going best, a thought, a pair of eyes, a word from the past might strike him and quench his inspiration at once. Then he got up and began to pace his room from wall to wall; he had done that so often that he had worn a white path across the floor and it grew whiter every day....

"Today, as I cannot work, cannot think, cannot rest for memories, I will set myself to describe what befell me one night. Dear Reader, today I have

had such a terribly bad day. It is snowing outside, there are scarcely any people in the streets, everything is dismal and my soul is so fearfully desolate. I have been walking in the street and then for hours in my room and have tried to compose myself a little; but now it is afternoon, and I am no better. I who should be warm am cold and pale like a sunless day. Dear Reader, in this state I am trying to describe a bright and thrilling night. For work forces calm upon me and when a few more hours are past I shall perhaps be happy again...."

There was a knock at the door and Camilla Seier, his young secret fiancé, came in. He put down his pen and got up. They both smiled as they shook hands.

"You don't ask me about the ball," she said at once, throwing herself into a chair. "I danced every single dance. It lasted till three o'clock. I danced with Richmond."

"Thank you so much for coming, Camilla. I am so miserably depressed and you are so cheerful; that will help me. Fancy, and what did you wear at the ball?"

"Red, of course. Oh dear, I can't remember, but I must have talked a lot and laughed a lot. It was so jolly. Yes, I was in red, no sleeves, not a hint of them. Richmond is at the Legation in London."

"I see."

"His people are English, but he was born here. What have you been doing to your eyes? They're so red. Have you been crying?"

"No," he answered with a laugh; "but I have been staring into my stories and there is so much sunshine there. Camilla, if you want to be a really nice girl, don't tear up that paper any more than you have done."

"Oh I say, how absent-minded I am. Excuse me, Johannes."

"It doesn't matter; it is only some notes. But let's hear now: I suppose you had a rose in your hair?"

"Oh yes! A red rose; it was almost black. I'll tell you what, Johannes, we might go to London for our wedding trip. It isn't nearly so awful as people say and it's all nonsense about the fogs."

"Who told you that?"

"Richmond. He said so last night, and he knows. You know Richmond, don't you?"

"No, I don't know him. He once proposed my health; he had diamond studs in his shirt. That's all I remember about him."

"He's simply sweet. Oh, when he came up and bowed and said: I expect you hardly remember me.... Do you know, I gave him the rose."

"Did you though? What rose?"

"The one I had in my hair. I gave it him."

"You must have been very taken with Richmond."

She turned red and protested warmly:

"Not a bit, far from it. Surely one can like a person, think them nice, without.... For shame, Johannes, are you mad? I shall never mention his name again."

"But, bless me, my dear Camilla, I didn't mean ... you mustn't think.... On the contrary, I should like to thank him for having entertained you."

"Yes, you just do it—you dare! For my part I'll never say another word to him as long as I live."

Pause.

"Well, well, let's say no more about it," he said. "Are you going already?"

"Yes, I can't stay any longer. How far have you got with your work now? Mamma asked about it. Fancy, I haven't seen Victoria for several weeks and I met her just now."

"Just now?"

"As I was coming here. She smiled. But my goodness, how she has changed! Look here, aren't you coming to see us soon?"

"Yes, soon," he answered, jumping up. A flush had spread over his face. "Perhaps in a day or two. I have to write something first, I've just thought of it, a conclusion to my tales. Oh, I shall write something, I tell you! Imagine the world as seen from above, like a rare and splendid pontifical robe. In its

folds people are walking about; they walk in couples, it is evening and calm, the hour of love. I shall call it 'The Race.' I think it will be great; I have had this vision so often, and every time I feel as if my breast would burst and I could embrace the earth. There they are, men and women, beasts and birds and all of them have their hour of love, Camilla. A wave of rapture is at hand, their eyes grow more ardent, their bosoms heave. Then a fine blush rises from the earth; it is the blush of bashfulness from all their naked hearts, and the night is stained a rosy red. But far away in the background lie the great sleeping mountains; they have seen nothing and heard nothing. And in the morning God throws his warm sun over all. 'The Race' I shall call it."

"I see."

"Yes. And then I'll come when I've finished it. Thank you so much for coming here, Camilla. And don't think any more about what I said. I didn't mean any harm by it."

"I'm not thinking about it at all. But I shall never mention his name again. Never."

The next morning Camilla came again. She was pale and in an unusual state of excitement.

"What is the matter with you?" he asked.

"Me? Nothing," she answered quickly. "It's you I am fond of. You really mustn't think there's anything the matter with me and that I'm not fond of you. No, now I'll tell you what I've been thinking: we won't go to London. What do we want there? He can't have known what he was talking about, that man, there's more fog than he thinks. You're looking at me, what makes you do that? I never mentioned his name. Such a storyteller, he filled me up with lies; we won't go to London."

He looked at her, studied her attentively.

"No, we won't go to London," he said thoughtfully.

"That's all right! So that's settled. Have you written that thing about the Race? I'm so frightfully interested. You must get it finished very quickly

and come and see us, Johannes. The hour of love, wasn't that it? And a lovely papal robe with folds, and a rosy red night; heavens, how well I remember what you told me about it. I haven't been here so often lately, but now I'm going to come every day to hear whether you've finished."

"I shall soon have finished," he said, still looking at her.

"Today I fetched your books and took them into my own room. I wanted to read them over again; it won't tire me the least, I'm looking forward to it. Look here, Johannes, you might be so kind as to see me home; I don't know whether it's quite safe for me all the way home. I don't know. Perhaps there's somebody waiting for me outside here, somebody walking up and down perhaps...." Suddenly she burst into tears and stammered: "I called him a storyteller, I didn't mean to say that. I'm sorry I said it. He hasn't told me lies, on the contrary he was all the time.... We're going to have some friends on Tuesday, but he's not coming, but *you* must come, do you hear? Will you promise? But all the same I didn't want to say anything bad about him. I don't know what you think of me...."

He answered:

"I am beginning to understand you."

She threw herself on his neck, hid her face on his breast, trembling with agitation.

"Oh, but I'm fond of you too," she exclaimed. "You mustn't think anything else. I don't love only him, it isn't so bad as that. When you asked me last year I was so glad; but now he has come. I don't understand it. Is it so awful of me, Johannes? Perhaps I love him a tiny bit more than you; I can't help it, it has come over me. O dear, I haven't slept for several nights since I saw him and I love him more and more. What am I to do? You are so much older, you must tell me. He walked here with me, he's standing outside waiting to see me home again and now perhaps he's cold. Do you despise me, Johannes? I haven't kissed him; no, I haven't, you must believe me; I've only given him my rose. Why don't you answer, Johannes? You must tell me what I'm to do, for I can't bear it any longer."

Johannes sat quite still and listened to her. He said:

"I have nothing to answer."

"Thanks, thanks, dear Johannes, it is so good of you not to be wild with me," she said, drying her tears. "But you mustn't think I'm not fond of you too. Goodness! I shall come and see you much oftener than I have done and do everything you want. But the only thing is that it's he I'm more fond of. It wasn't my doing. It's not my fault."

He got up in silence, put his hat on and said:

"Shall we go?"

They went downstairs.

Outside stood Richmond. He was a dark-haired young man with brown eyes that sparkled with youth and life. The frost had reddened his cheeks.

"Are you cold?" said Camilla, flying up to him.

Her voice trembled with emotion. Suddenly she hurried back to Johannes, put her arm through his and said:

"Excuse me for not asking whether *you* were cold. You didn't put on your overcoat; shall I go up and get it? No? Well, anyhow button your jacket."

She buttoned his jacket.

Johannes offered his hand to Richmond. He was in a strangely absent mood, as though what was happening did not concern him. He gave an uncertain half-smile and muttered:

"Glad to meet you again."

Richmond showed no sign of guilt or of dissimulation. As he shook hands the pleasure of recognition flashed across his face and he made a polite bow.

"I saw one of your books the other day in a shop-window in London," he said. "It had been translated. It was so jolly to see it there, like a message from home."

Camilla walked in the middle and looked up at each of them in turn. At last she said:

"Then you'll come on Tuesday, Johannes. Oh, excuse me for thinking only of my own affairs," she added with a laugh. But the next moment she repented and turned to Richmond, asking him to come too. He would only

meet people he knew, Victoria and her mother were asked, besides them only about a dozen were coming.

Suddenly Johannes stopped and said:

"After all I may just as well go back."

"See you on Tuesday," Camilla answered.

Richmond took his hand and pressed it sincerely.

So the two young people went on their way, alone and happy.

XII

The blue-clad Mother was in the most terrible suspense; every moment she expected a signal from the garden and the coast was not clear, nobody could come through it so long as her husband would not leave the house. Ah, that husband, that husband, with his forty years and his bald head! What sinister thoughts could they be that made him so pale this evening and kept him sitting in his chair, immovably, inexorably, staring at his paper?

She had not a minute's peace; now it was eleven o'clock. The children she had put to bed long ago; but the husband did not budge. What if the signal came? The door would be opened with the dear little latch-key—and two men would meet, stand face to face and look into each other's eyes! She dared not finish the thought.

She went away to the darkest corner of the room, wrung her hands, and at last said straight out:

"Now it's eleven. If you *are* going to the club you must go now."

He got up at once, even paler than before, and went out of the room, out of the house.

Outside the garden he stopped and listened to a whistle, a little signal. Steps were heard on the gravel, a key was put into the latch and turned—a moment later there were two shadows on the drawing-room blind.

And he recognized the signal, the steps and the two shadows on the blind, none of it was new to him.

He went to the club. It was open, there were lights in the windows; but he did not go in. For half an hour he roamed about the streets and in front of his garden, an endless half-hour. Let me wait another quarter of an hour, he thought, and he prolonged it to three quarters. Then he entered the garden, went up the steps and rang at his own door.

The maid came and opened it, just put her head out and said:

"Madam has long since...."

Then she stopped and saw who he was.

"I know, gone to bed," he answered. "Will you tell your mistress that her husband has come home."

And the maid went. She knocked at her mistress's room and gave the message through the closed door:

"I was to say that the master has come back."

Her mistress asked from within:

"What do you say, is your master come back? Who told you to say so?"

"The master himself. He's standing outside."

There are sounds of sore distraction in the mistress's room, hurried whispers, a door opening and closing again. Then all is still.

And the master walks in. His wife receives him with death in her heart.

"The club was shut," he says at once, from pity and compassion. "I sent you a message so as not to alarm you."

She falls into a chair, comforted, relieved, saved. The blissful feeling makes her kind heart overflow and she is solicitous about her husband:

"You are so pale. Is there anything wrong with you, dear?"

"I am not cold," he answers.

"But has anything happened? Your face looks so strangely drawn."

The husband answers:

"No, I'm smiling. This is going to be my way of smiling. I want this grimace to be my special property."

She listens to his short, hoarse words and doesn't understand them, can't make them out at all. What can he mean?

But suddenly he throws his arms around her with a grip of iron, with terrible force, and whispers close against her face:

"What do you say to giving him a pair of horns ... the man who's just gone ... give him a pair of horns, eh?"

She utters a scream and calls the maid. He lets her go with a quiet, dry laugh, with his mouth agape and slapping both his thighs.

In the morning the wife's kind heart is again uppermost and she says to her husband:

"You had an extraordinary attack last night; it's over now, but you're still pale today."

"Yes," he replies, "it takes it out of one to be witty at my age. I'll never do it again."

But, after having spoken of many kinds of Love, Friar Vendt tells of yet another kind and says:

What rapture there is in *one* kind of Love!

The young Lord and Lady had just come home, their long wedding tour was at an end and they settled down to rest.

A shooting star fell above their roof.

In summer the young couple walked together and never left each other's side. They plucked flowers, yellow, red and blue, and gave them to each

other; they saw the grass swaying in the wind and heard the birds singing in the woods, and every word they spoke was like a caress. In winter they drove with bells on their horses and the sky was blue and high above them, the stars coursed over their everlasting plains.

Thus passed many, many years. The young couple had three children and their hearts loved one another as on the first day, in the first kiss.

Then the proud Lord fell sick, of the sickness that chained him to his bed so long and put his wife's patience to so stern a proof. The day he was well and arose from his bed he did not know himself again; the sickness had disfigured him and taken away his hair.

He suffered and brooded over it. Then one morning he said:

"Now you cannot love me any more."

But his wife threw her arms about him, blushing, and kissed him as passionately as in the springtime of their youth and answered:

"I love you, love you still. I will never forget that it was I and no other whom you chose and made so happy."

And she went into her chamber and cut off all her yellow hair, to be like her husband whom she loved.

And again many, many years went by, the young couple were now old and their children were grown up. They shared every happiness as before; in summer they still walked in the fields and saw the waving grass and in the winter they wrapped themselves in furs and drove beneath the starry sky. And their hearts continued warm and glad as with a marvellous wine.

The Lady was paralysed. The old Lady could not walk, she had to be drawn in a wheeled chair and the Lord himself drew her. But the Lady suffered so unspeakably from her misfortune and her face was deeply furrowed with sorrow.

Then she said one day:

"Now I would gladly die. I am so helpless and ugly and your face is so handsome, you cannot kiss me any more and you cannot love me as you used."

But her Lord embraced her, red with emotion, and answered:

"I love you more, more than my life, my dear one, love you as the first day, the first hour, when you gave me the rose. Do you remember? You handed me the rose and looked at me with your beautiful eyes; the rose smelt like you, you blushed like it and all my senses were intoxicated. But now I love you even more, you are more beautiful than in your youth and my heart thanks you and blesses you for every day you have been mine."

The Lord went into his chamber, threw acid on his face to disfigure it, and said to his wife:

"I have had the misfortune to get some acid on my face, my cheeks are covered with burns, and now you cannot love me any more?"

"Oh, my bridegroom, my beloved!" faltered the old woman, kissing his hands. "You are more beautiful than any man on earth, your voice kindles my heart even today and I love you till death."

XIII

Johannes met Camilla in the street; she was with her mother, her father and Young Richmond; they stopped their carriage and talked to him in a friendly way.

Camilla clutched his arm and said:

"You didn't come to our party. We had a great time, I can tell you; we were expecting you to the very last, but you didn't come."

"I was prevented," he replied.

"Excuse me for not having been to see you since," she went on. "I shall come one of these days, for certain, when Richmond has gone away. Oh,

what a time we had! Victoria was taken ill, she was driven home, have you heard? I'm going up to her directly. I expect she's much better, quite well again perhaps. I've given Richmond a medallion, almost the same as yours. Look here, Johannes, you must promise me to look after your stove; when you're writing you forget everything and your room gets as cold as ice. You must ring for the girl."

"Yes, I'll ring for the girl," he answered.

Mrs. Seier spoke to him too, asked about his work, that piece about the Race, how was it getting on? She was eagerly looking forward to his next book.

Johannes gave the necessary answers, bowed very low and watched the carriage drive away. How little all this concerned him, this carriage, these people, this chatter! A cold and empty feeling came upon him and haunted him all the way home. Outside his doorway a man was walking up and down, an old acquaintance, the former Tutor at the Castle.

Johannes greeted him.

He was dressed in a long, warm overcoat which was carefully brushed and there was a brisk and decided air about him.

"Here you see your friend and colleague," he said. "Give me your hand, young man. God has guided my ways marvellously since we last met; I am married, I have a home, a little garden, a wife. The days of miracles are not yet past. Have you any observation to make on my last remark?"

Johannes looked at him in surprise.

"Agreed then. Yes, you see, I was giving lessons to her son. She has a son, a young hopeful from her first marriage; of course she has been married before, she was a widow. You see, I married a widow. You may object that this was not arranged by my fairy godmother; but there it is, I married a widow. The young hopeful she had already. It was like this, I go there and look at the garden and the widow and for a while I am absorbed in intense thought on the subject. Suddenly I have it and I say to myself: well, I dare say it wasn't promised by your fairy godmother and all that; but I'll do it all the same, I take it, for it was probably written in the book of fate. You see, that's how it came about."

"Congratulations!" said Johannes.

"Stop! not a word more. I know what you're going to say. What about the first one, you will say, have you forgotten the eternal love of your youth? That's exactly what you will say. May I then ask you, my good sir, in my turn, what became of my first, only and eternal love? Didn't she take a captain in the artillery? Moreover I will ask you another little question: have you ever, ever seen a case of a man getting the one he should have got? I haven't. There's a legend about a man whose prayers God heard in the matter, so that he was given his first and only love. But he didn't get much satisfaction out of it. Why not? you will ask again, and behold, I answer you: for the simple reason that she died immediately after—*immediately* after, do you hear? ha-ha-ha, instantly. So it is always. Naturally one doesn't get the right woman, but if it happens once in a while out of pure cussedness, then she dies straight away. There's always some trick in it. So then the man is reduced to providing himself with another love of the best available sort and there's no reason why he should die of the change. I tell you, Nature has ordained it so wisely that he bears it remarkably well. Just look at me."

Johannes said:

"I can see that you're doing well."

"Excellently for that matter. Look, feel and listen! Has a set of unenticing troubles swept over my person? I have clothes, shoes, house and home, wife and children—well, the hopeful anyhow. What was I saying?—with regard to my poetry I'll answer the question on the spot. Oh, my young colleague, I am older than you and perhaps a little better equipped by Nature. I keep my poems in a drawer. They are to be published after my death. But then you get no pleasure out of them, you will object? You are wrong again there, for in the meantime I delight my household with them. In the evening when the lamp is lit I unlock the drawer, take out my poems and read them aloud to my wife and the hopeful. One is forty, the other twelve, they are both enchanted. If you come and see us one day you will find supper and toddy. Now I've invited you. God preserve you from death."

He gave Johannes his hand. Suddenly he asked:

"Have you heard about Victoria?"

"About Victoria? No. Oh yes, I heard just now, a moment ago...."

"Haven't you seen her declining, getting greyer and greyer under the eyes?"

"I haven't seen her since last spring at home. Is she still ill?"

The Tutor answered in a comically hard voice, stamping his foot:

"Yes."

"I heard just now.... No, I haven't seen her declining, I haven't met her. Is she very ill?"

"Very. Probably dead by now, you understand."

Johannes gave a stunned look at the man, then at his door, wondered whether he should go in or stay where he was; looked at the man again, at his long coat, his hat; and he smiled in a confused and painful way like one in distress.

The old Tutor resumed in a threatening tone:

"Another example; can you get away from it? *She* did not get the right one either, her sweet-heart from childhood's days, a splendid young Lieutenant. He went shooting one evening, a shot hit him right in the forehead and blew his head to pieces. There he lay, a victim of the little trick God had a mind to play with him. Victoria, his bride, began to decline, a worm was preying on her, cribbling her heart like a sieve; we, her friends, could see it. Then a few days ago she went to a party, to some people named Seier; by the bye, she told me you were to have been there too, but didn't come. Be that as it may, at this party she overtaxes her strength, thoughts of her beloved rush in upon her and she is lively from sheer bravado; she dances, dances the whole evening, dances like a mad person. Then she falls, the floor turns red under her; they lift her up, carry her out, drive her home. She was near the end."

The Tutor went close up to Johannes and said in a hard voice:

"Victoria is dead."

Johannes began fending vaguely with his arms just like a blind man.

"Dead? When did she die? Do you say Victoria is dead?"

"She is dead," replied the Tutor. "She died this morning, this very forenoon." He put his hand in his pocket and brought out a thick letter. "And she confided this letter to me to hand to you. Here it is. After my death, she said. She is dead. I hand you this letter. My mission is ended."

And without taking leave, without a word more, the Tutor turned and strolled slowly down the street and vanished.

Johannes was left with the letter in his hand. Victoria was dead. He spoke her name aloud again and again and his voice was without feeling, almost callous. He looked at the letter and recognized the writing; there were big and small letters, the lines were straight, and she who had written them was dead!

Then he entered his doorway, went upstairs, found the right key to put into his latch and opened his door. His room was cold and dark. He sat down in the window and read Victoria's letter by the last of the daylight.

"Dear Johannes," she wrote. "When you read this letter I shall be dead. Everything is so strange to me now, I am no longer ashamed to write to you again as though nothing had happened to prevent it. Before, while I was altogether among the living, I would rather have suffered night and day than written to you again; but now I have begun to pass away I do not think so any longer. Strangers have seen me bleed, the Doctor has examined me and found that I have only a shred of a lung left; what is there to hold me back now?

"I have been thinking as I lay here in bed of the last words I said to you. It was that evening in the wood. I never thought then that they would be my last words, for then I would have said good-bye to you at the same time and thanked you. Now I shall never see you again, so now I am sorry I did not throw myself down and kiss your shoe and the ground you trod on, to show you how unspeakably I have loved you. I have lain here both yesterday and today wishing I could be just well enough to go home again and walk in the wood and find the place where we sat when you held both my hands; for then I could lie down there and see if I could find the trace of you and kiss all the heather about. But I cannot come home now, unless, as Mamma thinks, I may possibly get a little better.

"Dear Johannes, it is so curious to think that all I have ever been able to do was to come into the world and love you and now say good-bye to life. It is strange indeed to lie here waiting for the day and the hour. I am moving step by step away from life and the people in the street and the noise of the traffic; I shall never see spring again either, and these houses and streets and the trees in the Park I shall leave behind. Today I was allowed to sit up in bed and look out of the window a little while. Down at the corner I saw two people meet, they stopped and shook hands and laughed at what they said; but it seemed so strange to me that I who lay and watched them was to die. It made me think—of course those two people do not know that I am lying here waiting for my hour; but if they did know it they would still stop and talk just as they are doing now. Last night when it was dark I thought my last hour had come, my heart began to stand still and I seemed to hear already the distant roar of eternity coming towards me. But the next moment I was back from somewhere a long way off and began to breathe again. It was a feeling I can't describe at all. Mamma thinks it was perhaps only the river and the waterfall at home that were in my mind.

"O God, if you knew how I have loved you, Johannes. I have not been able to show it to you, so many things have come in my way, and above all my own nature. Papa was hard on himself in the same way and I am his daughter. But now that I am to die and it is all too late, I write to you once more and tell you so. I ask myself why I do it, as it cannot make any difference to you, especially as I shall not even be alive any more; but I want so much to be near you to the last so that I may not feel more lonely than before, at any rate. When you read this it is as though I can see your shoulders and hands and watch every movement you make as you hold the letter before you and read it. So we are not so far from each other, I think to myself. I cannot send for you, I have no right to do that. Mamma would have sent for you two days ago, but I would rather write. And I would rather you should remember me as I was once, before I began to be ill. I remember you ... [here some words are omitted] ... my eyes and eye-brows; but even they are not as they were. That is another reason why I would not have you come. And I will ask you not to see me in my coffin either. I expect I am much the same as when I was alive, only a little paler, and I am lying in a yellow dress; but still you would regret it if you came and saw me.

"Now I have been writing at this letter so many times today and yet I have not been able to say a thousandth part of what I wanted to say. It is so terrible for me to die, I do not want to, I am still hoping so fervently to God that perhaps I might get a little better, if only till the spring. Then the days are light and there are leaves on the trees. If I got well again now I would never be unkind to you any more, Johannes. How I have cried and thought about that! Oh, I would go out and stroke all the stones in the street and stop and thank every step of the stairs as I went by and be good to all. It would not matter how badly off I was if I might only live. I should never complain again about anything; no, I would smile at any one who attacked me and struck me and thank and praise God if I might live. My life is so unlived, I have not been able to do anything for anybody, and this failure of a life is to end now. If you knew how unwilling I was to die perhaps you would do something, do all in your power. I don't suppose you can do anything; but I thought that if you and every one else prayed for me and would not let me go then God would grant me life. Oh, how thankful I should be, I would never do harm to any one again, but smile at whatever fell to my lot, if only I were allowed to live.

"Mamma is sitting here crying. She sat here all night and cried for me. That does me a little good, it softens the bitterness of my going. And today I was thinking—how would you take it, I wonder, if I came straight up to you in the street one day when I was nicely dressed, and did not say anything to hurt you as I have done, but gave you a rose which I had bought on purpose? Then the next moment I remembered that I could never again do what I wanted; for I can never be well again before I die. I cry so often, I lie still and cry ceaselessly and inconsolably; it does not hurt my chest if I do not sob. Johannes, dear, dear friend, my only beloved on earth, come to me now and be here a little while when it begins to grow dark. I shall not cry then, but smile as well as I am able, from sheer joy at your coming.

"Ah, where are my pride and my courage! I am not my father's daughter now; but this is because my strength has left me. I have suffered for a long time, Johannes, long before these last days. When you were abroad I suffered, and afterwards, since I came to town in the spring I have done nothing but suffer every day. I have never known before how infinitely long the night can be. I have seen you twice in the street during this time; once you were humming as you passed me, but you did not see me. I had hope of seeing you at the Seiers'; but you did not come. I should not have spoken to you or come quite close to you, but should have been grateful to be able to look at you a long way off. But you did not come. Then I thought perhaps it was on my account you kept away. At eleven o'clock I began to dance because I could not bear to wait any longer. Ah, Johannes, I have loved you, loved only you all my life. It is Victoria who writes this and God is reading it over my shoulder.

"And now I must say good-bye, it is nearly dark and I cannot see any more. Good-bye, Johannes, thanks for every day. When I fly away from earth I shall still thank you to the last and say your name to myself all the way. Farewell, be happy all your life and forgive me the wrong I have done you and that I could not throw myself at your feet and beg your forgiveness. I do so now in my heart. Farewell, Johannes, and good-bye for ever. And thanks once more for every single day and hour. I can no more.

Your

VICTORIA.

"Now I have had the lamp lit and it is all much brighter. I have been lying in a trance and again been far away. Thank God, it was not so uncanny as before, I even heard a little music and above all it was not dark. I am so thankful. But now I have no more strength to write. Good-bye, my beloved...."

THE END



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